CHAPTER 13

Contemporary Feminist Theory

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Chapter Outline

Feminist theory is a generalized, wide-ranging system of ideas about social life and human experience developed from a woman-centered perspective. Feminist theory is woman-centered—or women-centered—in two ways. First, the starting point of all its investigation is the situation (or the situations) and experiences of women in society. Second, it seeks to describe the social world from the distinctive vantage points of women. Feminist theory differs from most sociological theories in that it is the work of an interdisciplinary and international community of scholars, artists, and activists.[1] Feminist sociologists seek to broaden and deepen sociology by reworking disciplinary knowledge to take account of discoveries being made by this interdisciplinary community.

We begin the chapter by outlining the basic questions guiding feminist scholarship. Next we provide a brief history of the relation between feminism and sociology; then we describe the various types of contemporary feminist theory, emphasizing the contributions of sociologists to those theories. We conclude the chapter with an integrated statement of feminist sociological theorizing as it is developing out of these various theoretical traditions.

Feminism's Basic Questions

The impetus for contemporary feminist theory begins in a deceptively simple question: *"And what about the women?"* In other words, where are the women in any

[1]This chapter draws primarily on the English-language contribution to this international effort.

situation being investigated? If they are not present, why? If they are present, what exactly are they doing? How do they experience the situation? What do they contribute to it? What does it mean to them?

In response to this question, feminist scholarship has produced some generalizable answers. Women are present in most social situations. Where they are not, it is not because they lack ability or interest but because there have been deliberate efforts to exclude them. Where they have been present, women have played roles very different from the popular conception of them (as, for example, passive wives and mothers). Indeed, as wives and as mothers and in a series of other roles, women, along with men, have actively created the situations being studied. Yet though women are actively present in most social situations, scholars, publics, and social actors themselves, both male and female, have been blind to their presence. Moreover, women's roles in most social situations, though essential, have been different from, less privileged than, and subordinate to the roles of men. Their invisibility is only one indicator of this inequality.

Feminism's second basic question is: *"Why is all this as it is?"* In answering this question, feminist theory has produced a general social theory with broad implications for sociology. One of feminist sociological theory's major contributions to answering this question has been the development of the concept of *gender.* Beginning in the 1970s, feminist theorists made it possible for people to see the distinctions between (a) biologically determined attributes associated with male and female and (b) the socially learned behaviors associated with masculinity and femininity. They did so by designating the latter as "gender."[2] The essential qualities of gender remain a point of theoretical debate in feminism, and these debates offer one way to distinguish among some of the varieties of feminist theory. But a starting point of agreement among nearly all varieties of feminist theory is an understanding of gender as a social construction, something not emanating from nature but created by people as part of the processes of group life.

The third question for all feminists is: *"How can we change and improve the social world so as to make it a more just place for all people?"* This commitment to social transformation in the interest of justice is the distinctive characteristic of critical social theory, a commitment shared in sociology by feminism, Marxism, neo-Marxism, and social theories being developed by racial and ethnic minorities and in postcolonial societies. Patricia Hill Collins (1998:xiv) forcefully states the importance of this commitment to seeking justice and confronting injustice: "Critical social theory encompasses bodies of knowledge . . . that actively grapple with the central questions facing groups of people differently placed in specific political, social, and historic contexts characterized by injustice." This commitment to critical theorizing requires that feminist theorists ask how their work will improve the daily lives of the people they study.

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[2] The word *gender* has origins as early as the fourteenth century when it was used interchangeably with *sex* but especially in discussion of grammar (whether a noun is understood as masculine or feminine). *Gender* is used occasionally in early sociology articles of the 1900s but in a sense interchangeable with *sex*. The first feminist sociological conceptualization of the distinction between biologically determined attributes and socially learned behaviors was made by Charlotte Perkins Gilman in her 1898 classic *Women and Economics*, where she created the concept of *excessive sex distinction* to refer to what we now mean by *gender*.

As the circle of feminists exploring these questions has become more inclusive of people of diverse backgrounds both in the United States and internationally, feminist theorists have raised a fourth question: *"And what about the differences among women?"* The answers to this question lead to a general conclusion that the invisibility, inequality, and role differences in relation to men that generally characterize women's lives are profoundly affected by a woman's social location—that is, by her class, race, age, affectional preference, marital status, religion, ethnicity, and global location.

But feminist theory is not just about women, nor is its major project the creation of a middle-range theory of gender relations. Rather, the appropriate parallel for feminism's major theoretical achievement is to one of Marx's epistemological accomplishments. Marx showed that the knowledge people had of society, what they assumed to be an absolute and universal statement about reality, in fact reflected the experience of those who economically and politically ruled the world; he effectively demonstrated that one also could view the world from the vantage point of the world's workers. This insight relativized ruling-class knowledge and, in allowing us to juxtapose that knowledge with knowledge gained from the workers' perspective, vastly expanded our ability to analyze social reality. More than a century after Marx's death we are still assimilating the implications of this discovery.

Feminism's basic theoretical questions have similarly produced a revolutionary switch in our understanding of the world: what we have taken as universal and absolute knowledge of the world is, in fact, knowledge derived from the experiences of a powerful section of society, men as "masters." That knowledge is relativized if we rediscover the world from the vantage point of a hitherto invisible, unacknowledged "underside": women, who in subordinated but indispensable "serving" roles have worked to sustain and re-create the society we live in. This discovery raises questions about everything we thought we knew about society, and its implications constitute the essence of contemporary feminist theory's significance for sociological theory.

Feminist theory deconstructs established systems of knowledge by showing their masculinist bias and the gender politics framing and informing them. To say that knowledge is "deconstructed" is to say that we discover what was hitherto hidden behind the presentation of the knowledge as established, singular, and natural—namely, that that presentation is a construction resting on social, relational, and power arrangements. But feminism itself has become the subject of relativizing and deconstructionist pressures from within its own theoretical boundaries. The first and more powerful of these pressures comes from women confronting the white, privileged-class, heterosexual status of many leading feminists—that is, from women of color, women in postcolonial societies, working-class women, and lesbians. These women, speaking from "margin to center" (hooks, 1984), show that there are many differently situated women, and that there are many women-centered knowledge systems that oppose both established, male-stream knowledge claims and any hegemonic feminist claims about a unitary woman's standpoint. The second deconstructionist pressure within feminism comes from a growing postmodernist literature that raises questions about gender as an undifferentiated concept and about the individual

self as a stable locus of consciousness and personhood from which gender and the world are experienced. The potential impact of these questions falls primarily on feminist epistemology—its system for making truth claims—and is explored more fully below.

Historical Framing: Feminism, Sociology, and Gender

Feminism and sociology share a long-standing relationship originating in feminists turning to sociology to answer feminism's foundational questions: *what about the women, why is all this as it is, how can it be changed to produce a more just society,* and, more recently, *what about differences among women?* Sociology was identified from its beginning by activist women as one possible source of explanation and change. One strand of this history has been women sociologists' identifying and conceptualizing *gender* as both a descriptive and at least partially explanatory variable in their answers, providing a tool for separating biological maleness and femaleness from social masculinity and femininity (Feree, Khan, and Moriomoto, 2007; Finlay, 2007; Tarrant, 2006). Feminism and sociology need to be understood both as systems of ideas and as social organizations—for feminism, this means as a theory and as a social movement; for sociology, as an academic discipline and as a profession. Looked at in this way, we find that women, most of whom were feminist in their understandings, were active in the development of sociology as both a discipline and a profession from its beginnings, and that repeatedly, generation after generation, these women have had their achievements erased from the history of sociology by a male-dominated professional elite (Delamont, 2003; Skeggs, 2008; for a detailed examination of this process see Lengermann and Niebrugge, 1998).

Despite such erasures, the feminist perspective is an enduring feature of social life. Wherever women are subordinated—and they have been subordinated almost always and everywhere—they have recognized and protested that situation (Lerner, 1993). In the Western world, *published* works of protest appeared as a thin but persistent trickle from the 1630s to about 1780. Since then feminist writing has been a significant collective effort, growing in both the number of its participants and the scope of its critique (Cott, 1977; Donovan, 1985; Giddings, 1984; Lerner, 1993; Alice Rossi, 1974; Spender, 1982, 1983).

Feminist writing is linked to feminist social activism, which has varied in intensity over the last two hundred years; high points occur in the liberationist "moments" of modern Western history. In U.S. history, major periods of feminist mobilization frequently are understood as "waves." *First Wave* feminism began in the 1830s as an offshoot of the antislavery movement and focused on women's struggle for political rights, especially the vote. It is marked by two key dates—1848, when the first women's rights convention was held at Seneca Falls, New York, and 1920, when the Nineteenth Amendment gave women the right to vote. *Second Wave* feminism (ca. 1960–1990) worked to translate these basic political rights into economic and social equality and to reconceptualize relations between men and women with the

concept "gender." *Third Wave* feminism is used in two senses—to describe the responses by women of color, lesbians, and working-class women to the ideas of white professional women claiming to be the voice of Second Wave feminism (Feree, 2009) and to describe the feminist ideas of the generation of women who will live their adult lives in the twenty-first century.

Feminist ideas were, thus, abroad in the world in the1830s when Auguste Comte coined the term "sociology" and feminist Harriet Martineau (1802–1876) was asked to edit a proposed journal in "sociology." Martineau is an important player in the history of sociology whose work has only been recovered under the impact of Second Wave feminism (Deegan, 1991; Hill, 1989; Hoecker-Drysdale, 1994; Lengermann and Niebrugge, 1998; Niebrugge, Lengermann, and Dickerson, 2010) and whose contribution undergirds the claim that women were "present at the creation" of sociology (Lengermann and Niebrugge, 1998). Sociology's development into an organized discipline in its "classic generation"—the period marked by white male thinkers who did significant work from 1890 to 1920 (e.g., Emile Durkheim [1858–1917] and Max Weber [1862–1920] overlapped with the rise in activism in First Wave feminism as women pushed their crusade for the right to vote). Feminists Jane Addams, Charlotte Perkins Gilman, Florence Kelley, and Marianne Weber played important roles in the development of sociology, creating theory, inventing research methods, publishing in sociological journals, belonging to sociological associations, and holding offices in professional associations—and directly or indirectly speaking from the standpoint of women. United States women of color Anna Julia Cooper and Ida B. Wells-Barnett, though barred by racist practices from full participation in the organization of sociology, developed both social theory and a powerful practice of sociological critique and activism. Gilman is particularly significant in the history of feminist contributions to sociology, providing the first conceptualization of what will become the idea of gender in her concept of *excessive sex distinction*, which she defines as socially maintained differences between men and women that go beyond the differences dictated by biological reproduction.

Between 1920 and 1960 feminist thinking and activism ebbed, partly due to a sense of anomie produced by its victory in getting the vote, partly in response to social crises—World War I and its aftermath, the Great Depression, World War II and its aftermath, and the Cold War of the 1950s. Women sociologists were left without a framework for critique of their professional marginalization. They worked as isolated individuals for a foothold in the male-dominated university. Even so these women sociologists did research on women's lives and worked to conceptualize gender within the prevailing framework of "sex roles" in work such as Helen Mayer Hacker's "Women as a Minority Group" (1951) and Mirra Komarovsky's "Cultural Contradictions of Sex Roles" (1946).

Beginning in the 1960s, as a second wave of feminist activism energized feminist thinking, women in sociology drew strength to confront the organization of their profession and to (re-)establish a feminist perspective in the discipline (Feree, Khan, and Morimoto, 2007; Niebrugge, Lengermann, and Dickinson, 2010). Key to their success was the leadership of individual women like Alice Rossi, the establishment of the Women's Caucus within the American Sociological Association and then in

1971 of a separate feminist organization, Sociologists for Women in Society (SWS), which in 1987 undertook the financially daring launch of a new journal, *Gender & Society,* under the editorship of Judith Lorber. These moves brought women a feminist base from which to speak to the profession and a feminist publication from which to introduce ideas to the discipline.

The effects of Second Wave feminism continue to this day in sociology. Women have moved into the profession in unprecedented numbers, as students, teachers, and scholars; the majority of undergraduate majors and about half of Ph.D. recipients are now women (Stacey and Thorne, 1996). Women hold office in the discipline's professional associations in percentages greater than their overall presence in the discipline (Rosenfeld, Cunningham, and Schmidt, 1997).

Central to this Second Wave triumph has been establishing gender as a core concept in sociology. Gender, which is broadly understood as a social construction for classifying people and behaviors in terms of "man" and "woman," "masculine" and "feminine," is now an almost unavoidable variable in research studies—a variable whose presence implies a normative commitment to some standard of gender equality or the possibility that findings of inequality may be explained by practices of gender discrimination. The emphasis on gender vastly expanded the reach of feminist understandings to clearly include men as well as women, and the community of feminist scholars, though still primarily female, now includes important work by male feminists (Brickell, 2005; Connell, 1995; Diamond, 1992; Hearn, 2004; M. Hill, 1989; A. Johnson, 1997; Kimmel, 1996, 2002; Messner, 1997; Schwalbe, 1996; Trexler, 1995).

Yet there remains a recurring unease about the relationship between feminism and sociology, an unease classically framed by Stacey and Thorne in their 1985 essay "The Missing Feminist Revolution in Sociology" and revisited subsequently (Alway, 1995b; Chafetz, 1997; Stacey and Thorne, 1996; Thistle, 2000; Wharton, 2006). A "feminist revolution in sociology" presumably would mean reworking sociology's content, concepts, and practices to take account of the perspectives and experiences of women. This effort has been far from wholesale or systematic. For instance, within the sociological theory community, feminists constitute a distinct and active theory group, intermittently acknowledged but unassimilated, whose ideas have not yet radically affected the dominant conceptual frameworks of the discipline.

The concern with gender has focused the energy of much feminist scholarship in sociology. But it may also have moved that energy away from two original primary concerns of feminist theory—the liberation of women and, as a means to that end, an articulation of the world in terms of women's experience. The study of gender is certainly not antithetical to these projects but neither is it coterminous with them. This chapter attempts to take account of the enormous developments around the concept of gender while at the same time remembering that feminist theory is not the same thing as the sociology of gender, an awareness that may help explain recent developments in feminist theorizing such as the growth of intersectionality theory and the resurgence of sexual difference theory, as well as the persistence of materialist or socialist feminism.

Varieties of Contemporary Feminist Theory

In this section we present a typology of contemporary feminist theories that guide feminist sociological theorizing.[3] Our typology is organized around answers to feminism's most basic question. *And what about the women?* Essentially there have been five answers to that question (see Table 13.1). The first of these can be framed in terms of *gender difference*—women's location in, and experience of, most situations is *different* from that of the men in those situations. The second is that of *gender inequality*—women's location in most situations is not only different from but also less privileged than or *unequal* to that of men. The third is that of *gender oppression*—that is a direct power relationship between men and women through which women are restrained, subordinated, molded, used, and abused by men. The fourth is that women's experience of difference, inequality, and oppression varies according to their location within societies' arrangements of *structural oppression*—class, race, ethnicity, age, affectional preference, marital status, and global location. The fifth, a major focus in third wave feminism, questions the concept of woman so central to other theoretical positions, asking what implications flow from assuming the concept "woman" as a given in social analysis.

Within these basic categories we can distinguish among theories in terms of their differing answers to the second or explanatory question, "Why is all this as it is?"

This typology provides one way to pattern the general body of contemporary feminist theory, created within and outside sociology. It also helps to pattern the expanding literature in the sociology of gender. The focus in the sociology of gender on the relationship of men and women is not equivalent to a feminist theory that presents a critical woman-centered patterning of human experience (Alsop, Fitzsimons, and Lennon, 2002; Chafetz, 2004), but some sociologists who begin from a sociology-of-gender standpoint have produced works of significance for feminist theory, and many sociologists are directly involved in producing feminist theory.

This typology also needs to be read with the following cautions in mind: that it outlines theoretical positions, not the location of specific theorists, who over the course of a career may write from several of these positions, and that feminist theory and feminist sociological theory are dynamic enterprises that change over time. At the current moment, this typology is located within the following intellectual trends: (1) a steady movement toward synthesis, toward critically assessing how elements of these various theories may be combined; (2) a shift from women's oppression to oppressive practices and structures that after both men and women; (3) tension between interpretations that emphasize culture and meaning and those that emphasize the material consequence of powers; (4) and finally, (5) the fact that feminist theory is coming

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[3] Several other classificatory systems already exist, for example, those developed by Chafetz (1988); Clough (1994); Glennon (1979); Jaggar (1983); Jaggar and Rothenberg (1984); Kirk and Okazawa-Rey (1998); Lengermann and Wallace (1985); Snitow, Stansell, and Thompson (1983); Sokoloff (1980); Tong (1998). Readers might turn to these works for balance or amplification of the ideal type presented here. In combination, these efforts have generated a long list of types of feminist theory, including black feminism, conservatism, expressionism, ecofeminism, existentialism, global instrumentalism, lesbian feminism, liberalism, Marxism, polarism, psychoanalytic feminism, radicalism, separatism, socialism, and synthesism. Our own typology attempts to include most of these theories, though not always as identified by these specific labels.

TABLE 13.1

Overview of Varieties of Feminist Theory

Basic varieties of feminist theory—answers to the descriptive question "What about the women?"	**Distinctions within theories—answers to the explanatory question, "Why is all this as it is?"**
Gender difference	
Women's location in, and experience of, most situations is *different* from that of men in the situation.	Cultural feminism Sexual difference theories Sociological theories • Institutional • Interactional
Gender inequality	
Women's location in most situations is not only different from but also less privileged than or *unequal* to that of men.	Liberal feminism
Gender oppression	
Women are *oppressed,* not just different from or unequal to, but actively restrained, subordinated, molded, and used and abused by men.	Psychoanalytic feminism Radical feminism
Structural oppression	
Women's experience of difference, inequality, and oppression varies by their social location within capitalism, patriarchy, and racism.	Socialist feminism Intersectionality theory
Interrogating gender	
What is really to be understood by the category "woman"? How is it produced and maintained?	Postmodernist feminism

to be practiced as part of what Thomas Kuhn has called "normal science," that is, its assumptions are taken for granted as a starting point for empirical research.

Gender Difference

Theories of gender difference are currently among the oldest of feminist theories experiencing a resurgence of interest and elaboration. Although historically the concept of

"difference" has been at the center of several theoretical debates in feminism, we use it here to refer to theories that describe, explain, and trace the implications of the ways in which men and women are or are not the same in behavior and experience. All theories of gender difference have to confront the problem of what usually is termed "the essentialist argument": the thesis that the fundamental differences between men and women are immutable. That immutability usually is seen as traceable to three factors: (1) biology, (2) social institutional needs for men and women to fill different roles, most especially but not exclusively in the family, and (3) the existential or phenomenological need of human beings to produce an "Other" as part of the act of self-definition. There has been some interest in sociobiology by feminist scholars, most notably Alice Rossi (1977, 1983), who have explored the thesis that human biology determines many social differences between men and women. A continuation of this feminist interest in the interaction of biology and sociocultural processes is also to be found in recent statements on *new (or neo-) materialism* (Ahmed, 2008; Davis, 2009; Hird, 2004). But overall the feminist response to sociobiology has been oppositional (Chancer and Palmer, 2001; Risman, 2001). Theories of gender difference important in feminist theory today issue from a range of locations: the women's movement, psychology, existential and phenomenological philosophy, sociology, and postmodernism.

Cultural Feminism

Cultural feminism is unique among theories analyzed here in that it is less focused on explaining the origins of difference and more on exploring—and even celebrating—the social value of women's distinctive ways of being, that is, of the ways in which women are different from men. This approach has allowed cultural feminism to sidestep rather than resolve problems posed by the essentialist thesis.

The essentialist argument of immutable gender difference first was used against women in male patriarchal discourse to claim that women were inferior to men and that this natural inferiority explained their social subordination. But that argument was reversed by some First Wave feminists who created a theory of cultural feminism, which extols the positive aspects of what is seen as "the female character" or "feminine personality." Theorists such as Margaret Fuller, Frances Willard, Jane Addams, and Charlotte Perkins Gilman were proponents of a cultural feminism that argued that in the governing of the state, society needed such women's virtues as cooperation, caring, pacifism, and nonviolence in the settlement of conflicts (Deegan and Hill, 1998; Donovan, 1985; Lengermann and Niebrugge-Brantley, 1998). This tradition has continued to the present day in arguments about women's distinctive standards for ethical judgment (Day, 2000; Gilligan, 1982; Held, 1993), about a mode of "caring attention" in women's consciousness (Fisher, 1995; Reiger, 1999; Ruddick, 1980), about a female style of communication (M. Crawford, 1995; Tannen, 1990, 1993, 1994), about women's capacity for openness to emotional experience (Beutel and Marini, 1995; Mirowsky and Ross, 1995), and about women's lower levels of aggressive behavior and greater capacity for creating peaceful coexistence (Forcey, 2001; Ruddick, 1994; Wilson and Musick, 1997).

The theme from cultural feminism most current in contemporary literature is that developed from Carol Gilligan's argument that women operate out of a different

method of moral reasoning than men. Gilligan contrasts these two ethical styles as "the ethic of care," which is seen as female and focuses on achieving outcomes where all parties feel that their needs are noticed and responded to, and the "ethic of justice," which is seen as male and focuses on protecting the equal rights of all parties (Gilligan and Attanucci, 1988). Although much research is concerned with whether there are gender differences in people's appeal to these two ethics, the more lasting influence of this research lies in the idea that an ethic of care is a moral position in the world (Orme, 2002; Reitz-Pustejovsky, 2002; F. Robinson, 2001). Despite criticism (Alcoff, 1988; Alolo, 2006) cultural feminism has wide popular appeal because it suggests that women's ways of being and knowing may be a healthier template for producing a just society than those of an androcentric culture.

Theories of Sexual Difference

Theories of sexual difference are having a resurgence in feminist discourse (e.g., Mortensen, 2006; Zerilli, 2005). "Sexual difference" is a term for a range of philosophical explorations—existential, phenomenological, Lacanian—of the question of the constitution of humans as sexed beings, that is, as personalities that both conform to and resist cultural or symbolic representations of the masculine and feminine. Sexual difference theories stand in marked contrast to sociobiology and cultural feminism, which basically accept "difference" as a fact of life. Sexual difference theories understand difference not as a fact but as a process that masculine culture both creates and uses to constitute itself. That culture, at best, pushes women's experience and ways of knowing themselves to the very margins of conceptual framing and, in its most intense form, creates a construct of the woman as "the Other," an objectified being who is assigned traits that represent the opposite of the agentic, subject male. Feminist sexual difference theorists explore what these processes may tell about the possibilities for women's freedom and human emancipation.

In its classic form, sexual difference theory arose in France as a feminist response to ideas in male-created (and male-centered) philosophy, literature, and psychoanalysis (Egeland, 2006). Its earliest representation is Simone de Beauvoir's analysis in *The Second Sex* (1949/1957), a feminist existentialism she creates as part of the larger project of existentialism, of which she was a part with Jean-Paul Sartre. Existentialism argues that, unlike all other things in the world, human beings are distinguished by the fact that their "essence" (what they truly are) follows their "existence"—that is, people are free to (or "condemned to") create themselves. For the individual, the "other" person both confirms one's existence and limits one's freedom—by looking at one, "fixing" one, as an object with a history. The great challenge for each individual is to assume the responsibilities of freedom, which means rejecting the need for the other's confirmation of self. It is against this background that De Beauvoir declares, "One is not born a woman, one becomes one." But for women, this existential journey is more difficult—as it is for members of racial minorities, lower classes, non-mainstream religions—because the dominant, in woman's case the male, has attempted to define woman's essence by stereotyping women and denying them the freedom to choose what they will become. Only by first overcoming this oppression by men, who have attempted to make women a

perpetual Other who exists only to recognize a master, can women pursue their own project of freedom. This, however, requires that women discover who they are in terms of their own acts of definition.

De Beauvoir's call for women to reject their status in masculine culture as the existential Other has been reworked and elaborated by a later group of French feminists, including Hélène Cixous, Luce Irigaray, Julia Kristeva, and Monique Wittig, who draw on the work of Jacques Lacan, Jacques Derrida, and Ferdinand de Saussure to build an argument that the quality of Otherness that shapes all women's experience is located in the realm of the symbolic, most especially, language. This point derives from two arguments in Lacanian psychoanalysis: one, following de Saussure, sees language and the symbolic constituted out of differences—words have no positive or absolute meaning but only an oppositional meaning in relation to other words—a second, revising Freud, postulates that within the unconscious there is no symbol of sexual difference but only the phallus as the signifier of sex; masculinity and femininity arise as positions around the phallus—which for Lacan exists in all three "registers," the imaginary, the symbolic, and the real. Sexual difference is based in the different ways in which women and men relate to a language based in the symbolism and fantasies of male power. These theorists seek women's emancipation, both personal and collective, by tapping alternative preverbal experience, particularly of the mother as powerful, for a new symbolic possibility in which to anchor women's language, writing and semiotics.

The recent return to these theories of sexual difference, largely but not solely by European feminists, may be seen as an attempt to chart a new course between the static images of gender as a social construction, and the overly fluid conceptualization of gender as performance, notably in ethnomethodology's "doing" gender theory (see next section) and postmodern performativity theories (see postmodern feminism below). These latest theories of sexual difference offer the realm of the symbolic as a basis for feminist analysis. They analyze the experiences of women as they live in a world of phallocentric meanings in which they are inevitably marginalized, tracing both the costs to women and their covert efforts to tap their own experience for meaning (Mortensen, 2006). Recent writings in this tradition also call for a collective effort by women to construct their own world of meaning, and from this base to begin to repattern the world made by men; most especially women are urged to collectively discover and make political claims that can confirm their identity as women and perhaps reform the social world (Zerilli, 2005).

Sociological Theories: Institutional and Interactionist

Institutional

This theory posits that gender differences result from the different roles that women and men come to play within various institutional settings. A major determinant of difference is seen to be the sexual division of labor that links women to the functions of wife, mother, and household worker; to the private sphere of home and family; and thus to a lifelong series of events and experiences very different from those of men. Women's roles as mothers and wives in producing and reproducing a female personality

and culture have been analyzed by theorists as diverse as J. Bernard (1981, 1972/1982), Chodorow (1978), M. Johnson (1989), and Risman and Ferree (1995). The central motif for this line of thinking is the sexual division of labor in the family. Repeated experience in these settings is pictured as carrying over into other institutions and producing differences between women and men in political behavior (e.g., the gender gap in voting), in choice of careers (e.g., the caring professions as female), in styles of corporate management, and in possibilities for advancement (e.g., the mommy track). Institutional placement theories have not been disproved so much as subsumed under deeper questions of how routine activities produce permanent features of the gendered personality. Institutional placement theories have been subject to two criticisms. First, they do not account for the persistence of gender difference when men and women occupy the same institutional position (though some feminist theorists argue that men and women can never occupy the same institutional position precisely because of the persistence of gender as a separate structure). Second, many sociologists see institutional theories as presenting too static and deterministic a model of gender differences in personality and action.

Interactionist

The most currently elaborated sociological understanding of the origins of gender difference comes from ethnomethodology's analysis of gender as an *accomplishment.* Ethnomethodology (see Chapter 11) posits that institutions, culture, and stratificational systems are maintained by the ongoing activities of individuals in interaction. When this idea is applied to gender, it produces the understanding that "people do gender"—or what is called in shorthand "doing gender."

West and Zimmerman's 1987 article "Doing Gender," the now classic statement of this position, is perhaps the most cited work in recent feminist sociological theory. Its starting point is in distinguishing among sex, sex category, and gender. A baby is born with some configuration of biological sex (which may be more or less clear). On the basis of what the adults attending to the birth interpret as its sex, the baby is assigned to a sex category. After that assignment, everyone around the child and the child itself over time begin to do gender, to act in ways considered appropriate to the sex category designation. The question of how everyone knows what is appropriate is resolved in ethonomethodology by the principle of *accountability:* People do not just act in any way they choose; people in interactions hold other people "accountable" for behaving in ways that are expected or useful or understandable. That is, people "manage conduct in anticipation of how others might describe it on a particular occasion" (Fenstermaker and West, 2002:212). Thus, gender is constantly being produced by people in interaction with each other as a way of making sense of and letting the world work.

For instance, using the "right" public restroom is a way of avoiding all sorts of potential embarrassments. It is a method of getting through the day hassle-free, and it is one so taken for granted that the person doing it hardly considers it doing gender. Ways of hugging, laughing, complaining—conveying the whole range of human emotions—are deeply gendered and are situationally enacted by people as they attempt to communicate with other people. Indeed, one question that emerges from the doing-gender perspective is whether it is possible *not* to do gender.

The current appeal of this approach reflects not only its abstract theoretical validity but also its suitability to a moment in U.S. history in which many people see men and women being more alike than different or at least having a great deal in common. The ethnomethodological insight gives a common origin to all gender experience in the movement from sex to sex category to gender: men and women both experience this and both are caught up in the activities of doing gender.

But although the elemental understanding of "doing" holds constant for women and men, West and Fenstermaker (1995, 2002) and West and Zimmerman (1987) recognize that a part of the substance of the doing in gender is "doing difference"—acting to make distinctions, to distinguish oneself as masculine not feminine or, conversely, as feminine not masculine. These acts of distinction are repeated from situation to situation to maintain gender identity. These theorists have further expanded their analysis of "doing" to other expressions of difference, notably race and class. The social mechanism that produces all this doing of gender difference is the operation of accountability in terms of sex category.

A major criticism of this approach is that it is not clear where the standards for accountability come from, for its emphasis on individual agency overlooks the fact that people in individual interactions do for the most part produce remarkably similar behaviors when doing gender (e.g., Maldonado, 1995; Weber, 1995). Another recurring concern is that much of the discussion and research that has built on the "doing gender" thesis uncritically focuses on interactional reproductions of gender inequality, failing to pursue the feminist protect of "undoing" such patterns (Deutsch, 2007; Risman, 2009; Throne, 1995). Another criticism is the failure of the approach to address the corporality or embodiment of those doing gender difference (Connell, 2009; Messerschmidt 2009). Dorothy Smith (2009) has advice another critique: that "doing" oversimplifirs and homogenizis the differences between gender, read, and class. Yet as any literature search will show, the thesis of doing gender difference continues to inspire teachers, researchers, and theorists in an expanding protect of tracing its ramifications. "Doing gender" as a theory has also gained additional attention through its resonance with the postmodernist thesis of philosopher Judith Butler that gender is a "performance" (see "Postmodernism and feminism" below).

Gender Inequality

Four themes characterize feminist theorizing of gender inequality. Men and women are situated in society not only differently but also unequally. Women get less of the material resources, social status, power, and opportunities for self-actualization than do men who share their social location—be it a location based on class, race, occupation, ethnicity, religion, education, nationality, or any intersection of these factors. This inequality results from the organization of society, not from any significant biological or personality differences between women and men. For although individual human beings may vary somewhat from each other in their profile of potentials and traits, no significant pattern of natural variation distinguishes the sexes. Instead, all human beings are characterized by a deep need for freedom to seek

self-actualization and by a fundamental malleability that leads them to adapt to the constraints or opportunities of the situations in which they find themselves. To say that there is gender inequality, then, is to claim that women are situationally less empowered than men to realize the need they share with men for self-actualization. All inequality theories assume that both women and men will respond fairly easily and naturally to more egalitarian social structures and situations. They affirm, in other words, that it is possible to change the situation. In this belief, theorists of gender inequality contrast with the theorists of gender difference, who present a picture of social life in which gender differences are, whatever their cause, more durable, more penetrative of personality, and less easily changed.

Liberal Feminism

The major expression of gender inequality theory is liberal feminism, which argues that women may claim equality with men on the basis of an essential human capacity for reasoned moral agency, that gender inequality is the result of a sexist patterning of the division of labor, and that gender equality can be produced by transforming the division of labor through the repatterning of key institutions—law, work, family, education, and media (Bem, 1993; Friedan, 1963; Lorber, 1994; Pateman, 1999; A. Rossi, 1964; Schaeffer, 2001).

Historically the first element in the liberal feminist argument is the claim for gender equality. This claim was first politically articulated in the Declaration of Sentiments drafted at Seneca Falls, New York, in 1848 with the express purpose of paralleling and expanding the Declaration of Independence to include women. It opens with the revisionist line "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all man *and women* are created equal" [italics added], changes the list of grievances to focus on women's state, and concludes with a call for women to do whatever is required to gain equal rights with men. In its arguments, the Declaration of Sentiments let the women's movement lay claim to the intellectual discourses of the Enlightenment, the American and French revolutions, and the abolitionist movement. It claimed for women the rights accorded to all human beings under natural law, on the basis of the human capacity for reason and moral agency; asserted that laws which denied women their right to happiness were "contrary to the great precept of nature and of no . . . authority"; and called for change in law and custom to allow women to assume their equal place in society. The denial of those rights by governments *instituted by men* violates natural law and is the tyrannical working out of multiple practices of sexism. The radical nature of this foundational document is that it conceptualizes the woman not in the context of home and family but as an autonomous individual with rights in her own person (DuBois, 1973/1995). Liberal feminism, thus, rests on the beliefs that (1) all human beings have certain essential features—capacities for reason, moral agency, and self-actualization—(2) the exercise of these capacities can be secured through legal recognition of universal rights, (3) the inequalities between men and women assigned by sex are social constructions having no basis in "nature," and (4) social change for equality can be produced by an organized appeal to a reasonable public and the use of the state.

Contemporary liberal feminism has expanded to include a global feminism that confronts racism in North Atlantic societies and works for "the human rights of

women" everywhere. And this discourse has continued to express many of its foundational statements in organizational documents such as the National Organization for Women's Statement of Purpose and the Beijing Declaration. These organizational statements of purpose rely on an informing theory of human equality as a right that the state—local, national, international—must respect. These arguments are being freshly invoked in debates with the political right over reproductive freedom (Bordo, 1993; Solinger, 1998), in debates with postmodernists over the possibility and utility of formulating principles of rights (K. Green, 1995; A. Phillips, 1993; P. Williams, 1991), and in feminist considerations of the gendered character of liberal democratic theory and practice (Haney, 1996; Hirschmann and Di Stefano, 1996; A. Phillips, 1993; Thistle, 2002).

In sociology, contemporary liberal feminism is in part focused on the intellectual project of defining gender as a structure (Ferree, Lorber, and Hess, 1999; Lorber, 1994; Martin, 2004; Risman, 2004). Risman (2004:432) contrasts this approach with past analyses that have explained gender in terms of social structure (such as those of institutional placement discussed above under "Gender Difference"):

> While structural perspectives have been applied to gender in the past . . ., there has been a fundamental flaw in these applications. Generic structural theories applied to gender presume that if women and men were to experience identical structural conditions and role expectations, empirically observable gender differences would disappear. But . . . a structural perspective on gender is accurate only if we realize that gender itself is a structure deeply embedded in society.

Risman describes gender as a highly complex structure that patterns human behavior at three levels—individual, cultural/interactional, and institutional (2004:437). From this perspective, the defining social effect of gender is that it is "a socially constructed stratification system" (2004:430). Liberal feminism sees that gender as a system of stratification produces a gendered division of labor, an organization of society into public and private spheres, and a cultural dimension of sexist ideology.

The sexual division of labor in modern societies divides production in terms of both gender and spheres denoted as "public" and "private." Women are given primary responsibility for the private sphere. Men are given privileged access to the public sphere (which liberal feminists see as the locus of the true rewards of social life—money, power, status, freedom, opportunities for growth and self-worth). The fact that women have what access they do to the public sphere is, of course, one triumph of the women's movement—and of liberal feminism—as is the fact that women feel they can make some demands on men to assist in the work of the private sphere. The two spheres constantly interact in the lives of women (more than they do for men), and both spheres are still shaped by patriarchal ideology and sexism, which also are pervasive in contemporary mass media (Blakely, 2008; Press, 2009).

On the one hand, women find their experience within the public sphere of education, work, politics, and public space still limited by practices of discrimination, marginalization, and harassment (Benokraitis, 1997; Gardner, 1995; Hagan and Kay, 1995; Reskin and Padovic, 1994; Ridgeway, 1997). On the other hand, in the private sphere, they find themselves in a "time bind" as they return home from

paid employment to "a second shift" of home and child care infused by an ideology of intensive mothering (Hochschild, 1989, 1997; McDowell, 2008; Shelton, 2000). These pressures on women work interactively in complex ways—and one feature of contemporary feminist theory is its attempts to understand these interactions. Women's ability to compete in career and profession is hindered by the demands of the private sphere (Waldfogel, 1997). The public sphere "ideal worker norm" (Williams, 2000), which assumes the life schedule available to the typical male intensifies the stress of home commitments by shrinking women's resources of time and energy which in turn increase the demands on them for crisis management at home (Hochschild, 1997). Sexism's link of women to the private sphere activities of caregiving, emotion management, and the maintenance of routine means that women are expected to do this additional work in the public sphere, being frequently tracked into underremunerated jobs in which these "womanly" skills are commodified and marketed (Adkins, 1995; Pierce, 1995). This sexist patterning of work and home puts the single mother at tremendous economic risk and is one factor in the increasing "feminization of poverty" (Edin and Lein, 1997; K. Harris, 1996; Hays, 2003).

A recurring theme in liberal feminist analysis is the problem of achieving equality in marriage. This theme is given its classic formulation in Jessie Bernard's study *The Future of Marriage* (1972/1982). Bernard analyzes marriage as being at one and the same time a cultural system of beliefs and ideals, an institutional arrangement of roles and norms, and a complex of interactional experiences for individual women and men. Culturally, marriage is idealized as the destiny and source of fulfillment for women; a mixed blessing of domesticity, responsibility, and constraint for men; and for American society as a whole an essentially egalitarian association between husband and wife. Institutionally, marriage empowers the role of husband with authority and with the freedom—indeed, the obligation—to move beyond the domestic setting; it meshes the idea of male authority with sexual prowess and male power; and it mandates that wives be compliant, dependent, self-emptying, and essentially centered on the activities and demands of the isolated domestic household. Experientially, then, there are two marriages in any institutional marriage: the man's marriage, in which the husband holds to the belief of being constrained and burdened, while experiencing what the norms dictate—authority, independence, and a right to domestic, emotional, and sexual service by the wife; and the woman's marriage, in which the wife affirms the cultural belief of fulfillment, while experiencing normatively mandated powerlessness and dependence, an obligation to provide domestic, emotional, and sexual services, and a gradual "dwindling away" of the independent young person she was before marriage.

The results of all this are to be found in the data that measure human stress. *Married* women, whatever their claims to fulfillment, and *unmarried* men, whatever their claims to freedom, rank high on all stress indicators, including heart palpitations, dizziness, headaches, fainting, nightmares, insomnia, and fear of nervous breakdown. *Unmarried* women, whatever their sense of social stigma, and *married* men rank low on all the stress indicators. Marriage, then, is good for men and bad for women and will cease to be so unequal in its impact only when couples feel free enough from

the prevailing institutional constraints to negotiate the kind of marriage that best suits their individual needs and personalities. Recent studies have suggested that Bernard's analysis still holds for most marriages (Dempsey, 2002; Steil, 1997) but that some couples are achieving, through dedicated effort, the liberal feminist ideal of egalitarian marriage (P. Schwartz, 1994).

Liberal feminists' agenda for change is consistent with their analyses of the basis for claiming equality and the causes of inequality: they wish to eliminate gender as an organizing principle in the distribution of social "goods," and they are willing to invoke universal principles in their pursuit of equality (Sallee, 2008). Some recent writings even argue for the elimination of gender categories themselves (Lorber, 2000, 2001). Liberal feminists pursue change through law—legislation, litigation, and regulation—and through appeal to the human capacity for reasoned moral judgments, that is, the capacity of the public to be moved by arguments for fairness. They argue for equal educational and economic opportunities; equal responsibility for the activities of family life; the elimination of sexist messages in family, education, and mass media; and individual challenges to sexism in daily life. Liberal feminists have worked through legislative change to ensure equality in education and to bar job discrimination; they have monitored regulatory agencies charged with enforcing this legislation; they have mobilized to have sexual harassment in the workplace legally defined as "job discrimination"; and they have demanded both "pay equity" (equal pay for equal work) and "comparable worth" (equal pay for work of comparable value) (Acker, 1989; England, 1992; R. Rosenberg, 1992).

For liberal feminists, the ideal gender arrangement would be one in which each individual acting as a free and responsible moral agent chooses the lifestyle most suitable to her or him and has that choice accepted and respected, be it for housewife or househusband, unmarried careerist or part of a dual-income family, childless or with children, heterosexual or homosexual. Liberal feminists see this ideal as one that would enhance the practice of freedom and equality, central cultural ideals in America. Liberal feminism, then, is consistent with the dominant American ethos in its basic acceptance of democracy and capitalism, its reformist orientation, and its appeal to the values of individualism, choice, responsibility, and equality of opportunity.

Gender Oppression

Theories of gender oppression describe women's situation as the consequence of a direct power relationship between men and women in which men have fundamental and concrete interests in controlling, using, and oppressing women—that is, in the practice of domination. By *domination,* oppression theorists mean any relationship in which one party (individual or collective), the *dominant,* succeeds in making the other party (individual or collective), the *subordinate,* an instrument of the dominant's will. Instrumentality, by definition, is understood as involving the denial of the suborbinate's independent subjectivity (Lengermann and Niebrugge-Brantley, 1995). Women's situation, for theorists of gender oppression, is centrally that of being dominated and oppressed by men. This pattern of gender oppression is incorporated in the deepest and most pervasive ways into society's organization, a basic arrangement of

domination most commonly called *patriarchy,* in which society is organized to privilege men in all aspects of social life. Patriarchy is not the unintended and secondary consequence of some other set of factors—be it biology or socialization or sex roles or the class system. It is a primary power arrangement sustained by strong and deliberate intention. Indeed, to theorists of gender oppression, gender differences and gender inequality are by-products of patriarchy.

We review here two major variants of gender oppression theory: psychoanalytic feminism and radical feminism.

Psychoanalytic Feminism[4]

Psychoanalytic feminism attempts to explain patriarchy by reformulating the theories of Freud and his intellectual heirs (J. Benjamin, 1988, 1996, 1998; Chodorow, 1978, 1990, 1994, 1999; Langford, 1999). These theories map and emphasize the emotional dynamics of personality, emotions often deeply buried in the subconscious or unconscious areas of the psyche; they also highlight the importance of infancy and early childhood in the patterning of these emotions. In attempting to use Freud's theories, however, feminists have to undertake a fundamental reworking of his conclusions in order to reject his gender-specific conclusions, which are sexist and patriarchal.

Like all oppression theorists, psychoanalytic theorists see patriarchy as a system in which men subjugate women, a universally pervasive system, durable over time and space, and steadfastly maintained in the face of occasional challenge. Distinctive to psychoanalytic feminism, however, is the view that this system is one that all men, in their individual daily actions, work to create and sustain. Women resist only occasionally but more often either acquiesce in or actively work for their own subordination. The puzzle that psychoanalytical feminists set out to solve is why men everywhere bring such unremitting energy to the task of sustaining patriarchy and why there is an absence of countervailing energy on the part of women.

Psychoanalytic feminists discount the argument that a cognitive calculus of practical benefits is sufficient for male support for patriarchy. Cognitive mobilization does not seem a sufficient source for the intense energy that men invest in patriarchy, especially because, in light of the human capacity to debate and second-guess, men may not always and everywhere be certain that patriarchy is of unqualified value to them. Moreover, an argument anchored in the cognitive pursuit of self-interest would suggest that women would as energetically mobilize against patriarchy. Instead, these theorists look to those aspects of the psyche so effectively mapped by the Freudians: the zone of human emotions, of half-recognized or unrecognized desires and fears, and of neurosis and pathology. Here they find a clinically proven source of motivational energy and debilitation, one springing from psychic structures too deep to be recognized or monitored by individual consciousness.

In searching for the energic underpinnings of patriarchy, psychoanalytical feminists turn their analytic lens on the socioemotional environment in which the

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[4]European feminists' use of Lacanian psychoanalytic theory was discussed under "Theories of Equal Difference" above; this section takes up another strand of psychoanalytic theory—object relations theory—and its use by American feminists.

personality of the young child takes form and to two facets of early childhood development: (1) the assumption that human beings grow into mature people by learning to balance a never-resolved tension between *individuation,* the desire for freedom of action, and *recognition,* the desire for confirmation by another; and (2) the observable fact that in all societies infants and children experience their earliest and most crucial development in a close, uninterrupted, intimate relationship with a woman, their mother or mother substitute. As infants and young children, for considerable periods lacking even language as a tool for understanding experience, individuals experience their earliest phases of personality development as an ongoing turbulence of primitive emotions: fear, love, hate, pleasure, rage, loss, desire. The emotional consequences of these early experiences stay with people always as potent but often unconscious "feeling memories." Central to that experiential residue is a cluster of deeply ambivalent feelings for the woman/mother/caregiver: need, dependence, love, possessiveness, but also fear and rage over her ability to thwart one's will. Children's relationship to the father/man is much more occasional, secondary, and emotionally uncluttered.

From this beginning, the male child, growing up in a culture that positively values maleness and devalues femaleness and increasingly aware of his own male identity, attempts to achieve an awkwardly rapid separation of identity from the woman/mother—an emotional separation that is partial, and costly in its consequences. In adulthood the emotional carryover from early childhood toward women—need, love, hate, possessiveness—energizes the man's quest for a woman of his own who meets his emotional needs yet is dependent on and controlled by him—that is, he has an urge to dominate and finds recognition of the other difficult. The female child, bearing the same feelings toward the woman/mother, discovers her own female identity in a culture that devalues women. She grows up with deeply mixed positive and negative feelings about herself and about the woman/mother and in that ambivalence dissipates much of her potential for mobilized resistance to her social subordination (Oliver, 2006). She seeks to resolve her emotional carryover in adulthood by emphasizing her capacities for according recognition—often submissively with males in acts of sexual attraction and mutually with females in acts of kinship maintenance and friendship. And rather than seeking mother substitutes, she re-creates the early infant-woman relationship by becoming a mother.

Psychoanalytical feminist theorists have extended their analyses beyond individual personality to Western culture: emphases in Western science on a distinct separation between "man" and "nature" (Jaggar and Bordo, 1989; Keller, 1985); motifs in popular culture (J. Benjamin, 1985, 1988; Chancer, 1992; Zannetrino, 2008). The organizational practices to professional groups (Ford and Harding, 2008); and of service providers (Varley, 2008). Two pathologies result from the tension between recognition and individuation—the overindividuated dominator, who "recognizes" the other only through acts of control, and the underindividuated subordinate, who relinquishes independent action to find identity only as a mirror of the dominator (Zosky, 1999).

Psychoanalytical feminists, then, explain women's oppression in terms of men's deep emotional need to control women, a drive arising from ambivalence toward the

women who reared them. Women either lack these neuroses or are subject to complementary neuroses, but in either case they are left psychically without an equivalent source of energy to resist domination. Clinical psychiatric evidence supports the thesis that these neuroses are widespread in Western societies, as does recent work in cross-cultural psychology (Haaken, 2008). But these theories, in drawing a straight line from human emotions to female oppression, fail to explore the intermediate social arrangements that link emotion to oppression and fail to suggest possible lines of variation in emotions, social arrangements, or oppression produced by the variable of class, nationality, and ethnicity. Moreover, psychoanalytic feminist theory suggests very few strategies for change, except perhaps that we restructure our child-rearing practices.

Radical Feminism

Radical feminism is based on two emotionally charged central beliefs: (1) that women are of absolute positive value as women, a belief asserted against what they claim to be the universal devaluing of women, and (2) that women are everywhere oppressed—violently oppressed—by the system of patriarchy (Bunch, 1987; Chesler, 1994; Daly, 1973; C. Douglas, 1990; Dworkin, 1989; Echols, 1989; French, 1992; Frye, 1983; Hunnicutt, 2009; MacKinnon, 1989, 1993; Monrow, 2007; Rhodes, 2005; Rich, 1976, 1980). With passion and militance similar to the "black power" cry of African American mobilization and the "witnessing" by Jewish survivors of the Holocaust, radical feminists elaborate a theory of social organization, gender oppression, and strategies for change.

Radical feminists see in every institution and in society's most basic stratificational arrangements—heterosexuality, class, caste, race, ethnicity, age, and gender—systems of domination and subordination, the most fundamental structure of which is the system of patriarchy. Not only is patriarchy historically the first structure of domination and submission, it continues as the most pervasive and enduring system of inequality, the basic societal model of domination (Lerner, 1986). Through participation in patriarchy, men learn how to hold other human beings in contempt, to see them as nonhuman, and to control them. Within patriarchy men see and women learn what subordination looks like. Patriarchy creates guilt and repression, sadism and masochism, manipulation and deception, all of which drive men and women to other forms of tyranny. Patriarchy, to radical feminists, is the least noticed yet the most significant structure of social inequality.

Central to this analysis is the image of patriarchy as violence practiced by men and by male-dominated organizations against women. Violence may not always take the form of overt physical cruelty. It can be hidden in more complex practices of exploitation and control: in standards of fashion and beauty; in tyrannical ideals of motherhood, monogamy, chastity, and heterosexuality; in sexual harassment in the workplace; in the practices of gynecology, obstetrics, and psychotherapy; and in unpaid household drudgery and underpaid wage work (MacKinnon, 1979; Rich, 1976, 1980; L. Roth, 1999; B. Thompson, 1994; N. Wolf, 1991). Violence exists whenever one group controls in its own interests the life chances, environments, actions, and perceptions of another group, as men do to women.

But the theme of violence as overt physical cruelty lies at the heart of radical feminism's linking of patriarchy to violence: rape, sexual abuse, enforced prostitution, spouse abuse, incest, sexual molestation of children, hysterectomies and other excessive surgery, the sadism in pornography, the historical and cross-cultural practices of witch burning, the stoning to death of adulteresses, the persecution of lesbians, female infanticide, Chinese foot-binding, the abuse of widows, and the practice of clitorectomy (Barry, 1979, 1993; Bart and Moran, 1993; Bergen, 1996; Buchwald, Fletcher, and Roth, 1993; Caputi, 1989; Faludi, 1991; Hammer, 2002; Mardorossian, 2002; Martin, Vieratis, and Britto, 2006; Russell, 1998; Sanday, 1996; Scully, 1990; Stiglmayer, 1994).

Patriarchy exists as a near-universal social form because men can muster the most basic power resource, physical force, to establish control. Once patriarchy is in place, the other power resources—economic, ideological, legal, and emotional—also can be marshaled to sustain it. But physical violence always remains its base, and in both interpersonal and intergroup relations, that violence is used to protect patriarchy from women's individual and collective resistance.

Men create and maintain patriarchy not only because they have the resources to do so but because they have real interests in making women serve as compliant tools. Women are a uniquely effective means of satisfying male sexual desire. Their bodies are essential to the production of children, who satisfy both practical and psychological needs for men. Women are a useful labor force. They can be ornamental signs of male status and power. As carefully controlled companions to both the child and the adult male, they are pleasant partners, sources of emotional support, and useful foils who reinforce the male's sense of central social significance. These useful functions mean that men everywhere seek to keep women compliant. But differing social circumstances give different rank orders to these functions and therefore lead to cross-cultural variations in the patterning of patriarchy.

How is patriarchy to be defeated? Radicals hold that this defeat must begin with a basic reworking of women's consciousness so that each woman recognizes her own value and strength; rejects patriarchal pressures to see herself as weak, dependent, and second-class; and works in unity with other women, regardless of differences among them, to establish a broad-based sisterhood of trust, support, appreciation, and mutual defense (Chasteen, 2001; McCaughey, 1997; Whitehead, 2007). With this sisterhood in place, two strategies suggest themselves: a critical confrontation with any facet of patriarchal domination whenever it is encountered and a degree of separatism as women withdraw into women-run businesses, households, communities, centers of artistic creativity, and lesbian love relationships. Lesbian feminism, as a major strand in radical feminism, is the practice and belief that "erotic and/or emotional commitment to women is part of resistance to patriarchal domination" (Phelan, 1994; Rudy, 2001; Taylor and Rupp, 1993).

A theoretical evaluation of radical feminism should note that it incorporates arguments made by both socialist and psychoanalytical feminists about the reasons for women's subordination yet moves beyond those theories. Radical feminists, moreover, have done significant research to support their thesis that patriarchy ultimately rests on the practice of violence against women. They have a reasonable though

perhaps incomplete program for change. They may, however, be faulted for their exclusive focus on patriarchy, a focus that simplifies the realities of social organization and social inequality.

Structural Oppression

Structural oppression theories, like gender oppression theories, recognize that oppression results from the fact that some groups of people derive direct benefits from controlling, using, and subjugating other groups of people. Structural oppression theorists analyze how interests in domination are enacted through social structure, here understood as those recurring and routinized large-scale arrangements of social relations that arise out of history, and are always arrangements of power. These theorists focus on the structures of patriarchy, capitalism, racism, and heterosexism, and they locate enactments of domination and experiences of oppression in the interplay of these structures, that is, in the way they mutually reinforce each other. Structural oppression theorists do not absolve or deny the agency of individual dominants, but they examine how that agency is the product of structural arrangements. In this section we look at two types of structural oppression theory: socialist feminism and intersectionality theory.

Socialist Feminism

The theoretical project of socialist feminism develops around three goals: (1) to achieve a critique of the distinctive yet interrelated oppressions of patriarchy and capitalism from a standpoint in women's experience, (2) to develop explicit and adequate methods for social analysis out of an expanded understanding of historical materialism, and (3) to incorporate an understanding of the significance of ideas into a materialist analysis of the determination of human affairs. Socialist feminists have set themselves the formal project of achieving both a synthesis of and a theoretical step beyond other feminist theories, most specifically Marxian and radical feminist thought (Acker, 2008; Eisenstein, 1979; Fraser, 1989, 1997; Fraser and Bedford, 2008; Gimenez, 2005; Hartsock, 1983; Hennessey and Ingraham, 1997; Jackson, 2001; MacKinnon, 1989; Dorothy Smith, 1979, 1987, 1990a, 1990b, 1999a, 1999b, 2000a, 2004a, 2009; Vogel, 1995).

Radical feminism, as discussed above, is a critique of patriarchy. Marxian feminism, described here, has traditionally brought together Marxian class analysis and feminist social protest. But this amalgam—portrayed as an uneasy marriage (Hartmann, 1981; Shelton and Agger, 1993)—often produced not an intensified theory of gender oppression but a more muted statement of gender inequality as women's concerns were grafted onto, rather than made equal partners in, the critique of class oppression. While pure Marxian feminism is a relatively dormant theory in contemporary American feminism, it remains important as an influence on socialist feminism. Its foundation was laid by Marx and Engels (see Chapter 2). Their major concern was social class oppression, but they occasionally turned their attention to gender oppression, most famously in *The Origins of the Family, Private Property, and the State* (written by Engels in 1884 from extensive notes made by Marx in the year immediately preceding

DOROTHY E. SMITH

A Biographical Sketch

Dorothy E. Smith explains that her sociological theory derives from her life experiences as a woman, particularly as a woman moving between two worlds—the male-dominated academic sphere and the female-centered life of the single parent. Remembering herself at Berkeley in the early 1960s studying for a doctorate in sociology while single-parenting, Smith reflects that her life seems to have been framed by what she sees as "not so much . . . a career as a series of contingencies, of accidents" (1979:151). This theme of contingency is one of many personal experiences that have led Smith to challenge sociological orthodoxy such as the image of the purposive actor engaged in linear pursuits of projects.

Whether they occurred by accident or design, the following events appear to the outsider as significant stages in Smith's development. She was born into a multigenerational family of independent and activist women in 1926 in Great Britain (Smythe, 2009); she earned her bachelor's degree in sociology from the University of London in 1955 and her Ph.D. in sociology from the University of California at Berkeley in 1963. During this period, she had "the experience of marriage, of immigration [to Canada] closely following marriage, of the arrival of children, of the departure of a husband rather early one morning, of the jobs that became available" (Smith, 1979:151). Of these events, Smith stresses, they "were moments in which I had in fact little choice and certainly little foreknowledge." The jobs that became available included research sociologist at Berkeley; lecturer in sociology at Berkeley; lecturer in sociology at the University of Essex, Colchester, England; associate professor and then professor in the department of sociology at the University of British Columbia; and professor of sociology in education at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, Toronto.

Smith has written on a wide variety of topics, all connected by a concern with "bifurcation," sometimes as a central theme and sometimes as a motif. Smith sees the experience of bifurcation manifesting itself in the separation

his death in 1883). We briefly summarize this book because it gives a good introduction to the classic Marxian theory of gender oppression and to the method of historical materialism.

The major argument of *The Origins* is that woman's subordination results not from her biology, which is presumably immutable, but from social relations that have a clear and traceable history and that presumably can be changed. In the context of nineteenth-century thinking about gender, this was a radical, indeed a feminist, argument. The relational basis for women's subordination lies in the family, an institution aptly named from the Latin word for *servant,* because the family as it exists in complex

between social-scientific description and people's lived experience, between women's lived experience and the patriarchal ideal types they are given for describing that experience, between the micro-world and the macro-world structures that dictate micro experience, and, especially, between the micro world of the oppressed and the micro world of the dominants whose actions create the macro structures of oppression. The concretization of these themes can be seen in a selective review of the titles of some of Smith's works. In 1987 Smith produced her most extensive and integrated treatment of these themes in what has become a landmark in feminist sociology, *The Everyday World as Problematic* (1987). She followed this with *The Conceptual Practices of Power* (1990a), *Texts, Facts and Femininity* (1990b), *Writing the Social* (1999b), and *Institutional Ethnography: A Sociology for People* (2004b).

What Smith is producing for feminist sociologists, and indeed for all sociologists interested in the theoretical frontiers of the profession, is a sociology that integrates neo-Marxian concerns with the structures of domination and phenomenological insights into the variety of subjective and micro-interactional worlds. Smith sees these various everyday life-worlds as shaped by macro structures that are themselves shaped by the historical specifics of economic demand. What Smith wishes to avoid, in developing this line of reasoning, is a vision of the world in which the oppressors are consistently interpreted as individual actors making rational decisions on the basis of self-interest. Smith sees that self-interest itself is structurally situated, but she believes that these structures can become known only by beginning with the outcome at hand, that is, by exploring the everyday worlds of situated individuals. Smith is concerned that much social science serves to obfuscate rather than clarify the structures that produce these worlds because much social science begins with an assumption that the structures are already known and can be known separately from the everyday life-worlds. Her recent work extends her project of a sociology for women to a sociology for people that explores macro structures as organizers of everyday/everynight worlds. She is particularly interested in analyzing text-based organization and text-mediated social relations in people's everyday local practices (Smith, 2006). Here her work offers a sociological alternative to feminist postmodernism. The implications of Smith's work for sociological theory form the basis for much of this chapter.

societies is overwhelmingly a system in which men command women's services. Although the ideology of contemporary societies treats family as a fundamental and universal feature of social life, Engels and Marx use archaeological and anthropological evidence to show that the family is a fairly recent relational invention, that for much of prehistory men and women lived in kin structures in which women enjoyed relative autonomy primarily because they had an independent economic base as gatherers, crafters, storers, and distributors of essential materials. The factor that destroyed this type of social system, producing what Engels calls "the world historic defeat of the female sex" (Engels, 1884/1970:87), was an economic one, specifically the

replacement of hunting and gathering by herding and farming economies in which men's resources of strength, mobility, and a technology derived from their earlier hunting roles gave them a systematic advantage over women. This period saw the invention of the concept of *property,* the idea and reality of a male class claiming as its own the communal resources for economic production. In these new economies, men as property owners needed both a compliant labor force—be it of slaves, captives, women-wives, children—and heirs who would serve as a means of preserving and passing on property. Thus emerged the first *familia,* a master and his slave-servants, wife-servants, children-servants. Since then, the exploitation of labor has developed into increasingly complex structures of domination, most particularly class relations, and the family has evolved along with historical transformations of economic and property systems into an embedded and dependent institution, reflecting all the injustices of the economy and consistently enforcing the subordination of women. Engels and Marx conclude that only with the destruction of property rights through class revolution will women attain freedom of social, political, economic, and personal action.

Locating the origin of patriarchy in the emergence of property relations subsumes women's oppression under the general framework of Marxian class analysis. "Property"—understood not as personal possessions but as ownership of the resources necessary for social production (the means of production)—is the basis of class division because it creates a situation in which some groups are able to claim that they own the means of production while other groups work to do the producing. Marxian analysis focuses particularly on how this class division works out under capitalism, the economic system of modern societies. The distinctive feature of capitalism is that the class that owns the means of production—the capitalists—operates on a logic of continuous capital accumulation; *capital* is wealth (money and other assets), which can be used to generate the material infrastructure of economic production. Unlike other forms of economic organization in which people may seek to exchange either goods or money for more goods, capitalists seek to exchange goods in order to amass wealth. The mechanism by which capitalists turn goods into wealth is surplus value; surplus value is the difference between the compensation given to workers for their production and the value of the goods they produce; this surplus value is appropriated by the capitalist, who uses it to enhance his own lifestyle and power and, above all, to reinvest in the ongoing process of capital accumulation and expansion.

Socialist feminists accept the Marxian analysis of capitalism's class relations as an explication of one major structure of oppression. But they reject the Marxian analysis of patriarchy as a by-product of the same economic production. Instead they endorse the radical feminist argument that patriarchy, while interacting with economic conditions, is an independent structure of oppression.

Socialist feminism sets out to bring together these dual knowledges—knowledge of oppression under capitalism and of oppression under patriarchy—into a unified explanation of all forms of social oppression. One term used to try to unify these two oppressions is *capitalist patriarchy* (Eisenstein, 1979; Hartmann, 1979; A. Kuhn and Wolpe, 1978). But the term perhaps more widely used is *domination,* defined above (under "Gender Oppression") as a relationship in which one party, *the dominant,* succeeds in making the other party, *the subordinate,* an instrument of the dominant's

will, refusing to recognize the subordinate's independent subjectivity. Socialist feminism's explanations of oppression present domination as a large-scale structural arrangement, a power relation between categories of social actors that is reproduced by the willful and intentional actions of individual actors. Women are central to socialist feminism as the primary topic for analysis, and as the essential vantage point on domination in all its forms. But these theorists are concerned with all experiences of oppression, both by women and by men. They also explore how some women, themselves oppressed, actively participate in the oppression of other women, for example, privileged-class women in American society who oppress poor women (Eisenstein, 1994; Hochschild, 2000).

Socialist feminists use historical materialism as their analytical method (Hennessey and Ingraham, 1997). *Historical materialism,* a basic principle in Marxian social theory, is the claim that the material conditions of human life, including the activities and relationships that produce those conditions, are the key factors that pattern human experience, personality, ideas, and social arrangements; that those conditions change over time because of dynamics immanent within them; and that history is a record of the changes in the material conditions of a group's life and of the correlative changes in experiences, personality, ideas, and social arrangements. Historical materialists hold that any effort at social analysis must trace in historically concrete detail the specifics of a group's material conditions and the links between those conditions and the experiences, personalities, events, ideas, and social arrangements characteristic of the group. In linking historical materialism to their focus on domination, socialist feminists attempt to realize their goal of a theory that probes the broadest of human social arrangements, domination, yet remains firmly committed to precise, historically concrete analyses of the material and social arrangements that frame particular situations of domination.

The use of historical materialism by socialist feminism shows the school's indebtedness to Marxian thought. But in their use of this method, socialist feminists move beyond the Marxians in three crucial ways: their redefinition of *material conditions,* their reevaluation of the significance of ideology, and their focus on domination. First, they broaden the concept of the *material conditions* to include not only the Marxian concept of economic production for the market but other conditions that create and sustain human life: sexuality, involvement in procreation, and child rearing; the unpaid, invisible round of domestic tasks; emotional care; and the production of knowledge. In *all* these life-sustaining activities, exploitative arrangements profit some and impoverish others. An analysis of the historical transformation of all production and exploitation is essential to a theory of domination (McDowell, 2008).

The second point of difference between Marxian historical materialism and the historical materialism of socialist feminism is the latter perspective's emphasis on what some Marxians might dismiss as consciousness, motivation, ideas, social definitions of the situation, knowledge, texts, ideology, the will to act in one's interests or acquiesce to the interests of others.[5] To socialist feminists all these factors deeply

[5]Admittedly some neo-Marxians, notably the critical theorists, have reevaluated the explanatory significance of ideology (see Chapter 8).

affect human personality, human action, and the structures of domination that are realized through that action. Moreover, these aspects of human subjectivity are produced by social structures that are inextricably intertwined with, and are as elaborate and powerful as, those that produce economic goods. Within all these structures, too, exploitative arrangements enrich and empower some while impoverishing and immobilizing others. Historical materialist analysis of the processes that pattern human subjectivity is vital to a theory of domination.

Third is Marxian unlike the object of analysis theorists for whom class inequality, socialist feminists focus on the complex intertwining of a wide range of social inequalities. They develop a portrait of social organization in which the public structures of economy, polity, and ideology interact with the intimate, private processes of human reproduction, domesticity, sexuality, and subjectivity to sustain a multifaceted system of domination, the workings of which are discernible both as impersonal social patterns and as the more varied subtleties of interpersonal relationships. To analyze this system, socialist feminists shuttle between mapping large-scale systems of domination and situationally specific, detailed exploration of the mundane daily experiences of oppressed people. Their strategy for change rests in this process of discovery, in which they attempt to involve the oppressed groups that they study and through which they hope that both individuals and groups, in large and small ways, will learn to act in pursuit of their collective emancipation.

Within this general theoretical framing, socialist feminist analyses has distinct emphases. First, *materialist feminism* two situates gender relations within the structure of the contemporary capitalist system, particularly as that system is now operating globally. The interest of materialist feminists is in the implications of global capitalism for women's lives and in the ways in which women's labor contributes to the expanding wealth of capitalism. Within global capitalism, women as wage earners are more poorly paid than men because patriarchal ideology assigns them a lower social status. Because patriarchy assigns them the responsibility for the home, they are structurally more precariously positioned in wage-sector employment than men are and thus are more difficult to organize. These two factors make them an easy source of profit for the capitalist class. Further, capitalism depends on the unpaid production of women whose work as housewives, wives, and mothers subsidizes and disguises the real costs of reproducing and maintaining the workforce. And women's work as consumers of goods and services for the household becomes a major source of capitalist profit making (J. L. Collins, 2002; Hennessey and Ingraham, 1997; Ingraham, 2008; N. Rose, 1995; Vogel, 1995).

A second emphasis given most form by Dorothy Smith and her students, is on the *relations of ruling,* the processes by which capitalist patriarchal domination is enacted through an interdependent system of control that includes not only the economy but the state and the privileged professions (including social science). The dynamics of this arrangement of control are explored through a focus on women's daily activities and experiences in the routine maintenance of daily life. The relations of ruling are revealed as pervading and controlling women's daily production via "texts," extralocal, generalized requirements that seek to pattern and appropriate their labor—texts like health insurance forms, the school calendar, advertisements about

the ideal home and the ideal female body (M. Campbell and Manicom, 1995; Currie, 1997, 1999; Widerberg, 2008).

Socialist feminists' program for change calls for global solidarity among women to combat the abuses capitalism works in their lives, in the lives of their communities, and in the environment. Indeed, eco-feminism is a major current trend in socialist feminism (Dordoy and Mellor, 2000; Goldman and Schurman, 2000; Kirk, 1997). They call on the feminist community to be ever vigilant about the dangers of their own co-optation into a privileged intelligentsia that serves capitalist interests. Their project is to mobilize people to use the state as a means for the effective redistribution of societal resources through the provision of an extensive safety net of public services such as publicly supported education, health care, transportation, child care, and housing; a progressive tax structure that reduces the wide disparities of income between rich and poor; and the guarantee of a living wage to all members of the community. They believe that this mobilization will be effective only if people become aware of and caring about the life conditions of others as well as their own. The feminist social scientist's duty is to make visible the material inequalities that shape people's lives.

Intersectionality Theory

The central issue for intersectionality theory is the understanding that women experience oppression in varying configurations and in varying degrees of intensity (Anderson, 2005; Anzaldúa, 1990; Anzaldúa and Keating, 2002; Aptheker, 1989; P. Collins, 1990, 1998, 1999, 2000, 2001, 2004; Crenshawe, 1991, 1997; E. Glenn, 1999; Kall, 2006; Lorde, 1984; Smith, 2009; Vespa, 2009). The explanation for that variation is that while all women potentially experience oppression on the basis of gender, women are, nevertheless, differentially oppressed by the varied intersections of other arrangements of social inequality. These *vectors of oppression and privilege* (or, in Patricia Hill Collins's phrase, "the matrix of domination" [1990]) include not only gender but also class, race, global location, sexual preference, and age. The variation of these intersections qualitatively alters the experience of being a woman—and this alteration, this diversity, must be taken into account in theorizing the experiences of "women." The argument in intersectionality theory is that it is intersection itself that produces a particular experience of oppression, and one cannot arrive at an adequate explanation by using an additive strategy of gender, plus race, plus class, plus sexuality (Andersen, 2005). Crenshawe (1989), for example, shows that black women frequently experience discrimination in employment because they are *black women,* but courts routinely refuse to recognize this discrimination—unless it can be shown to be a case of what is considered general discrimination, "sex discrimination" (read "also white women"), or "race discrimination" (read "also black men"). In characterizing these as vectors of oppression *and* privilege, we wish to suggest a fundamental insight of intersectionality theories—that the privilege exercised by some women and men turns on the oppression of other women and men. Theories of intersectionality at their core understand these arrangements of inequality as hierarchical structures based in unjust power relations. The theme of injustice signals the consistent critical focus of this analysis.

Patricia Hill Collins

A Biographical Sketch

Patricia Hill Collins was born in 1948. By her own report, she grew up in a supportive and extended black working-class family located in a black community in Philadelphia; she moved from this secure base daily to attend an academically demanding public high school for girls, and then, more permanently, to earn her bachelor's degree at Brandeis University in 1969 and her M.A.T. at Harvard in 1970. During the 1970s she worked as a curriculum specialist in schools in Boston, Pittsburgh, Hartford, New York, and Washington, D.C. She returned to Brandeis to earn her Ph.D. in sociology in 1984. She spent much of her career in higher education at the University of Cincinnati, where she held a dual appointment as Charles Phelps Taft Professor of Sociology and as Professor of African-American Studies. Currently, she is Distinguished University Professor at the University of Maryland. She was president of the American Sociological Association in 2009—the first African American Woman elected to this position.

Collins writes that her experiences of educational success were permeated by the counterexperience of being "the 'first,' or 'one of the few,' or the 'only' African-American and/or woman and/or working-class person in my schools, communities, and work settings" (1990:xi). In these situations, she found herself judged as being less than others who came from different backgrounds, and she learned that educational success seemed to demand that she distance herself

Intersectionality theory recognizes the fundamental link between ideology and power that allows dominants to control subordinates by creating a politics in which difference becomes a conceptual tool for justifying arrangements of oppression. In social practice, dominants use differences among people to justify oppressive practices by translating difference into models of inferiority/superiority; people are socialized to relate to difference not as a source of diversity, interest, and cultural wealth but evaluatively in terms of "better" or "worse." As Lorde (1984:115) argues, this "institutional rejection of difference is an absolute necessity in a profit economy which needs outsiders as surplus people." These ideologies operate in part by creating *"a mythical norm"* against which people evaluate others and themselves; in United States society this norm is "white, thin, male, young, heterosexual, Christian, and financially secure" (Lorde, 1984:116). This norm not only allows dominants to control social production (both paid and unpaid), but also becomes part of individual subjectivity—an internalized rejection of difference that can operate to make people devalue themselves, reject people from different groups, and create criteria within their own group for excluding, punishing, or marginalizing group members. Anzaldúa

from her black working-class background. This created in her a tension that produced "a loss of voice."

Her response to these tensions has been to formulate an alternative understanding of social theory and an alternative way of doing theory. This project led her to discover the theoretical voice of her community and to reclaim her own voice by situating it in that community. It culminated in *Black Feminist Thought* (1990), a landmark text in feminist and social theory that received both the Jessie Bernard Award and the C. Wright Mills Award. *Black Feminist Thought* presents social theory as the understandings of a specific group, black women; to this end, Collins draws on a wide range of voices, some famous, others obscure. What she presents is a community-based social theory that articulates that group's understanding of its oppression by intersections of race, gender, and class—and its historical struggle against that oppression. In this work, Collins uncovers the distinctive epistemology by which black women assess truth and validity; she also argues convincingly for a feminist standpoint epistemology. In both practice and theory she has pursued her theory of intersectionality, helping to organize the ASA section Race, Gender, Class; editing, with Margaret Andersen, the essay collection *Race, Class and Gender* (1992); and authoring a multiplicity of articles in a wide range of journals.

In *Fighting Words: Black Women and the Search for Justice* (1998) Collins continued her project of redefining social theory not as the province and practice of an elite intellectual group but as the understandings variously situated groups have achieved about the social world. In *Black Sexual Politics: African Americans, Gender and the New Racism* (2004), Collins expands the reach of her intersectionality theory to the analysis of the varied experiences of oppression of black women and black men, tracing the consequences of these experiences for the relation between black women and men.

describes this last practice as "Othering," an act of definition done within a subordinated group to establish that a group member is unacceptable, an "other," by some criterion; this definitional activity, she points out, erodes the potential for coalition and resistance.

The intersection of vectors of oppression and privilege creates variations in both the forms and the intensity of people's experience of oppression. Much of the writing and research done out of an intersectionality perspective presents the concrete reality of people's lives as those lives are shaped by the intersections of these vectors. The most-studied intersections by feminists are of gender and race (Clark-Lewis, 1994; Dill, 1994; S. Hill and Sprague, 1999; Tester, 2008), gender and class (P. Cohen, 1998; Foner, 1994; Gregson and Lowe, 1994; Wrigley, 1995), and race, gender, and class (Andersen and Collins, 1992; Edin and Lein, 1997; Edin and Kefalas; 2005). Other analyses include gender and age (Desai, 2007; D. Gibson, 1996; Lopata, 1996), gender and global location (Desai, 2007; Goodwin, 1994; Reddock, 2000), and gender and sexual preference (Dunne, 1997; Mullins, 2005; Nagel, 2003; Oberhauser and Pratt, 2004; Schilt, 2008). In the most recent writings out of this perspective,

intersectionality theory has also been applied to the circumstances of subordinate men (P. Collins, 2004; Edin and Kefalas, 2005; shows and Gerstel, 2009).

In response to their material circumstances, people create interpretations and strategies for surviving and resisting the persistent exercise of unjust power. One part of the project of intersectionality theory is to give voice to the group knowledges worked out in specific life experiences created by historical intersections of inequality and to develop various feminist expressions of these knowledges—for example, black feminist thought or chicana feminism (P. Collins, 1990; Cordova et al., 1990; Alma Garcia, 1989; James and Busia, 1993).

Intersectionality theory develops a critique of work done in Second Wave (and First Wave) feminism as work reflecting the experience and concerns of white privileged-class feminists in North Atlantic societies. Some of this work of critique is paralleled by work done in postmodernism—but this parallelism should not be overstated. Intersectionality theory is one of the oldest traditions in feminism, at least in the United States, going back, for example, to Sojourner Truth's "Aint I a Woman" speech at the Akron Women's Rights Convention of 1852 (Zerai, 2000). This critique has produced questions about what we mean by categories such as "woman," "gender," "race," and "sisterhood"—questions that are essentially political in intent, and not, as in post modernism, philosophpical (Chopra, 2004; hooks, 1984; Kaminsky, 1994; Mohanty, 1991). It has focused on the diversity of experience in such seeming universals as "mothering" and "family" and has reinterpreted theoretical works like the sociological-psychoanalytic studies of Chodorow and Benjamin (Dickerson, 1995; E. Glenn, Chang, and Forcey, 1993; Mahoney and Yngvesson, 1992; Segura and Pierce, 1993). This critique has prompted a repositioning of the understandings of "whiteness" by white feminists who seek to understand whiteness as a construction, the ways whiteness results in privilege, what they can actively do to reduce racism, and how they can contribute to producing a more inclusive feminist analysis (Alcoff, 1998; Chodorow, 1994; Frankenberg, 1993; Rowe, 2000; Ward, 1994; Yancy, 2000).

Two central concerns have developed in recent intersectionality theory. The first is how to allow for the analytical principle and empirical fact of diversity among women while at the same time holding to the valuational and political position that women share a distinctive standpoint. Explaining *standpoint,* Collins (1998:224–225) proposes that it is the view of the world shared by a group characterized by a "heterogeneous commonality"; "shared," Collins argues, refers, as Marx suggests, to " 'circumstances directly encountered, given, and transmitted from the past.' " Thus, Collins concludes that a group's standpoint is constituted not out of some essentialism but out of a recognition that women have common experiences and interests. While vectors of oppression and privilege—race, class, gender, age, global location, sexual preference—intersect in all people's lives, these theorists argue that the way they intersect markedly affects the degree to which a common standpoint is affirmed. The second pressing concern is how to conceptualize and empirically observe the interplay of multiple vectors of oppression and/or privilege in people's experiences and actions, so that one is not, for example, talking first about the effects of gender, then of race, then of class (Weber, 2000).

How do these factors coexist? In balance? In hierarchy? In shifting schema of ascendenc? What are the implications of this issue for methods of—studying intersectionality? But, importantly intersectionality theorists warn that while it is easy to locate the experience of intersection and of standpoint in individuals, this reductionism is theoretically and politically dangerous, erasing the historical structures of unequal power that have produced the individual experience and obscuring the need for political change.

In developing an agenda for change, intersectionality theory turns to the knowledge of oppressed people and their long-held evaluative principles of faith and justice (P. Collins, 1990, 1998; hooks, 1990; Reagon, 1982/1995; Lorde, 1984). The theory argues for the need to bear witness, to protest, and to organize for change within the context of the oppressed community, for only within community can one keep faith in the eventual triumph of justice—a justice understood not in the narrow framing of legal rationality but as the working-out within social institutions and social relations of the principles of fairness to and concern for others and oneself.

Feminism and Postmodernism

Postmodernist theory has affected feminist theory in general in two important ways. First, it has radically challenged the central question of all feminist theory, *"And what about the women?"* by developing a philosophic argument about what the category "women" really means, an argument that extends to challenge the concept of gender. Second, postmodernism has provided feminist theory with "an oppositional epistemology," a strategy for questioning the claims to truth advanced by any given theory. It has done the latter most effectively through its creation of a rich and provocative language to be used in challenging the taken-for-granted assumptions that it argues were constituted by modernity. The most important thinker in a feminist postmodern theory is philosopher Judith Butler; she and other feminist postmodernists draw on the work of Michel Foucault and Jacques Derrida, among other poststructuralist and postmodernist thinkers (see Chapter 17).

Postmodernist theory begins with the observation that people no longer live under conditions of modernity but live now in "postmodernity." This postmodern world is produced by the interplay of four major changes: (1) an expansive stage in global capitalism; (2) the weakening of centralized state power (with the collapse of the old imperial systems, the fragmentation of the communist bloc, and the rise of ethnic politics within nation-states); (3) the patterning of life by an increasingly powerful and penetrative technology that controls production and promotes consumerism; and (4) the development of liberationist social movements based not in class but in other forms of identity—nationalism, race, gender, sexual orientation, ethnicity, religion, and environmentalism. These changes, as feminist philosopher Susan Bordo explains, were brought about by people worldwide engaged in political practice and asking a new set of questions: "*Whose* truth? *Whose* nature? *Whose* version of reason? *Whose* history? *Whose* tradition?" (Bordo, 1990:136–137).

These questions led postmodernists to reject the basic principle of modernist epistemology—that humans can, by the exercise of pure reason, arrive at a complete

and objective knowledge of the world, a knowledge that is a representation of reality, "a mirror of nature." They argue that this modernist principle gives rise to a number of epistemological errors—the *god-eye* view that locates the observer outside the world being observed; the *grand narrative* that holistically explains that world; *foundationalism* that identifies certain rules of analysis as always appropriate; *universalism* that asserts that there are discoverable principles that everywhere govern the world; *essentialism* that claims that people are constituted by core and unchanging qualities; *representation* that presumes that one's statement about the world can accurately reflect the world. Postmodernism questions the existence both of "reason" as a universal, essential quality of the human mind and of the "reasoning subject" as a consistent, unified configuration of consciousness. Postmodernists portray the knowledge-making process as one of multiple representations of experience created by differently located discourse groups in which the establishment of any hegemonic knowledge-claim results from an effective exercise of power. They have produced a powerful set of practices and vocabulary for *interrogating* the modernist claim of definitive statements. They suggest alternative epistemological practices such as *decentering,* which moves the understandings of nonprivileged groups to the center of discourse and knowledge; *deconstruction,* which shows how concepts, posed as accurate representations of the world, are historically constructed and contain contradictions; and a focus on *difference,* which explores any knowledge construct not only for what it says but for what it erases or marginalizes, particularly through the application of modernist *binary logic* of "either/or."

A major substantive contribution of postmodernist theory to general feminist theory has been its questioning of the primary category of feminist theory: woman (or women). The classic statement of this questioning has been Judith Butler's 1990 *Gender Trouble.* Butler questioned *woman, gender,* and whether there is, as popularly presumed, a coherent relation among *sex, gender,* and *sexuality*—and she situated her argument directly in the political context of the women's movement, warning that "The premature insistence on a stable subject of feminism, understood as a seamless category of women, inevitably generates multiple refusals to accept the category. These domains of exclusion reveal the coercive and regulatory consequences of that construction, even when the construction has been elaborated for emancipatory purposes. Indeed, the fragmentation within feminism and the paradoxical opposition to feminism from 'women' whom feminism claims to represent suggest the necessary limits of identity politics" (Butler, 1990:4); this warning helped focus a range of Third Wave feminist concerns with the Second Wave position that was seemingly anchored in the concept of woman as a possible if not a seamless category.

For Butler, the category of woman arises out of the process that produces gender, a process she names "performativity." Her definition of *performativity,* a work-in-progress, has its origins in speech-act theory, where a performative is "that discursive practice that brings into being or enacts that which it names and so marks the constitutive or productive power of discourse" (Butler, 1995:134). (A classic example of a performative, drawn from speech-act philosopher J. L. Austin, occurs when a judge or minister says, "I now pronounce you man and wife.") Butler sees gender arising as people perform it in interaction with each other—by performing gender,

they create it. Butler later elaborates how this occurs in *Bodies That Matter* (1993) using Jacques Derrida's principle of *iterability* to explain how these repeated performances lead to a sense of gender and woman and man. Iterability is the capacity of signs or symbols to be repeated in different situations—for example, "I love you," "You're looking great," "You wanna go out?" This repetition both confers consistency to performance and allows for some possibility of variation in the meaning and outcome. But people are not free to choose their performances. Drawing on Foucault, Butler sets performativity in the context of discourse or "regulative discourse." For Foucault, a discourse is a composite of ideas, actions, beliefs, and attitudes that systematically relate and construct the worlds and the subjects about which they speak. Gender performance then is subject to regulative discourses that vary across history and culture but that control what one is able to do to act as a man or a woman. Because of performativity, subject to iterability and regulative discourse, gender is experienced as a core identity that everyone shares. The assignment of sex to an individual, in terms of two binary opposites, is a performance, subject to regulative discourse that specifies what can be taken into account in making this assignment and reproduced through iterability. But an alternative understanding Butler says is that "In the place of an original identification which serves as a determining cause, gender identity might be reconceived as a personal/cultural history of received meanings subject to a set of imitative practices which refer laterally to other imitations and which, jointly, construct the illusion of a primary and interior gendered self or parody the mechanism of that construction" (Butler, 1990:138). In Butler's thinking, people do not begin life with an internal identity as man or woman; rather they get hold of certain understandings of man and woman depending on their personal biographies and their location in history, and the regulatory discourses that constitute them. These meanings suggest ways of acting, and as the person looks around, she or he can see other people engaged in similar ways of acting. Thus, gender is created as people imitate other people trying to act in accord with culturally given ideas about masculinity and femininity. These ideas so effectively bring into being what they name that people take as real the idea of a core gendered self. But Butler (1990:25) argues, playing off Nietzsche, that "There is no gender identity behind the expressions of gender; that identity is performatively constituted by the very 'expressions' that are said to be its results." Key to those expressions in a society governed by a sociocultural history that privileges heterosexuality as natural is the need to establish oneself as different from the other gender in order to participate in the ongoing imitation that is heterosexuality.

Butler's work constitutes the major contribution of postmodern feminism, but other scholars have adapted ideas from Michel Foucault to the project of women's liberation, most especially his insights about power, power/knowledge, and body. Illustrative of feminist adaptations are studies by Bartsky (1992) and Bordo (1993) that turn on Foucault's insights into the body as the principal site for the exercise of power in modern societies, his ability to present a nonessentialist but very material body that is historically constructed by discourses at a given moment in time. Bartsky looks at women's "self-imposed" exercise and dieting regimes and Bordo at women's eating disorders, both of which are seen as examples of bodies being created out of

regulative discourses or power/knowledge regimes that say this is what can be done at this moment in the production of femininity.

But the feminist relation to postmodernism is also marked by unease. Many feminists see postmodernism as exclusive in aspiration and therefore antithetical to the feminist project of inclusion (Benhabib, 1998). Evidence for this unease includes postmodernism's arcane vocabulary, its location in the academy rather than in political struggle, and its nonreflexive grasp for hegemonic status in that academic discourse. Many feminists also question the "innocence" of the postmodernist challenge, wondering whether it is truly liberationist or is part of a politics of knowledge in which a privileged academic class responds to the challenges of marginalized persons with a technically complex argument to the effect that no location for speech can claim authority. Hartsock (1990:169) has made the classic statement of this concern: "Somehow it seems highly suspicious that it is at the precise moment when so many groups have been engaged in . . . redefinitions of the marginalized Others that suspicions emerge about the nature of the 'subject,' about the possibilities for a general theory which can describe the world, about historical 'progress.'" Another source of unease is that the postmodernist emphasis on an infinite regress of deconstruction and difference leads people away from collective, liberationist politics and toward a radical individualism that may conclude that "'because every . . . one of us is different and special, it follows that every problem or crisis is exclusively our own, or, conversely, your problem—not mine'" (Jordan, 1992; P. Collins, 1998:150). Above all, the postmodernist turn takes feminist scholars away from the materiality of inequality, injustice, and oppression and toward a neo-idealist posture that sees the world as "discourse," "representation," and "text." In severing the link to material inequality, postmodernism may be moving feminism away from its commitment to progressive change—the foundational project of any critical social theory.

Feminist Sociological Theorizing

This section presents a synthesis of ideas implicit or explicit in the varieties of feminist theory described above in order to develop a statement of some fundamental principles of feminist *sociological* theorizing. We identify four distinctive features of this effect: its sociology of knowledge, its model of society, its patterning of social interaction, and its focus on a subjective level of social experience. Our synthesis draws on classic statements by theorists writing out of a variety of disciplines, including sociology. The major influences are Andersen, 2005; J. Benjamin, 1988; Bordo, 1993; Butler, 1990, 1993; Chodorow, 1978; P. Collins, 1990, 1998, 2004; Fenstermaker and West, 2002; Gilligan, 1982; Heilbrun, 1988; Hennessey and Ingraham, 1997; Ingraham, 1999; Lorde, 1984; MacKinnon, 1989; Rich, 1976, 1981; Dorothy Smith, 1989, 1990a, 1990b, 1999a, 1999b, 2004a, 2009; and West and Fenstermaker, 1993.

A Feminist Sociology of Knowledge

A feminist sociology of knowledge sees everything that people label "knowledge of the world" as having four characteristics: (1) it is always created from the standpoint

of embodied actors situated in groups that are differentially located in social structure; (2) it is, thus, always partial and interested, never total and objective; (3) it is produced in and varies among groups and, to some degree, among actors within groups; and (4) it is always affected by power relations—whether formulated from the standpoint of dominant or subordinate groups. This understanding of knowledge has been named "feminist standpoint epistemology" (Harding, 1986). Feminist sociological theorizing begins with a sociology of knowledge because feminists attempt to describe, analyze, and change the world from the standpoint of women and because, working from women's subordinated position in social relations, feminist sociological theorists see that knowledge production is part of the system of power governing all production in society. Feminist sociological theory attempts to alter the balance of power within sociological discourse—and within social theory—by establishing the standpoint of women in particular, and of oppressed people more broadly, as standpoints from which social knowledge is constructed.

In attempting to do sociology from the standpoint of women, feminist sociological theorists have to consider what constitutes a standpoint of women. A standpoint is the product of a social collectivity with a sufficient history and commonality of circumstance to develop a shared knowledge of social relations. Feminists, starting where Marx left off, have identified three crucial collectivities—owners, workers, *and women*—whose distinctive relationships to the processes of social production and reproduction constitute them as standpoint groups. Historically women under patriarchy, whatever their class and race, have been assigned to the tasks of social reproduction (childbearing, child rearing, housekeeping, food preparation, care of the ill and dependent, emotional and sexual service). Yet any solidarity of women as a "class" in patriarchal production is fractured by other class configurations, including economic class and race class. While women's shared and historical relation to social reproduction in circumstances of subordination is the basis for the feminist claim of "the standpoint of women," in the daily workings of social power the intersection of gender inequality with race inequality, class inequality, geosocial inequality, and inequalities based on sexuality and age produces a complex system of unequally empowered standpoint groups relating through shifting arrangements of coalition and opposition. These intersectionalities are now an integral part of the feminist description and analysis of women's standpoint.

This understanding of knowledge as the product of different standpoint groups presents feminist sociological theorists with the problem of how to produce a feminist sociological account that is both acceptable to sociologists and useful to feminism's emancipatory project. At least four strategies are used. One is asserting the validity of "webbed accounts," that is, accounts woven together by reporting all the various actors' or standpoint groups' knowledges of an experience and describing the situations, including the dynamics of power, out of which the actors or groups came to create these versions (Haraway, 1988). A second strategy is that of privileging the accounts or standpoints of the less empowered actors or groups because a major factor in unequal power relations is that dominants' views are given both more credence and more circulation. The privileging of the standpoints of the disempowered is a part of the feminist emancipatory project, but it also produces an important corrective to

mainstream sociological theories by changing the angle of vision from which social processes are understood. A third strategy requires the feminist theorist to be reflexive about and able to give an account of the stages through which she or he moves from knowledge of an individual's or group's standpoint to the generalizations of a sociological account, for that translation is an act of power (P. Collins, 1990, 1998; Dorothy Smith, 1990a). A fourth strategy is for the social theorist to identify the particular location from which she or he speaks and thus to identify her or his partiality (in all meanings of that word) and its effect on the theory constructed.

In keeping with the fourth strategy, we should declare the standpoint from which we create the theoretical synthesis presented here. We write from the relatively privileged class position of academic social scientists living in the contemporary United States, but also as women located within a particular intersection of vectors of oppression and privilege that makes us subject to experiences of racism, ageism, and heterosexism. We also write out of family heritages of membership in historically constituted standpoint groups shaped by poverty and by colonial status. This intermingling of current status and family history shapes both our interests and our values. The synthesis we present here reflects oppression theories' concept of a just society as one that empowers all people to claim as a fundamental right (not a begrudged concession or a reward) a fair share of social goods—from the material essentials of food, clothing, shelter, health care, and education, to an absence of fear of violence, to a positive valuation of self in the particularities of one's group and individual identity.

The Macro-Social Order

In this and the next two sections we operate within the established sociological conventions of vocabulary and conceptualization by organizing our presentation around the categories of *macro-social, micro-social,* and *subjectivity*—although much of feminist sociological theory poses a fundamental critique of those categories.

Feminist sociology's view of the macro-social order begins by expanding the Marxian concept of economic production into a much more general concept of social production, that is, the production of all human social life. Along with the production of commodities for the market, social production for feminists also includes arrangements such as the organization of housework, which produce the essential commodities and services of the household; sexuality, which pattern and satisfy human desire; intimacy, which pattern and satisfy human emotional needs for acceptance, approval, love, and self-esteem; state and religion, which create the rules and laws of a community; and politics, mass media, and academic discourse, which establish institutionalized, public definitions of the situation.

Thus framed and expanded, the Marxian model of intergroup relations remains visible in a feminist model of social organization. Each of these various types of social production is based on an arrangement by which some actors, controlling the resources crucial to that activity, act as dominants, or "masters," who dictate and profit from the circumstances of production. Within each productive sector, production rests on the work of subordinates, or "servants," whose energies create the world ordered into being by their masters and whose exploitation denies them the rewards and satisfactions

produced by their work. Through feminist theory, we see, more vividly than through Marxian theory, the intimate association between masters and servants that may lie at the heart of production and the indispensability of the servant's work in creating and sustaining everything necessary to human social life. In intimate relations of exploitation, domination may be expressed not as coercion but as paternalism, "the combination of positive feelings toward the group with discriminatory intentions toward the group." Paternalism masks for both parties but does not transform a relationship of domination and subordination (Jackman, 1994:11). Social production occurs through a multidimensional structure of domination and exploitation that organizes class, gender, race, sex, power, and knowledge into overlapping hierarchies of intimately associated masters and workers.

This model of stratification in social production offers a direct critique of the structural-functionalist vision of a society composed of a system of separate institutions and distinct, though interrelated, roles. Feminist theory claims that this image is not generalizable but that it depicts the experiences and vantage points of society's dominants—white, male, upper-class, and adult. Feminist research shows that women and other nondominants do not experience social life as a movement among compartmentalized roles. Instead, they are involved in a balancing of roles, a merging of role-associated interests and orientations, and, through this merging, in a weaving together of social institutions. Indeed, one indicator of the dominant group's control over the situations of production may be that its members can achieve purposive role compartmentalization. But feminist sociology stresses that this condition depends on the subordinate services of actors who cannot compartmentalize their lives and actions. Indeed, were these subordinate actors to compartmentalize similarly, the whole system of production in complex industrialized societies would collapse. In contrast to the structural-functional model, the feminist model emphasizes that the role-merging experience of women may be generalizable to the experience of many other subordinate "servant" groups whose work produces the fine-grained texture of daily life. The understandings that such subordinated groups have of the organization of social life may be very different from the understanding depicted in structural-functionalist theory; even the identification of key institutional spheres may differ. Yet their vantage point springs from situations necessary to society as it is currently organized and from work that makes possible the masters' secure sense of an institutionally compartmentalized world.

Further, feminism emphasizes the centrality of ideological domination to the structure of social domination. Ideology is an intricate web of beliefs about reality and social life that is institutionalized as public knowledge and disseminated throughout society so effectively that it becomes taken-for-granted knowledge for all social groups. Thus, what feminists see as "public knowledge of social reality" is not an overarching culture, a consensually created social product, but a reflection of the interests and experiences of society's dominants and one crucial index of their power in society. What distinguishes this view from traditional Marxian analysis is that for feminists ideological control is a basic process in domination, and the hierarchical control of discourse and knowledge is a key element in societal domination.

Central to feminist concerns about the macro-social order is the macro-structural patterning of gender as a structure. It is on this structure that oppression is founded.

Feminist theorists argue that women's bodies constitute an essential resource in social production and reproduction and therefore become a site of exploitation and control. Gender oppression is reproduced by an ideological system of institutionalized knowledge that reflects the interests and experiences of men. Among other things, this gender ideology identifies men as the bearers of sociocultural authority and allocates to the male role the right to dominate and to the female role the obligation to serve in all dimensions of social production. Gender ideology constructs women as objects of male desire whose social value is determined by their fabrication of an appropriately molded body. Gender ideology also systematically flattens and distorts women's productive activities by (1) trivializing some of them, for example, housework; (2) idealizing to the point of unrecognizability other activities, for example, mothering; and (3) making invisible yet other crucial work, for example, women's multiple and vital contributions to the production of marketplace commodities. These ideological processes may be generalizable to the macro-structural production of all social subordination.

Capitalism and patriarchy, although analytically separate forms of domination, reinforce each other in numerous ways. For example, the organization of production into public and private spheres and the gendering of those spheres benefit both systems of domination. Capitalism benefits in that women's labor in the private sphere reproduces the worker at no cost to capital; further, their responsibility for the private sphere makes women a marginal but always co-optable source of cheap labor, driving wages down generally. At the same time patriarchy benefits from this exploitation of the woman worker because it sustains her dependence on men. Women's difficult entry into the public sphere ensures that what "good" employment may be available there will go first to men. Women's experiences of sexual harassment on the job and of being hassled in public places are not incidental and insignificant micro events but examples of a power relation in which patriarchy helps police the borders for capital. This division is further complicated by the "race-ing" and "age-ing" as well as the gendering of public and private.

The Micro-Social Order

At the micro-interactional level, feminist sociology (like some microsociological perspectives) focuses on how individuals take account of each other as they pursue objective projects or intersubjective meanings. Feminist sociological theory argues that the conventional models of interaction (social behaviorist and social definitionist—see the Appendix) may depict how equals in macro-structural, power-conferring categories create meanings and negotiate relationships in the pursuit of joint projects or how structural dominants experience interaction with both equals and subordinates. But feminist theory suggests that when structural unequals interact there are many other qualities to their association than those suggested by the conventional models: that action is responsive rather than purposive, that there is a continuous enactment of power differentials, that the meaning of many activities is obscured or invisible, that access is not always open to those settings in which shared meanings are most likely to be created. This analysis offers an additional dimension to the sociology of gender literature on doing gender and to the postmodernist conception of gender as

performativity. What may be a near constant in all interactive situations in addition to doing gender and doing difference is doing power. People in interaction are adjusting their actions not only in anticipation of other people's responses or in the work of imitation of others' imitations but also in terms of a calculus of who can finally get their way by what means.

Most mainstream microsociology presents a model of purposive human beings setting their own goals and pursuing them in linear courses of action in which they (individually or collectively) strive to link means to ends. In contrast, feminist research shows, first, that women's lives have a quality of incidentalism, as women find themselves caught up in agendas that shift and change with the vagaries of marriage, husbands' courses of action, children's unpredictable impact on life plans, divorce, widowhood, and the precariousness of most women's wage-sector occupations. Second, in their daily activities, women find themselves not so much pursuing goals in linear sequences but responding continuously to the needs and demands of others. This theme has been developed from analysis of the emotional and relational symbiosis between mothers and daughters, through descriptions of intensely relational female play groups, to analyses of women in their typical occupations as teachers, nurses, secretaries, receptionists, and office helpers and accounts of women in their roles as wives, mothers, and community and kin coordinators. In calling women's activities "responsive," we are not describing women as passively reactive. Instead, we are drawing a picture of beings who are oriented not so much to their own goals as to the tasks of monitoring, coordinating, facilitating, and moderating the wishes, actions, and demands of others. In place of microsociology's conventional model of purposeful actors, then, feminist research presents a model of actors who are in their daily lives responsively located at the center of a web of others' actions and who in the long term find themselves located in one or another of these situations by forces that they can neither predict nor control.

Conventional micro-social theory assumes that the pressures in interactive situations toward collaboration and meaning construction are so great that actors, bracketing considerations of the macro structure, orient toward each other on an assumption of equality. Feminist research on interactions between women and men contradicts this idea, showing that these social interactions are pervasively patterned by influences from their macro-structural context. In their daily activities, women are affected by the fact that they are structurally subordinate to the men with whom they interact in casual associations, courtship, marriage, family, and wage work. Any interpersonal equality or dominance that women as individuals may achieve is effectively offset, within the interactive process itself, by these structural patterns—of which the most pervasive is the institution of gender. The macro-structural patterning of gender inequality is intricately woven through the interactions between women and men and affects not only its broad division of labor, in who sets and who implements projects, but also its processual details, which repeatedly show the enactment of authority and deference in seating and seating-standing arrangements, forms of address and conversation, eye contact, and the control of space and time. This assumption of inequality as a feature in interactive situations is intensified and complicated when factors of race and class are included in the feminist analytical frame.

Social definitionists assume that one of the major ongoing projects in social interaction is the construction of shared meanings. Actors, seeing each other in activity and interaction, form shared understandings through communication and achieve a common vantage point on their experiences. Feminists argue that this assumption must be qualified by the fact that micro interactions are embedded in and permeated by the macro structures of power and ideology. These structures pattern the meanings assigned to activities in interaction. Men as dominants in interaction with women are more likely to assign to women's activity meanings drawn from the macro structure of gender ideology than either to enter the situation with an attitude of open inquiry or to draw on any other macro-level typing for interpreting women's activity. Women, immersed in the same ideological interpretation of their experiences, stand at a point of dialectical tension, balancing this ideology against the actuality of their lives. A great diversity of meanings develops out of this tension. Social definitionists assume that actors, relating and communicating intimately and over long periods of time, create a common vantage point or system of shared understanding. Feminists' research on what may be the most intimate, long-term, male-female association—marriage—shows that, for all the reasons reported above, marriage partners remain strangers to each other and inhabit separate worlds of meaning. This "stranger-ness" may be greater for the dominant man, in the interests of effective control, than for the subordinate woman who must monitor the dominant's meanings (Dorothy Smith, 1979).

A democratic ethos shapes both social-definitionist and social-behaviorist descriptions of interaction. Conventional models imply that people have considerable equality of opportunity and freedom of choice in moving in and out of interactional settings. Feminist research shows that the interactions in which women are most free to create with others meanings that depict their life experiences are those that occur when they are in relationship and communication with similarly situated women. Moreover, these associations can be deeply attractive to women because of the practical, emotional, and meaning-affirming support they provide. Women, however, are not freely empowered to locate in these settings. Law, interactional domination, and ideology restrict and demean this associational choice so that, insidiously, even women become suspicious of its attractions. Under these circumstances, the association becomes not a free and open choice but a subterranean, circumscribed, and publicly invisible arena for relationship and meaning.

Finally, a feminist analysis of interactional practices may emphasize differences between men and women explainable in terms of deep psychic structures. Male training rewards individuation and the repudiation of the female so that the male understands at an early age that his claim to male privilege involves his distancing from female behaviors. Similarly, the female learns early that one of the duties of women—to men and to each other—is to recognize the subjectivity of the other through interactional gestures such as paying attention, commenting on actions done, and using gestures to indicate approval and awareness. These behaviors permeate and explain not only interactions across gender but interactions within same-gender groups. Women are repeatedly shown as enacting more responsiveness to the other and engaging in more ongoing monitoring of the other's needs and desires. Men are more inclined to feel both the right and the duty to compartmentalize in order to attain

individual projects and to view their responsiveness to other as an act of generosity, not a part of expected interactional behavior.

Subjectivity

Most sociological theories subsume the subjective level of social experience under micro-social action (micro subjectivity) or as "culture" or "ideology" at the macro level (macro subjectivity) (see Chapter 14 and the Appendix). Feminist sociology, however, insists that the actor's individual interpretation of goals and relationships must be looked at as a distinct level. This insistence, like so much of feminist sociology, grows out of the study of women's lives and seems applicable to the lives of subordinates in general. Women as subordinates are particularly aware of the distinctiveness of their subjective experience precisely because their own experience so often runs counter to prevailing cultural and micro-interactionally established definitions. When sociologists do look at the subjective level of experience, usually as part of the micro-social order, they focus on four major issues: (1) role taking and knowledge of the other, (2) the process of the internalization of community norms, (3) the nature of the self as social actor, and (4) the nature of the consciousness of everyday life. This section explores the feminist thesis on each of these issues.

The conventional sociological model of subjectivity (as presented to us in the theories of Mead [see Chapter 10] and Schutz) assumes that in the course of role taking, the social actor learns to see the self through the eyes of others deemed more or less the same as the actor. But feminist sociology shows that women are socialized to see themselves through the eyes of men. Even when significant others are women, they have been so socialized that they too take the male view of self and of other women. Women's experience of learning to role-take is shaped by the fact that they must, in a way men need not, learn to take the role of the genuine *other,* not just a social other who is taken to be much like oneself. The other for women is the male and is alien. The other for men is, first and foremost, men who are like them in a quality that the culture considers of transcendent importance: gender. Feminist theory emphasizes that this formula is complicated by the intersection of the vectors of oppression and privilege within individual lives.

Role taking usually is seen as culminating in the internalization of community norms via the social actor's learning to take the role of "the generalized other," a construct that the actor mentally creates out of the amalgam of macro- and micro-level experiences that form her or his social life. The use of the singular *other* indicates that microsociologists usually envision this imagined generalized other as a cohesive, coherent, singular expression of expectations. But feminists argue that in a male-dominated patriarchal culture, the generalized other represents a set of male-dominated community norms that force the woman to picture herself as "less than" or "unequal to" men. To the degree that a woman succeeds in formulating a sense of generalized other that accurately reflects the dominant perceptions of the community, she may have damaged her own possibilities for self-esteem and self-exploration. Feminist theory calls into question the existence of a unified generalized other for the majority of people. The subordinate has to pivot between a world governed by a dominant

generalized other, or meaning system, and locations in "home groups" that offer alternative understandings and generalized others. The awareness of the possibility of multiple generalized others is essential to understanding the potential complexity of having or being a self.

Microsociologists describe the social actor as picturing the everyday world as something to be mastered according to one's particular interests. Feminist sociologists argue that women may find themselves so limited by their status as women that the idea of projecting their own plans onto the world becomes meaningless in all but theory. Further, women may not experience the life-world as something to be mastered according to their own particular interests. They may be socialized to experience that life-world as a place in which one balances a variety of actors' interests. Women may not have the same experience of control of particular spheres of space, free from outside interference. Similarly, their sense of time rarely can follow the simple pattern of first things first because they have as a life project the balancing of the interests and projects of others. Thus, women may experience planning and actions as acts of concern for a variety of interests, their own and others; may act in projects of cooperation rather than mastery; and may evaluate their ongoing experiences of role balancing not as role conflicts but as a more appropriate response to social life than role compartmentalization.

Feminist sociologists have critically evaluated the thesis of a unified consciousness of everyday life that traditional microsociologists usually assume. Feminist sociologists stress that for women the most pervasive feature of the cognitive style of everyday life is that of a "bifurcated consciousness," developing along "a line of fault" between their own personal, lived, and reflected-on experience and the established types available in the social stock of knowledge to describe that experience (Dorothy Smith, 1979, 1987). Everyday life itself thus divides into two realities for subordinates: the reality of actual, lived, reflected-on experience and the reality of social typifications. Often aware of the way that their own experience differs from that of the culturally dominant males with whom they interact, women may be less likely to assume a shared subjectivity. As biological and social beings whose activities are not perfectly regulated by patriarchal time, they are more aware of the demarcation between time as lived experience and time as a social mandate. A feminist sociology of subjectivity perhaps would begin here: How do people survive when their own experience does not fit the established social typifications of that experience? We know already that some do so by avoiding acts of sustained reflection; some by cultivating their own series of personal types to make sense of their experience; some by seeking community with others who share this bifurcated reality; and some by denying the validity of their own experience.

What we have generalized here for women's subjectivity may be true for the subjectivity of all subordinates. (1) Their experience of role taking is complicated by their awareness that they must learn the expectations of an other who by virtue of differences in power is alien. (2) They must relate not to a generalized other but to many generalized others in both the culture of the powerful and the various subcultures of the less empowered and the disempowered. (3) They do not experience themselves as purposive social actors who can chart their own course through life—although

they may be constantly told that they can do so, especially within the American ethos. (4) Most pervasively, they live daily with a bifurcated consciousness, a sense of the line of fault between their own lived experiences and what the dominant culture tells them is the social reality.

Everything in this discussion has assumed a unified subject, that is, an individual woman or man with an ongoing, consistent consciousness and a sense of self. The unified subject is important to feminist theory because it is that subject who experiences pain and oppression, makes value judgments, and resists or accepts the world in place—the unified subject is the primary agent of social change. Yet our discussion of subjectivity also raises questions about how unified this subject is; there are the problems of a subject whose generalized other is truly "other" or "alien," who experiences not *a* generalized other but many generalized others, whose consciousness is bifurcated, and whose self in its capacities for development and change may be viewed more as a process than as a product. All these tendencies toward an understanding of the self as fragmented rather than as unified are inherent in feminist theorizing of the self—indeed, they are at the heart of feminist ideas about resistance and change. This sense of fragmentation is much intensified in postmodernist feminist critiques (discussed earlier in this chapter), a theoretical position that raises questions about the very possibility of "a unified subject or consciousness." If a self, any self, is subject to change from day to day or even moment to moment, if we can speak of "being not myself," then on what basis do we posit a self? Yet feminist critics of postmodernism respond by beginning in the experience of women in daily life, who when they say "I was not myself" or "I have not been myself" assume a stable self from which they have departed and, further, by those very statements, some self that knows of the departure.

Summary

Feminist theory develops a system of ideas about human life that features women as objects and subjects, doers and knowers. Feminism has a history as long as women's subordination—and women have been subordinated almost always and everywhere. Until the late 1700s feminist writing survived as a thin but persistent trickle of protest; from that time to the present, feminist writing has become a growing tide of critical work. While the production of feminist theory has typically expanded and contracted with societal swings between reform and retrenchment, the contemporary stage of feminist scholarship shows a self-sustaining expansion despite new conservative societal trends.

Although feminist theoretical production has occurred in the same time frame as the development of sociology, feminist theory remained on the margins of sociology, ignored by the central male formulators of the discipline until the 1970s. Since the 1970s, a growing presence of women in sociology and the momentum of the women's movement have established feminist theory as a new sociological paradigm that inspires much sociological scholarship and research.

Feminist scholarship is guided by four basic questions: *And what about the women? Why is women's situation as it is? How can we change and improve the*

social world? and *What about differences among women?* Answers to these questions produce the varieties of feminist theory. This chapter patterns this variety to show four major groupings of feminist theory. Theories of gender difference see women's situation as different from men's, explaining this difference in terms of two distinct and enduring ways of being, male and female, or institutional roles and social interaction, or ontological constructions of woman as "other." Theories of gender inequality, notably by liberal feminists, emphasize women's claim to a fundamental right of equality and describe the unequal opportunity structures created by sexism. Gender oppression theories include feminist psychoanalytic theory and radical feminism. The former explains the oppression of women in terms of psychoanalytic descriptions of the male psychic drive to dominate; the latter, in terms of men's ability and willingness to use violence to subjugate women. Structural oppression theories include socialist feminism and intersectionality theory; socialist feminism describes oppression as arising from a patriarchal and a capitalist attempt to control social production and reproduction; intersectionality theories trace the consequences of class, race, gender, affectional preference, and global location for lived experience, group standpoints, and relations among women.

Feminist theory offers five key propositions as a basis for the revision of standard sociological theories. First, the practice of sociological theory must be based in a sociology of knowledge that recognizes the partiality of all knowledge, the knower as embodied and socially located, and the function of power in effecting what becomes knowledge. Second, macro social structures are based in processes controlled by dominants acting in their own interests and executed by subordinates whose work is made largely invisible and undervalued even to themselves by dominant ideology. Thus, dominants appropriate and control the productive work of society, including not only economic production but also women's work of social reproduction. Third, micro-interactional processes in society are enactments of these dominant-subordinate power arrangements, enactments very differently interpreted by powerful actors and subordinate actors. Fourth, these conditions create in women's subjectivity a bifurcated consciousness along the line of fault caused by the juxtaposition of patriarchal ideology and women's experience of the actualities of their lives. Fifth, what has been said for women may be applicable to all subordinate peoples in some parallel, though not identical, form.