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# Marilyn Waring on Women and Economics

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VHS

9196 006



The  
**Who's Counting?** SERIES

A three-part series for classroom use

# Marilyn Waring on Women and Economics

*"The system recognizes no value other than money, regardless of how that money is made. This means that there is no value to peace. This means there is no value to the preservation of natural resources for future generations. This means there is no value to unpaid work, including the unpaid work of reproducing human life itself, including the unpaid work of women who feed and nurture their own families. This system cannot respond to values it refuses to recognize...this is an economic system that will eventually kill us all."* — Marilyn Waring

During World War II, Sir Richard Stone and John Maynard Keynes devised a system for measuring economic activity that was used to help Britain pay for the war. In 1953, this system became the basis for the United Nations System of National Accounts (UNSNA), which was quickly adopted as a world standard. All nations must conform to the rules of the UNSNA or they cannot belong to the UN, obtain loans from the International Monetary Fund (IMF), or be funded by the World Bank.

The problem with the UNSNA — which, like the IMF and the World Bank, is a system devised by the world's wealthiest countries — is that it only values activities that produce money. This places developing countries at a distinct disadvantage, forcing them to conform to Western ways of managing their economies. As a result, many Third World countries have become trapped in a cycle of producing goods for export to help pay off their escalating debts to the World Bank. By using their farmland, labour and natural resources to supply the rest of the world with cheap goods, the indigenous peoples of these countries often suffer increased hardship.

Pull out  
for more  
information

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Daniel Lanois  
Jason Lang &  
Lance Neveu  
J.S. Bach "Easter  
Oratorio" (Marilyn  
Waring - Soprano)**

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29 minutes 58 seconds  
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Because the UNSNA only measures whatever passes through the marketplace, it doesn't take into account "hidden economy" activities that can have a huge impact on people's lives. There is no way of factoring in unpaid labour, particularly that of women, who, in some countries, routinely put in 16- or 18-hour days caring and providing for their families. There is no acknowledgment of the poverty, illness, suffering and environmental destruction that results from profit-generating activities such as war, industrial development and child prostitution. In short, the quality of life is simply not part of the equation.

## Discussion questions:

- ◆ Studies have shown that even in households where both partners have full-time jobs, in general, women still spend more time doing housework and childcare. Is this true in your family? Why would this be so?
- ◆ Do you think that women, especially housewives, should be paid or receive other financial compensation (i.e. tax breaks) for the childcare and other unpaid labour that they do?
- ◆ Can you think of any unpaid labour that men typically do?
- ◆ Do you think that Waring is over-reacting when she blames the world's most serious problems (pollution, poverty, etc.) on the UNSNA? What other factors contribute to these problems?

- ◆ Why would economists tend to talk in jargon?
- ◆ When Waring compares the work done by women in Kenya and in Pakistan, it becomes clear that the women do far more work than the men. Why? What prevents a more equal sharing of the work?
- ◆ How do you think that having children will affect your income, status, career plans and the amount of leisure time in your life: a) if you are a man; b) if you are a woman?
- ◆ Do you think that Ben deserves to get paid well for what he does?
- ◆ Have students do time surveys of their lives, or perhaps the lives of other family members, for one week. What might this show?

# Chapter breakdown:

## 1. Being Taken for a Ride (7:30)

We travel with Marilyn Waring in a taxi through the streets of New York and into the UN Library as she outlines the United Nations System of National Accounts; its historical development, its structure, and its devastating consequences. We learn that although the system purports to be objective, it is in fact highly selective, and is based on a set of values that does not acknowledge the enormous amount of unpaid labour that women contribute to local economies.

## 2. It's About Time (10:08)

As chairperson of the Public Accounts Committee in the New Zealand Parliament, Waring discovered serious flaws in an economic system based more on theory than on practical realities. In this segment, Waring explores the use of time surveys (a breakdown of a person's typical day by task) to accurately assess how energy and resources are used and how to better distribute them, particularly as this relates to the unpaid, unrecognized work of women worldwide.

## 3. Cathy (3:37)

We visit a playcare centre in Waring's riding to meet Cathy, a busy mother of three whose day is filled with an exhaustive list of tasks that are instrumental to the health and well-being of her family, yet who is considered "unoccupied" and unproductive by conventional economists.

## 4. Ben (2:05)

Ben, a well-paid employee of a US nuclear missile facility, spends entire days awaiting a possible launch command that could unleash billions of dollars worth of destruction and result in millions of deaths. Unlike Cathy, Ben's paid work is considered valuable and is counted by the System of National Accounts.

## 5. What are the Alternatives? (4:29)

At a lecture given in Montreal, Waring plays the crowd with the cheerful flair of a stand-up comic, outlining strategies, both personal and political, that women can use to initiate change. She argues that if we were to use time — a commodity that is of equal value to people of both sexes at all economic levels — to determine need, we would see a more equitable, more efficient, and more productive distribution of resources.



# Marilyn Waring on Women and Economics

(selected excerpts from *Who's Counting? Marilyn Waring on Sex, Lies & Global Economics*)

***"It's perfectly obvious that the people who are visible to you as contributors to the economy are the people who will be visible when you make policy. And if you're not visible as a producer in a nation's economy, then you're going to be invisible in the distribution of benefits. And wherever I was, this was the situation for women."* — Marilyn Waring**

As Chairperson of New Zealand's Public Expenditures Committee, which reviewed all the parliamentary budgets of her government, Marilyn Waring travelled to over 35 countries and discovered that the rules which governed the finances of her own country were operating worldwide.

In each country she visited, Waring spent a day with a local woman her own age. She witnessed the enormous, unrecorded, unacknowledged extent of women's work.

Women remain more than 50 percent of the world's population, yet hold no more than 10 percent of the seats in national legislatures. In one government in three, there are no women in the highest decision-making bodies. This video takes a hard look at the disparity between what women contribute to communities and how their work is valued.

**Marilyn Waring on Women and Economics** is divided into five short chapters:

- *Being Taken for a Ride* (7:30)
- *Ben* (2:05)
- *It's About Time* (10:08)
- *What are the Alternatives?* (4:29)
- *Cathy* (3:37)

The three-volume *Who's Counting?* classroom series challenges the myths of economics, its elitist stance, and our tacit compliance with political agendas that masquerade as objective economic policy. Each volume will stimulate debate on a wide range of issues, serving as entertaining and compelling springboards for further study. Chapter synopses and suggested study questions are included.

Produced by the National Film Board of Canada, Studio B

29 minutes 58 seconds

**Director:** Terre Nash

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**Producer:** Kent Martin

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