Chapter 3

Sex and gender

Kessler and McKenna note that, despite these anomalies, both the public and scientists tend to see males and females as opposites, refusing to recognize the possibility of an intermediate state. However, this has not always been the case. Some societies have recognized a third gender role: the *berdache*. A number of North American Indian tribes contained *berdache*. They were usually 'men' who dressed and in some ways acted like women. In some societies they had a high status, in others a low one, but in all cases they were treated as a distinct gender. In Western industrial society, hermaphrodites are almost always categorized as male or female. In tribes such as the Potock of East Africa they would be more likely to be allocated to a third category.

Allocation to sexes

Having questioned the most basic assumption (that there are just two sexes), Kessler and McKenna go on to discuss how individuals are allocated to sexes by others. This process was studied by interviewing transsexuals, people who seem biologically normal but who feel themselves to be members of the 'opposite' sex. Some, but not all, transsexuals undergo operations to alter their genitals, usually changing from male to female.

Normally gender and genitals are equated with each other: the connection between them is taken for granted. However, people are not expected to ask others whom they have just met to remove their clothes so that they can determine which sex they are. Various types of evidence are pieced together so that a gender attribution can be made by the observer. Someone with the appearance and behaviour of a female or male will simply be assumed to have the appropriate genitals. The existence of transsexuals means that this assumption is not always accurate. Biological males sometimes live as, and are accepted as, females.

How then do people decide what gender another person is? According to Kessler and McKenna there are four main processes involved:

1 The content and manner of the speech of others are taken into account. Some male to female transsexuals have trained themselves to appear to be women by putting more inflection in their voice and by having more mobile facial movements when talking. Others introduce themselves as 'Miss' to settle any doubt there might be in an observer's mind.

2 Another important factor in gender attribution is public physical appearance. For example, female to male transsexuals may disguise their breasts by wearing baggy clothing or by using strapping.

3 The information people provide about their past life helps to determine gender attribution. Again, transsexuals have to be careful to avoid suspicion. They may need a cover story. In one case a female to male transsexual attributed pierced ears to belonging to a tough street gang.

4 The final important factor is the private body. Usually there is little problem in keeping the body covered, but transsexuals may need to avoid certain situations (such as visiting beaches or sharing rooms with others) if they have not undergone the appropriate operations to change their sex physically.

Taking on the identity of a sex to which they do not belong biologically is difficult and demanding for the transsexual. For most people, hormones, chromosomes, genitals and the gender attributed to them will all coincide. Nevertheless, the exceptions studied by Kessler and McKenna demonstrate that even the most basic division – that between male and female – can be seen as being at least in part a social construct.

Sex and gender differences–conclusion

Some sociologists have tried to move beyond the debate on whether sex or gender shapes the behaviour of men and women. Both David Morgan (1986) and Linda Birke (1986) argue that sex and gender interact. Sex differences influence gender differences and vice versa. Linda Birke argues that 'women's biology actually and materially affects their lives'. She suggests that feminists cannot ignore biological facts, for example that women menstruate and can give birth.

However, both Morgan and Birke also argue that the cultural interpretation placed on biological differences is very important. Thus David Morgan says:

> *if certain distinctions between men and women come to be seen as crucial, this itself is a cultural fact and has its consequences, although this is the outcome of a complex interaction between the biological and the cultural rather than the primary assertion of the former.*
>
> Morgan, 1986, p. 35

In the nineteenth century, for example, some people believed that men and women had fixed amounts of energy. Unlike men, women were believed to use up much of this energy in menstruation, pregnancy and the menopause.

Today, many people believe that hormonal differences play a major part in shaping the behaviour of men and women. Birke points out that this belief is held despite the fact that 'there simply is no one hormone or even class of hormone, that belongs uniquely to one gender or the other'. What matters

most is the meaning attached to differences, real or imagined, in a society. For a different view of the relationship between sex and gender differences, see the discussion of Connell's work on masculinity (pp. 191–6).

In recent years, there has been an increased theoretical emphasis upon the differences among women, and the differences among men. It has been recognized that there are a variety of ways to be feminine and a variety of ways to be masculine. There has been less emphasis on the sex/gender differences between men in general and women in general. These new approaches will be discussed later in the chapter (see pp. 157–63 and 191–6).

Gender inequality

So far in this chapter we have examined explanations for differences between men and women. These differences have sometimes been seen as the basis for inequalities between them, and we will now look at those inequalities in more detail.

The development of feminism has led to attention being focused on the subordinate position of women in many societies. Feminist sociologists have been mainly responsible for developing theories of gender inequality, yet there is little agreement about the causes of this inequality, nor about what actions should be taken to reduce or end it. More recently, the focus has changed from an emphasis on inequality to one on difference.

Several feminist approaches can be broadly distinguished:

1 radical feminism
2 Marxist and socialist feminism
3 liberal feminism
4 Black feminism
5 postmodern feminism.

There is considerable overlap between these approaches, and each contains feminists with a variety of views. Nevertheless, the distinction between these perspectives is important. It helps to clarify some of the major disputes within feminism, and feminists often attribute themselves to one of these categories.

We will briefly outline each perspective before considering a more detailed examination of how they have been applied to particular aspects of gender inequality.

Radical feminism

Radical feminism blames the exploitation of women on men. To a radical feminist, it is primarily men who have benefited from the subordination of women. Women are seen to be exploited because they undertake unpaid labour for men by carrying out childcare and housework, and because they are denied access to positions of power.

Radical feminists see society as patriarchal – it is dominated and ruled by men. From this point of view, men are the ruling class, and women the subject class. The family is often seen by radical feminists as the key institution oppressing women in modern societies. The family is certainly given more prominence than in Marxist sociology, where, as part of the superstructure, it is given only secondary importance.

Radical feminists tend to believe that women have always been exploited and that only revolutionary change can offer the possibility of their liberation. However, there are disagreements within this group about both the origins of women's oppression and the possible solutions to it. Some radical feminists, such as Shulamith Firestone (1972), believe women's oppression originated in their biology, particularly in the fact that they give birth. Others do not see biology as so important; they see male rule as largely a product of culture. Some stress rape and male violence towards women as the methods through which men have secured and maintained their power.

Because men are seen as the enemies of women's liberation, many radical feminists reject any assistance from the male sex in their struggle to achieve the rights they seek. Separatist feminists argue that women should organize independently of men outside the male-dominated society. A few, like The Leeds Revolutionary Feminist Group (1982), argue that only lesbians can be true feminists, since only they can be fully independent of men.

A particularly radical group, female supremacists, argue that women are not just equal but are actually morally superior to men. They wish to see patriarchy replaced by matriarchy (male rule replaced by female rule). From such perspectives, men are responsible not only for the exploitation of women, but also for many other problems. These may include conflict, war, destruction of the environment, the abuse of science so that it fails to meet human needs, and so on.

Rosemarie Tong distinguishes between two groups of radical feminists (Tong, 1998). Radical-libertarian feminists believe that it is both possible and desirable for gender differences to be eradicated or at least greatly reduced. They therefore aim for a state of androgyny in which men and women are not significantly different. The ideal state is one in which women and men take on the more desirable characteristics of one another. They believe that differences between the masculine and feminine are socially constructed. If they are removed then equality between men and women can follow.

The second group, radical-cultural feminists, believe in the superiority of the feminine. As Tong puts it:

> *far from believing that the liberated woman must exhibit both masculine and feminine traits and behaviour, these radical-cultural feminists expressed the view that it is better to be female/feminine than it is to be male/masculine. Thus women should not try to be like men.*
>
> Tong, 1998

According to Tong, they celebrate characteristics associated with femininity such as 'interdependence, community, connection, sharing, emotion, body, trust, absence of hierarchy, nature, immanence, process, joy, peace and life'. On the other hand, they are hostile to characteristics associated with masculinity, such as 'independence, autonomy, intellect, will, wariness, hierarchy, domination, culture, transcendence, product, asceticism, war and death'.

Tong accepts that a distinction between radical-libertarian feminists and radical-cultural feminists can be overstated, but believes that it does reflect real and significant differences.

Marxist and socialist feminism

Marxist and socialist feminists do not attribute women's exploitation entirely to men. They see capitalism rather than patriarchy as being the principal source of women's oppression, and capitalists as the main beneficiaries. Like radical feminists, they see women's unpaid work as housewives and mothers as one of the main ways in which women are exploited. Although men in general benefit, it is primarily capitalists who gain from women's unpaid work since new generations of workers are reproduced at no cost to the capitalist. (For a discussion of this issue see Chapter 8.)

Thus Marxist and socialist feminists relate women's oppression to the production of wealth, while radical feminists attribute greater importance to childbearing. Marxist feminists also place much greater stress on the exploitation of women in paid employment. The disadvantaged position of women is held to be a consequence of the emergence of private property and subsequently their lack of ownership of the means of production, which in turn deprives them of power.

Although Marxist and socialist feminists agree with radical feminists that women as a group are exploited, particularly since the advent of capitalism, they are more sensitive to the differences between women who belong to the ruling class and proletarian families. In this respect, women have interests in common with the working class, and Marxist and socialist feminists see greater scope for cooperation between women and working-class men than do radical feminists.

Marxist feminists share with radical feminists a desire for revolutionary change; however, they seek the establishment of a communist society. In such a society (where the means of production will be communally owned) they believe gender inequalities will disappear. This view is not shared by radical feminists who believe that women's oppression has different origins and causes, and therefore requires a different solution.

There is no clearcut division between Marxist and socialist feminists; they share much in common. Marxist feminists, though, tend to seek more sweeping changes than socialist feminists. Socialist feminists tend to give more credence to the possibility of capitalist societies gradually moving towards female equality. They see more prospect for change within the democratic system.

Liberal feminism

Liberal feminism does not have such clearly developed theories of gender inequalities as radical and Marxist and socialist feminism. Nevertheless, liberal feminism probably enjoys greater popular support than the other perspectives. This is largely because its aims are more moderate and its views pose less of a challenge to existing values. Liberal feminists aim for gradual change in the political, economic and social systems of Western societies.

To the liberal feminist, nobody benefits from existing gender inequalities; both men and women are harmed because the potential of females and males alike is suppressed. For example, many women with the potential to be successful and skilled members of the workforce do not get the opportunity to develop their talents, while men are denied some of the pleasures of having a close relationship with their children. The explanation of this situation, according to liberal feminists, lies not so much in the structures and institutions of society, but in its culture and the attitudes of individuals.

Socialization into gender roles has the consequence of producing rigid, inflexible expectations of men and women. Discrimination prevents women from having equal opportunities.

The creation of equal opportunities, particularly in education and work, is the main aim of liberal feminists. They pursue this aim through the introduction of legislation and by attempting to change attitudes. In Britain, they supported such measures as the Sex Discrimination Act (1975) and the Equal Pay Act (1970) in the hope that these laws would help to end discrimination. They try to eradicate sexism and stereotypical views of women and men from children's books and the mass media. They do not seek revolutionary changes in society: they want reforms that take place within the existing social structure, and they work through the democratic system. Since they believe that existing gender inequalities benefit nobody (although they are particularly harmful to women), liberal feminists are willing to work with any members of society who support their beliefs and aims.

Although the least radical of feminist perspectives, the liberal view could still lead to considerable social change. At the very least, the changes it supports could lead to women having the same access as men to high-status jobs.

Black feminism

Black feminism has developed out of dissatisfaction with other types of feminism. Black feminists such as Bell Hooks (1981) have argued that other feminists, as well as male anti-racists, have not addressed the particular problems faced by black women. Writing in 1981, Hooks claimed that black women in the USA had not joined:

> *together to fight for women's rights because we did not see 'womanhood' as an important aspect of our identity. Racist, sexist socialization had conditioned us to devalue our femaleness and to regard race as the only relevant label of identification.*
>
> Hooks, 1981

Black women had joined in the fight for civil rights, but the organizations were dominated by men, and women's issues received no consideration.

Hooks argued that contemporary black women could learn a lot from some of their nineteenth-century counterparts who had pioneered a distinctive Black feminism. Hooks describes the views of Sojourner Truth, a black American woman who had campaigned for black women to gain the right to vote along with black men. Truth had said that if black women failed in their campaign for voting rights, but black men succeeded, then 'the coloured men will be masters over the women, and it will be just as bad as it was before' (quoted in Hooks, 1981). At a convention of the women's rights movement in Ohio in 1852, white males argued that women should not have equal rights to men because they were physically inferior to men and were unsuited to heavy manual labour. Sojourner Truth countered this argument in a passionate speech saying:

> *Look at me! look at my arm! ... I have plowed and planted, and gathered into barns, and no man could head me – and ain't I a woman? I could work as much as any man (when I could get it), and bear de lash as well – and ain't I a woman?*
>
> Hooks, 1981, p. 160

Truth's speech highlighted the differences in the experiences of black women and white women. For some Black feminists these differences are the legacy of slavery. Patricia Hill Collins (1990) says that slavery 'shaped all subsequent relationships that black women had within African-American families and communities, with employers, and among each other, and created the political context for women's intellectual work'. To Collins, writing in 1990, most feminist theory has 'suppressed Black women's ideas' and has concentrated on the experiences and grievances of white and usually middle-class women. For example, feminist critiques of family life tended to examine the situation of middle-class wives who were in a very different position from most black women. There was a 'masculinist bias in Black social and political thought' and a 'racist bias in feminist theory'.

Black feminism could correct that bias by drawing on black women's experiences. Many black women had been employed as domestic servants in white families. From this position they could see 'white power demystified'. They could see whites as they really were, yet they remained economically exploited outsiders. Thus Black feminists could draw upon the 'outsider-within perspective generated by black women's location in the labour market' and could develop a 'distinct view of the contradictions between the dominant groups' actions and ideologies'.

Like Hooks, Collins draws inspiration from the insights of Sojourner Truth to show how black women can attack patriarchal ideology. For example, they could attack the belief that women are fragile and weak by drawing on their own experience of physically demanding labour.

Rose M. Brewer (1993) sees the basis of Black feminist theory as an 'understanding of race, class and gender as simultaneous forces'. Black women suffer from disadvantages because they are black, because they are women, and because they are working-class, but their problems are more than the

sum of these parts: each inequality reinforces and multiplies each of the other inequalities. Thus black women's problems can be represented as stemming from 'race × class × gender' rather than 'race + class + gender'. The distinctive feature of Black feminism to Brewer is that it studies the 'interplay' of race, class and gender in shaping the lives and restricting the life chances of black women.

Heidi Safia Mirza (1997) argues that there is a need for a distinctive Black British feminism. She does not claim that black British women have a unique insight into what is true and what is not, but she does believe that this group can make an important contribution to the development of feminist and other knowledge. They can challenge the distorted assumptions of dominant groups by drawing on their own experiences. They offer 'other ways of knowing' and can 'invoke some measure of critical race/gender reflexivity into mainstream academic thinking'.

In particular, Black British feminists can challenge the predominant image of black British women as passive victims of racism, patriarchy and class inequality. They can undermine the image of 'the dutiful wife and daughter, the hard (but happy and grateful!) worker, the sexually available exotic other, the controlling asexual mother, or simply homogenized as the "third world" woman'. Instead, Black British feminists have been able to show how black British women have been 'brave, proud and strong'. They have struggled against domestic violence; tried to overcome sexism and racism in school; developed alternative family forms in which women have autonomy, and challenged the activities of the police and immigration authorities. They have made their own voice heard rather than relying on others to tell their story.

Black feminist thought has had some influence upon postmodern feminism. This will be discussed on pp. 157–63.

The origins of gender inequalities – feminist views

Although many feminists clearly align themselves to one of the perspectives that we have just outlined, others do not. Thus, in the subsequent sections, not all the explanations for gender inequalities that we will discuss can be 'neatly' attributed to one perspective.

Feminists do not agree about the origins of inequality between men and women. Some believe that women have always had a subordinate position in all societies; others argue that the origins of gender inequalities can be traced back to particular historical events.

Shulamith Firestone – a radical feminist view

In her book, *The Dialectics of Sex*, published in 1970, Firestone was the first to outline a radical feminist explanation of female inequality. To Firestone, sexual oppression was the first and most fundamental form of oppression. Unlike Marxists, Firestone does not attach primary importance to economic differences in the explanation of inequality. Although she acknowledges the importance of the work of Marx and Engels, she criticizes them for confining their studies to economic production. In her view, they ignored an important part of the material world: 'reproduction'.

Firestone believes that what she calls the sexual class system was the first form of stratification. It predated the class system and provided the basis from which other forms of stratification evolved. She provides a very clear explanation for its origins. She says 'men and women were created different and not equally privileged'. Inequalities and the division of labour between men and women arose directly from biology. Biological differences produced a form of social organization she calls the biological family. Although societies vary in the roles of men and women and the form the family takes, all societies share the biological family, which has four key characteristics:

The biological family

1 Women are disadvantaged by their biology. Menstruation, the menopause and childbirth are all physical burdens for women, but pregnancy and breastfeeding have the most serious social consequences. At these times, when women are pregnant or looking after infants, they are 'dependent on males (whether brother, father, husband, lover or clan, government, community-at-large) for physical survival'.

2 Women's dependence on men is increased by the long periods during which human infants are dependent, compared to the infants of other species.

3 The interdependence between mother and child, and in turn their dependence on men, has been found in every society, and it has influenced the psychology of every human being. Dependence on men produced unequal power relationships and power psychology.

4 The final characteristic of the biological family is that it provides the foundations for all types of inequality and stratification. Men derived pleasure from their power over women and wished to extend their power to the domination of men. The sexual class system provided the blueprint and prototype for the economic class system. The economic class system provided the means through which some men came to dominate other men. Because the sexual class system is the basis for other class systems, Firestone believes that it must be destroyed before any serious progress can be made towards equality. She says 'the sexual class system is the model for all other exploitative systems and thus the tapeworm that must be eliminated first by any true revolution'.

Biology and equality

Because sexual class has a biological origin, biological equality is the only effective starting point for securing its elimination. Firestone believes that effective birth control techniques have helped to loosen the chains of women's slavery by giving them more control over whether they become pregnant. Even so, the pill and other contraceptives have not freed women from pregnancy altogether; this would only be possible when babies could be conceived and developed outside the womb. Once this occurred, women would no longer be forced into dependence on men for part of their lives.

Yet even this would only be the first step towards a complete revolution. In addition to the biological changes, the economic class system and the cultural superstructure would also have to be destroyed. Economic equality would have to follow biological equality, and power psychology would need to be overcome.

The strength of Firestone's argument lies in its ability to explain all forms of stratification, but this radical feminist perspective on inequality has been subject to criticism. Firestone does not explain variations in women's status in different societies at different times. For example, in some societies women do not have primary responsibility for childcare and women's biology does not seem to make them dependent on men for long periods (as we saw in Oakley's discussion on the cultural division of labour, p. 133). If this is the case, then it may not be biology alone that explains gender inequalities.

Sherry B. Ortner – culture and the devaluation of women

Sherry B. Ortner (1974) agrees with Firestone that women are universally oppressed and devalued. However, she claims that it is not biology as such that ascribes women to their status in society, but the way in which every culture defines and evaluates female biology. Thus, if this universal evaluation changed, then the basis for female subordination would be removed.

Ortner argues that in every society, a higher value is placed on culture than on nature. Culture is the means by which humanity controls and regulates nature. By inventing weapons and hunting techniques, humans can capture and kill animals; by inventing religion and rituals, humans can call upon supernatural forces to produce a successful hunt or a bountiful harvest. By the use of culture, humans do not have to passively submit to nature: they can regulate and control it. Thus humanity's ideas and technology (that is, its culture), have power over nature and are therefore seen as superior to it.

Women and nature

This universal evaluation of culture as superior to nature is the basic reason for the devaluation of women. Women are seen as closer to nature than men, and therefore as inferior to men.

1 Ortner argues that women are universally defined as closer to nature because their bodies and physiological functions are more concerned with 'the natural processes surrounding the reproduction of the species'. These natural processes include menstruation, pregnancy, childbirth and lactation, processes for which the female body is 'naturally' equipped.

2 Women's social role as mothers is also seen as closer to nature. They are primarily responsible for the socialization of the young. Infants and young children are seen as 'barely human', as one step away from nature because their cultural repertoire is small compared to that of adults. Women's close relationships with young children further associate them with nature.

3 Since the mother role is linked to the family, the family itself is regarded as closer to nature compared to activities and institutions outside the family. Thus activities such as politics, warfare and religion are seen as more removed from nature, as superior to domestic tasks, and therefore as the province of men.

4 Finally, Ortner argues that woman's psyche, her psychological make-up, is defined as closer to nature. Because women are concerned with childcare and primary socialization, they develop more personal, intimate and particular relationships with others, especially their children. By comparison, men, by engaging in politics, warfare and religion, have a wider range of contacts and less personal and particular relationships. Thus men are seen as being more objective and less emotional: their thought processes are defined as more abstract and general, and less personal and particular. Ortner argues that culture is, in one sense, 'the transcendence, by means of systems of thought and technology, of the natural

> givens of existence'. Thus men are seen as closer to culture since their thought processes are defined as more abstract and objective than those of women. Since culture is seen as superior to nature, woman's psyche is devalued and once again, men come out on top.

Ortner concludes that in terms of her biology, physiological processes, social roles and psychology, woman 'appears as something intermediate between culture and nature'.

Criticisms of Ortner

Ortner fails to show conclusively that in all societies culture is valued more highly than nature. Although many societies have rituals that attempt to control nature, it is not clear that nature is necessarily devalued in comparison to culture. Indeed it could be argued that the very existence of such rituals points to the superior power of nature.

Stephanie Coontz and Peta Henderson (1986) provide some examples to contradict Ortner. Among the Sherbo of West Africa, children are seen as close to nature, but adults of both sexes are seen as close to culture. Coontz and Henderson also claim that not all societies devalue nature. The Haganers of Papua and New Guinea distinguish culture and nature, but do not rank one above the other.

Michelle Z. Rosaldo – the public and the domestic

The anthropologist Michelle Zimbalist Rosaldo (1974) was the first to argue that women's subordination was the consequence of a division between the public and the private (or domestic) world.

She argues that there are two distinctive areas of social life:

1. She defines the domestic as 'institutions and modes of activity that are organized immediately around one or more mothers and their children'. As her use of the word 'mother' implies, she believes that it is usually women who are associated with this sphere.
2. In contrast, the public sphere is seen as being primarily the province of men. She defines the public as, 'activities institutions and forms of association that link, rank, organize, or subsume particular mother child groups'.

Thus the domestic sphere includes the family and life in the place of residence of the family, while the public sphere includes the activities and institutions associated with rituals and religion, politics and the economy.

Like Firestone and Ortner, Rosaldo argues that women have been disadvantaged in every known society – 'women everywhere lack generally recognized and culturally valued authority'. Although she accepts that biology is the basis of women's oppression, she argues, like Ortner, that the link between the two is indirect. It is the ***interpretation*** given to women's biology that leads to their disadvantages, not the biology itself. This interpretation ties them to the rearing of children and the domestic sphere.

Men, on the other hand, are better able to keep their distance from domestic life. As a result, they do not need the same personal commitment to other humans as that required from mothers. Men are associated more with abstract authority, and with the political life of society as a whole. Men's separation from the domestic sphere sets them apart from the intimacy of the domestic world, and makes them more suitable for involvement in religious rituals. Rosaldo argues that as a consequence of men's involvement in religious and political life, they can exercise power over the domestic units which are the focus of women's lives.

Although Rosaldo argues that women have less power than men in all societies, she does believe that inequalities between the sexes are greater in some societies than in others. Even though she does not appear to accept that there is any prospect of a totally egalitarian society, she does believe that women can come closer to equality if men become more involved in domestic life.

Rosaldo justifies this claim with reference to societies in which men have an important domestic role. Thus the Mbuti Pygmies of Africa have a relatively egalitarian society because men and women cooperate in both domestic and economic life. Yet even here men retain some independence from the domestic sphere by having separate and secret flute cults.

Criticisms of Rosaldo

Undoubtedly the distinction between the domestic or private sphere and the public sphere provides a useful way of analysing and explaining the relative powerlessness of women in many societies. If women are largely excluded from the institutions that exercise power in society, then it is hardly surprising that men possess more power than women. Furthermore, this distinction helps to explain how the position of men and women in society has changed (see, for example, the section on 'Gender and industrialization', pp. 144–5).

However, there are difficulties involved in Rosaldo's theory and in the use of the terms 'public' and 'domestic'. Janet Siltanen and Michelle Stanworth (1984) point out that there are many ways in which public and private lives overlap. For example, in modern industrial societies it is women's labour in

the home that makes it possible for men to devote themselves to work in the public sphere.

Linda Imray and Audrey Middleton (1983) argue that women's activities tend to be devalued even when they take place in the public sphere. When women take paid employment outside the home, the jobs they do are often regarded as being of less importance than those of men. From this point of view, the devaluation of women must have deeper roots than their association with domestic life. Certainly, as we will demonstrate in later sections, the increasing employment of women outside the private home has not produced equality for women within work.

Firestone, Ortner and Rosaldo all agree that women's subordination to men is universal. They all to some extent agree that the ultimate source of inequality between the sexes is biology, or the interpretation placed on biology. These views are not accepted by all sociologists. Marxist and socialist feminists question the view that women's subordination has always been universal. They claim that it is necessary to examine history to find out how and why inequality between the sexes came about. As Stephanie Coontz and Peta Henderson put it:

> *a number of scholars have begun to address the issue of male dominance as a historical phenomenon, grounded in a particular set of circumstances rather than flowing from some universal aspect of human nature or culture.*
>
> Coontz and Henderson, 1986, p. 1

We will examine some of these viewpoints next.

The origins of gender inequality – Marxist and socialist perspectives

Marx's associate, Freidrich Engels, devoted more attention to the sociology of gender than Marx himself. In *The Origins of the Family, Private Property and the State* (Engels, 1972), Engels outlined his theory of how human societies developed.

Engels – inequality and private property

In the earliest phases of societal development (which Engels called savagery and barbarism), gender inequalities favoured women rather than men. There was a division of labour by sex, with men mainly responsible for procuring food and women mainly responsible for the domestic sphere, but women were not subordinate to men. Private property existed in only a rudimentary form and consisted mainly of simple tools, utensils and weapons. What private property there was passed down through the female, not the male, line. This was because monogamous marriage did not exist. Both men and women could have sex with as many partners as they chose. Consequently, men could never be sure about who their children were. In contrast, as women give birth there is no such doubt about their offspring, and so the property was passed on to their children by the women.

According to Engels, it was during the period of barbarism that women suffered a 'world-historic' defeat. Men gained the upper hand when animals were domesticated and herded and became an important form of private property. Then meat and other animal products became crucial parts of the economy of early societies. Men gained the responsibility for owning and controlling livestock, and were unwilling to allow this important property to be passed down the female line; through owning livestock men overthrew the dominance of women in the household. In Engels's words, 'the man seized the reins in the house also, the woman was degraded, enthralled, the slave of the man's lust, a mere instrument for breeding children'.

In order to ensure that they could identify their own children, men increasingly put restrictions on women's choice of sexual partners. Eventually, during the period Engels calls civilization, monogamous marriage was established. By this stage, men had gained control over what was now the patriarchal family.

Criticisms of Engels

Unfortunately, Engels's theory was based upon unreliable anthropological evidence. His history of early societies no longer seems plausible in the light of more recent research into simple societies (which we discuss later in this chapter). Nevertheless, Engels's pioneering Marxist theory of the origins of gender inequalities laid the foundations upon which later Marxist and socialist feminists have built. Engels suggested that particular historical conditions led to the subordination of women, and he directed attention towards the material, economic reasons that could account for this.

Stephanie Coontz and Peta Henderson – women's work, men's property

Stephanie Coontz and Peta Henderson (1986) provide an example of an attempt to explain women's subordination from a Marxist/socialist perspective. They agree with Engels on a number of important points. Like him, they reject the view that women's subordination has always been a universal feature of human society, and they believe that the roots of women's oppression today are to be found in social causes. They emphasize that it was the difference between the roles of men and women in the production of goods that resulted in gender inequality, and not the difference between the contribution each makes to the reproduction of the species. In all these ways, Coontz and Henderson reject the radical feminism of Firestone.

However, they also disagree with Engels over some issues. For example, they deny that history started with a period of female dominance. On the basis of anthropological evidence, Coontz and Henderson argue that most early societies began with equality between the sexes. They accept that, from earliest times, there was a division of labour by sex, but this in itself did not make inequality inevitable. In most (though not all) societies, some women were excluded from hunting and risky tasks, such as trading and warfare, that could involve travel over long distances. However, it was only pregnant women and nursing mothers who had these restrictions placed on them. It was a matter of social convenience, rather than biological necessity, that led to an early division of labour. For example, it was difficult for women nursing children to combine this activity with warfare as young babies could prove a considerable inconvenience in battle. Women did, nevertheless, become successful warriors in some societies, for example, Dahomey in West Africa.

The existence of a sexual division of labour did not in itself lead to inequality. According to Coontz and Henderson, the earliest societies were communal – the resources produced by men and women alike were shared by everyone. Meat from the hunt and gathered vegetables were given both to the kin and the non-kin of those who produced the food. Even strangers would usually be fed. In these circumstances, it was not important to identify the father of a specific child since the offspring of particular individuals had no special rights to food.

Property and gender inequality

Like Engels, Coontz and Henderson believe that social inequalities developed as a result of changes in property ownership. They follow Engels in arguing that the introduction of herding and agriculture laid the foundations for gender inequalities. These new modes of production made it more likely that a surplus would be produced which could be accumulated or distributed. However, they suggest that some societies, including some North American Indian tribes, produced a surplus in favourable environmental conditions without developing herding or agriculture.

The most important factor in the transition to a society with gender stratification was the appearance of a form of communal property to which a group of kin had exclusive rights. Kin corporate property, as Coontz and Henderson describe it, meant that for the first time non-kin and strangers lost their right to share food and other resources. In these circumstances, parenthood and kinship relationships became important, and senior members of kinship groups gained control over property. Age and seniority began to provide greater economic power, as well as higher status.

Patrilocality and gender inequality

So far, Coontz and Henderson have tried to account for the origins of inequality, but have not explained why men became the dominant group. According to their theory, the key to this development lay in marriage arrangements. Some societies had a system of patrilocality, in other words wives went to live with their husband's kin. Women, as gatherers, continued to act as producers, but they lost control over the products of their labour. What they produced no longer belonged to their own kin corporate group but to that of their husband.

Not all societies had a system of patrilocality, some were matrilocal: husbands moved to live with their wife's kin group. Coontz and Henderson claim that such societies were more egalitarian; women retained greater power. Not only did the food they produced stay with their own kin group, but husbands had to share what they produced with their sister's household as well as their wife's. There was less opportunity for men to concentrate property in their own hands.

However, for a number of reasons matrilocal societies tended to be less successful. For example, patrilocal societies had more chance of producing a surplus. More successful kin groups could expand by the practice of polygamy (men could marry a number of women) and, in doing so, increase the labour force. The extra wives could gather and process more food. Patrilocal societies therefore expanded at the expense of matrilocal ones so that societies in which women were subordinate became more common than those in which they enjoyed greater equality.

To Coontz and Henderson, then, women's subordination arose out of a complex process in which kin corporate property made inequality possible, and patrilocal residence rules for those who married led to men's dominance. According to Coontz and Henderson, gender and class inequalities were closely linked: women lost power in the same process that led to some kin groups accumulating more property than others. Ultimately, property became largely owned by individuals rather than collective groups, and wealthy men came to dominate other men as well as women.

This theory of the development of gender inequalities is perhaps more sophisticated than Engels's, and rests upon sounder anthropological evidence. Despite its claims to provide an entirely social explanation, though, it still uses a biological starting-point. It assumes that women's capacities to give birth and suckle children tended to result in a division of labour in which women were largely responsible for cooking and gathering, and men for hunting.

Gender and industrialization

No blanket statements can be made about the position of women in industrializing societies. In different pre-industrial nations the position of women has varied, and has altered in several ways during industrialization. Nevertheless, Britain, as the first nation to industrialize, provides some indication of the effects of industrialization on women in Western industrial societies.

Women and industrialization – a historical perspective

Ann Oakley (1981) has traced the changing status of women in British society from the eve of the Industrial Revolution to the 1970s. She claims that 'the most important and enduring consequence of industrialization for women has been the emergence of the modern role of housewife as "the dominant mature feminine role"'. In this section, we summarize Oakley's view of the emergence of the housewife role.

The family as the unit of production

In pre-industrial Britain, the family was the basic unit of production. Marriage and the family were essential to individuals for economic reasons since all members of the family were involved in production. Agriculture and textiles were the main industries, and women were indispensable to both. In the production of cloth, the husband did the weaving while his wife spun and dyed the yarn. On the farm, women were in charge of dairy produce. Most of the housework – cooking, cleaning, washing, mending and childcare – was performed by unmarried offspring. The housewife role (which involved the domesticity of women and their economic dependence on men) had yet to arrive. Public life concerned with economic activity, and the private life of the family, were not as distinct as they are today.

The factory as the unit of production

During the early stages of industrialization (which Oakley dates from 1750 to 1841), the factory steadily replaced the family as the unit of production. Women were employed in factories where they often continued their traditional work in textiles.

The first major change that affected their status as wage earners was the Factory Acts, beginning in 1819, which gradually restricted child labour. Children became increasingly dependent upon their parents and required care and supervision, a role that fell to women. Oakley argues that 'the increased differentiation of child and adult roles, with the child's growing dependence, heralded the dependence of women in marriage and their restriction to the home'.

Restrictions on women's employment

From 1841 until the outbreak of the First World War in 1914, a combination of pressure from male workers and philanthropic reformers restricted female employment in industry. Women were seen by many male factory workers as a threat to their employment. As early as 1841, committees of male factory workers called for the 'gradual withdrawal of all female labour from the factory'. In 1842, the Mines Act banned the employment of women as miners. In 1851, one in four married women were employed; by 1911 this figure was reduced to one in ten.

Helen Hacker states that with the employment of women as wage earners:

> *Men were quick to perceive them as a rival group and make use of economic, legal and ideological weapons to eliminate or reduce their competition. They excluded women from the trade unions, made contracts with employers to prevent their hiring women, passed laws restricting the employment of*

married women, caricatured the working woman, and carried on ceaseless propaganda to return women to the home and keep them there.

Hacker, 1972

Victorian ideology, particularly the versions of the upper and middle classes, stated that a woman's place was in the home. No less a figure than Queen Victoria announced: 'Let woman be what God intended, a helpmate for man, but with totally different duties and vocations' (quoted in Hudson, 1970). The following quotations from articles in the *Saturday Review* illustrate the ideal of womanhood in mid-Victorian times. In 1859:

Married life is a woman's profession, and to this life her training – that of dependence – is modelled.

And in 1865:

No woman can or ought to know very much of the mass of meanness and wickedness and misery that is loose in the wide world. She could not learn it without losing the bloom and freshness which it is her mission in life to preserve.

Quoted in Hudson, 1970, pp. 53–4

Oakley claims that during the second half of the nineteenth century these attitudes began to filter down to the working class. Thus a combination of factors which included ideology, the banning of child labour, and restrictions on the employment of women, locked the majority of married women into the mother–housewife role.

The return to paid employment

Oakley states that from 1914 to 1950, there was a 'tendency towards the growing employment of women coupled with a retention of housewifery as the primary role expected of all women'. During these years, women received many legal and political rights (for example, the vote in 1928) but these had little effect on the central fact of their lives: the mother–housewife role.

Oakley concludes that industrialization has had the following effects on the role of women:

1 the 'separation of men from the daily routines of domestic life'
2 the 'economic dependence of women and children on men'
3 the 'isolation of housework and childcare from other work'.

In twentieth-century British society, the role of housewife–mother became institutionalized as 'the primary role for all women'.

These generalizations perhaps became less valid as the twentieth century progressed. Subsequent sections will suggest that women have made gains in terms of increasing their economic independence. Furthermore, although the housewife-mother role may continue to be the primary role for many women, it is not the case for all. The increase in homeworking and male unemployment may have had a small effect in reducing the separation of men from domestic life. Even so, the changes produced by the Industrial Revolution still exert a powerful influence.

For radical feminists, patriarchy is the most important concept for explaining gender inequalities. Although literally it means 'rule by the father', radical feminists have used it more broadly to refer to male dominance in society. From this point of view, patriarchy consists of the exercise of power by men over women. Kate Millett was one of the first radical feminists to use the term and to provide a detailed explanation of women's exploitation by men.

Kate Millett – radical feminism and sexual politics

In her book, *Sexual Politics*, Kate Millett (1970) argues that politics is not just an activity confined to political parties and parliaments, but one which exists in any 'power-structured relationships, arrangements whereby one group of persons is controlled by another'. Such relationships of domination and subordination can exist at work where a man instructs his female secretary to make a cup of tea, or in the family when a husband's meal is cooked by his wife. Political relationships between men and women exist in all aspects of everyday life.

According to Millett, such relationships are organized on the basis of patriarchy, a system in which 'male shall dominate female'. She believes that patriarchy is 'the most pervasive ideology of our culture, its most fundamental concept of power'. It is 'more rigorous than class stratification, more uniform, certainly more enduring'.

Like other radical feminists, Millett suggests that gender is the primary source of identity for individ-

uals in modern societies. People react to others first and foremost as men and women, rather than in terms of their class membership. It is a rigid system of stratification: sex is ascribed and almost impossible to change.

The basis of patriarchy

Millett identifies no fewer than eight factors which explain the existence of patriarchy:

1 First, she considers the role of biology. Although she admits that it is difficult to be certain about the origins of patriarchy, she attributes some importance to superior male strength. She suggests that this on its own cannot explain female subordination, claiming that there may have been 'pre-patriarchal' societies in which men were not dominant. Furthermore, she points out that in contemporary, technologically advanced societies, strength is itself of little significance. Despite this, she speculates that at some point in history strength may have assumed a degree of importance which accounts for the origins of patriarchy.

   To Millett though, it is more significant that in early socialization males are encouraged to be aggressive and females to be passive. Males and females are taught to behave and think in ways which reinforce the biological differences that exist.

2 Millett points to ideological factors in her search for the roots of patriarchy. Again, she attaches importance to socialization. Men are socialized to have a dominant temperament. This provides men with a higher social status, which in turn leads to them filling social roles in which they can exercise mastery over women.

3 Millett also considers sociological factors to be important. She claims that the family is the main institution of patriarchy, although men also exercise power in the wider society and through the state. Within the family it is the need for children to be legitimate, to have a socially recognized father, that gives men a particularly dominant position. Mothers and children come to rely for their social status on the position of husbands and fathers in society.

   The family therefore plays an important part in maintaining patriarchy across generations, socializing children into having different temperaments and leading them to expect and accept different roles in later life.

4 Millett discusses the relationship between class and subordination. She believes that women have a caste-like status that operates independently of social class. Even women from higher-class backgrounds are subordinate to men. She believes that the economic dependency of women on men almost places them outside the class system. Romantic love appears to place males and females on an equal footing but in truth it merely 'obscures the realities of female status, and the burden of economic dependency'. Women's inferior status is reinforced and underlined by the ability of men to gain psychological ascendancy through the use of physical or verbal bullying and obscene or hostile remarks.

5 Millett discusses the educational factors which handicap women and she expands upon the question of women's economic dependency. In traditional patriarchies, women lacked legal standing and were not able to own property or to earn their own living. In today's society, Millett accepts that women can and do take paid work, but believes that their work is usually menial, badly paid and lacking in status.

   Furthermore, in societies in which women retain their roles as mothers and housewives, much of that work is unpaid. She sees women as being essentially a reserve labour force who are made use of when they are needed (for example, in wartime) but are discarded when not required.

   Economic inequalities are reinforced by educational ones. Women tend to study the humanities which, according to Millett, have a lower status than sciences. As a result, women lack knowledge and this restricts their power. For example, women often do not understand technology so they cannot compete on equal terms with men to earn a living.

6 Millett argues that men also retain patriarchal power through myth and religion. Religion is used as a way of legitimating masculine dominance. As Millett puts it, 'patriarchy has God on its side'. To illustrate this point she notes that the Christian religion portrays Eve as an afterthought produced from Adam's spare rib, while the origins of human suffering are held to have their source in her actions.

7 An additional source of men's power is psychology. Patriarchal ideology is 'interiorized' by women because of all the above factors. Women develop a passive temperament and a sense of inferiority. This is further reinforced by sexist European languages which use words such as 'mankind' to refer to humanity. Media images of women also play their part, but to Millett the greatest psychological weapon available to men is the length of time they have enjoyed worldwide dominance. Women have simply come to take men's dominance for granted.

8 Millett identifies physical force as the final source of male domination. Despite the extent of men's ideological power, Millett believes that patriarchy is ultimately backed up by force. She points to many examples of the use of violence against women, such as the stoning to death of adulteresses in Muslim countries, and 'the crippling deformity of footbinding in China, the lifelong ignominy of the Veil in Islam'. In modern Western societies, women are also the victims of violence. Millett does not admit that women are inevitably physically weaker, but 'physical and emotional training' make it very difficult for women to resist the force used against

them by individual men. Rape and other forms of sexual violence are ever-present possibilities and ways in which all women are intimidated by all men.

Criticisms of Millett

Millett made an important contribution towards explaining the disadvantaged position of women within society. However, her work has been criticized by socialist and Marxist feminists. They have identified three main weaknesses in her theory of sexual politics:

1 Sheila Rowbotham (1979) argues that patriarchy is too sweeping a category. Because Millett regards all societies as patriarchal, she fails to explain the particular circumstances which have produced male domination in its current forms. According to Rowbotham, describing all societies as patriarchal implies that male domination has some universal cause which stems from the biology of women and the fact that they bear and rear children. In Rowbotham's words, it 'ignores the multiplicity of ways in which societies have defined gender'.

2 Rowbotham questions the assumption implied in the use of the term 'patriarchy' – that all men exploit all women. She says that 'patriarchy cannot explain why genuine feelings of love and friendship are possible between men and women, and boys and girls, or why people have acted together in popular movements'.

3 Another criticism of Millett, and radical feminists in general, is that they ignore the material basis of much of the oppression of women. Robert McDonough and Rachel Harrison (1978) criticize Millett for ignoring the possibility that women's lack of wealth and economic power is the most important factor determining their disadvantages. To Marxist and socialist feminists, it is capitalism rather than patriarchy that explains women's oppression in modern societies.

Gender in contemporary societies – Marxist and socialist perspectives

Marx and Engels and women under communism

Apart from explaining the origins of inequality between men and women, Engels also tried to foresee how women's position in society would change as capitalism developed (Engels, 1972). Engels believed that economic factors caused women's subservience to men, and only economic changes could lead to their liberation. He stated that 'the predominance of the man in marriage is simply a consequence of his economic predominance and will vanish with it automatically'. Men enjoyed greater power than women because it was men who owned the means of production, or who earned a wage outside the home.

However, Marx and Engels believed that capitalism would eventually lead to some reduction in inequalities between men and women. They argued that the demand for female wage labour would raise the status and power of proletarian women within the family.

Marx believed that, despite its many evils, capitalist industry 'creates a new economic foundation for a higher form of the family and of relations between the sexes'. Female employment would largely free women from economic dependence upon their husbands and so from male dominance within the family. Engels took a similar view maintaining that with female wage labour:

> *the last remnants of male domination in the proletarian home have lost all foundation – except, perhaps, for some of the brutality towards women which became firmly rooted with the establishment of monogamy.*
>
> Engels, 1972

However, the bourgeois wife in capitalist society was still required to produce heirs and so forced to submit to male control.

Although women entered the labour force in increasing numbers in the twentieth century, many contemporary Marxist and socialist feminists deny that this led to the changes anticipated by Marx and Engels. As we will indicate in a later section, women continue to be financially disadvantaged compared to men, even when they take paid employment. They tend to get lower wages and lower-status jobs than men (see pp. 163–8). Furthermore, they still seem to have less power than men within the family. (Further details can be found in Chapter 8.)

Gender under communism

Engels believed that true equality between men and women would arrive with the establishment of communism when the means of production would be communally owned. Engels predicted that the communal ownership of the means of production would be accompanied by the socialization of

housework and childcare. Sexual inequality would end. Gender roles would disappear.

Evidence from former communist countries suggests that Engels was wrong. In a review of studies of the USSR, Nickie Charles (1993) found that women did make significant progress under communism. In 1991, just before the USSR broke up with the collapse of communism, women made up a majority of the Soviet workforce – 51 per cent. Under communism women were guaranteed the right to work, and laws gave them the right to equal pay for equal work. Women also had the right to paid maternity leave and breaks during working hours to feed their babies.

However, although Charles believes that women made significant gains under communism, she does not think that they achieved full equality. In 1991, average wages for women were only about two-thirds of those for men. Laws made it easier for women to work and have children, but this also meant that 'childcare was viewed as a purely female concern'. As in Western capitalist societies, women continued to have most of the responsibility for childcare and housework even when they had full-time employment outside the home.

If women's progress under communism in the USSR was limited, early evidence suggests that the move towards a market economy and a Western-style democracy has undermined some of the gains that were made. Charles found that in 1992 after the withdrawal of the right to employment, women had twice the redundancy rate of men. In the light of rising unemployment, Charles thought it likely that women would 'be encouraged to return to the home either full or part-time' and state childcare services would be withdrawn.

Nickie Charles found that by the late 1980s women had high rates of participation in the East European labour market. Women made up 50 per cent of the workforce in East Germany and nearly 50 per cent in Czechoslovakia. In Poland and Hungary they made up about 44 per cent of the workforce. Charles argues that despite these figures women remained disadvantaged because of the persistence of a familial ideology 'which defined women primarily as wives and mothers'.

Such examples suggest that societies claiming to be communist had made inroads into reducing gender inequality, but did not succeed in coming anywhere near to eradicating it. Nickie Charles argues that communist states have made much more effort than capitalist states to reduce the burden of childcare and housework on women, but 'in both types of society women are to be found in the lowest paid and least skilled jobs'. This suggests that factors other than the economic system are at least partly responsible for gender inequalities.

Contemporary Marxist feminism

Some Marxist feminists have argued that women's position in society primarily benefits capitalism and capitalists rather than men. Margaret Benston (1972) argues that capitalism benefits from a large reserve labour force of women 'to keep wages down and profits up'. (For a discussion of the reserve army of labour theory see pp. 170–1.) In their roles as secondary breadwinners, married women provide a source of cheap and easily exploitable labour. Because women have been socialized to comply and submit, they form a docile labour force that can be readily manipulated and easily fired when not required.

Compared to male workers, women are less likely to join unions, to go on strike or take other forms of militant action against employers. Even when women join unions, they often find themselves in male-dominated organizations where, according to Barron and Norris (1976), men 'often do not share the interests or outlook of their fellow female unionists'. To some degree, sexist ideology splits the working class and in doing so serves the interests of capital. It divides workers along sex lines and thereby makes them easier to control.

Some Marxists also believe that women benefit capitalists and the capitalist system in their capacities as mothers and housewives by reproducing labour power at no cost to employers. (We discuss this in more detail in Chapter 8.)

Criticisms of Marxist feminism

There are a number of difficulties with Marxist approaches that explain gender inequalities in terms of how they benefit capitalism. Some Marxist feminists claim that such explanations ignore many of the questions raised by feminists. In terms of the Marxist theory, women appear insignificant: they sit on the sidelines of the grand struggle between capital and labour. Marxists may explain capitalism, but this does not explain patriarchy.

Heidi Hartmann (1981) compares the situation to a marriage in which the husband represents Marxism, the wife represents feminism, and it is the husband who has all the power. She says: 'the "marriage" of Marxism and feminism has been like the marriage of husband and wife depicted in English common law: Marxism and feminism are one, and that one is Marxism'.

She does not believe that Marxism on its own can explain gender inequalities because it is 'sex-blind'. In other words, Marxism can explain why capitalists exploit workers, but not why men exploit women. For example, it might be possible to explain in Marxist terms how it benefits capitalism for housework and childcare to be carried out free of

charge, but not why women in particular should be responsible for these tasks. Capitalism would benefit as much from househusbands as housewives.

Michelle Barrett (1980, 1984) also attacks Marxist theories which see capitalism alone benefiting from the exploitation of women. She points out that working-class men can benefit from the labour of their wives as well as capitalists. Furthermore, there may be cheaper alternative ways of reproducing labour power than the use of the nuclear family unit with unpaid housewives. It might be less expensive for capitalist countries to use migrant workers. They could be accommodated in cheap barracks. Furthermore, their early socialization has already been carried out in another country at no cost to capitalists.

Both Hartmann and Barrett accept that Marxism can play an important part in explaining gender inequalities; however, they believe that feminism must be fully incorporated into any adequate theory. Both these writers attempt to cement a 'marriage' between Marxist and feminist theory.

The 'marriage' of Marxism and feminism

In her article 'The unhappy marriage of Marxism and feminism', Heidi Hartmann (1981) claims that Marxism makes an important contribution to explaining Western industrial societies, including 'the structure of production, the generation of a particular occupational structure, and the nature of the dominant ideology'. It explains the creation of particular jobs, but to Hartmann it is 'indifferent' to who fills them. Thus it does not explain why women have lower-paid and lower-status employment outside the home, nor why they continue to carry the main burden of domestic responsibilities, even when they are working as well.

Following radical feminists, Hartmann argues that patriarchy provides the key to explaining the sexual division of labour. Unlike radical feminists though, she believes that patriarchy has a 'material' base which is not directly related to biological differences between men and women. Men maintain their material control over women by controlling women's labour power. They largely deny access for working women to jobs that pay a living wage. They force women into financial dependence on husbands and thereby control the labour of women in their capacities as housewives and mothers. Because of men's dominance within the family they also control women's bodies and sexuality. Women who are married become almost their husbands' property.

Hartmann believes that capitalism and patriarchy are very closely connected – she describes them as 'intertwined' – but she does not believe that the interests of men as a group and capitalists as a group are identical. For example, ruling-class men may benefit from increasing numbers of women entering the labour force, whereas working-class men may prefer their wives to stay at home to perform personal services for them.

Furthermore, Hartmann denies that capitalism is all-powerful: the capitalist system has to be flexible, and the need for social control may sometimes become more important than the need to produce the maximum possible profit. In this context, Hartmann claims that historically there has been an accommodation between patriarchy and capitalism. They have learned to co-exist in a partnership that fundamentally damages neither partner.

Hartmann believes that in the nineteenth century capitalism gave way to pressure from men about female employment. Male-dominated trade unions in Britain persuaded the state to pass legislation limiting the degree to which women were permitted to participate in paid employment. Although capitalists may not have accepted this situation as ideal, it did have certain advantages for them. The family wage, paid to men and sufficiently large for them to be able to support their wives and children, led to some increase in the wage bill, but ensured that when women did work they could be paid very low wages. It also placated men since their power over women was maintained, and as such it reduced the likelihood of class-conscious action by male workers.

Hartmann accepts that the increasing participation of women in work today has made them slightly less dependent on men. There are more opportunities for women to become independent. Nevertheless, she believes that the persistence of relatively low wage levels for women prevents patriarchy from becoming seriously undermined. She claims 'women's wages allow very few women to support themselves independently and adequately'.

In *Women's Oppression Today*, Michelle Barrett (1980) adopts a similar approach. Although she considers herself a Marxist she believes that it is necessary to go beyond Marxism in order to explain women's oppression. Like Hartmann, she sees the origins of women's oppression today as lying in the nineteenth century, and she argues that a coalition of men and capitalists led to women being excluded from work and being forced to take on a primarily domestic role.

In this process women's oppression became lodged in what she calls the family-household system: members of the household came to rely on the wages of a few adults (primarily men) while all family members relied on the unpaid housework mainly carried out by women. In the process an ideology was developed in which this division of labour in the family came to be accepted as normal and natural.

In the twentieth century, the family-household system became an entrenched part of capitalism. Although there is no inevitable reason why capitalism needs women (as opposed to men, for example) to do the unpaid housework, the capitalist class does benefit politically from this division of labour. According to Barrett, the working class is divided by the family-household system; husbands and wives, men and women, fight each other instead of uniting to fight capitalism.

Biology, capitalism and the oppression of women

Both Hartmann and Barrett move away from seeing gender inequalities as being an inevitable product of capitalism. Both accept that an extra dimension needs to be added to Marxist analysis since Marxism is sex-blind. However, according to some critics, neither has succeeded in unifying Marxism and feminism.

Johanna Brenner and Maria Ramas (1984) believe that Barrett has adopted a dual-system approach, in which class inequalities are explained in terms of capitalism, and gender inequalities are explained in terms of patriarchal ideology, but the two approaches are not combined. They do not believe that Barrett has demonstrated a material need for men and women to have different roles within capitalism. According to Brenner and Ramas, there is a material basis for women's oppression under capitalism, and it is to be found in women's biology.

In pre-capitalist times women were able to combine the demands of childbirth, breastfeeding, and childcare with work, because work was largely based around the home. Furthermore, families could be flexible about when they carried out their work.

With the introduction of factory production, though, work and home became separated, and it also became uneconomic to allow breaks from work to allow women to breastfeed their children. This would have entailed interruptions in production which would have meant that expensive machinery was not fully used.

Furthermore, capitalists were unwilling to provide for expensive maternity leave or childcare facilities at work. With the long hours of work demanded in early factories, the high costs of any domestic help, and the lack of sterilization techniques which would have made bottlefeeding a viable proposition, there was little option but for mothers to withdraw from work.

Brenner and Ramas admit that many of the conditions that originally forced mothers into domestic roles have now changed. Bottlefeeding is now a safe option for babies; there is some provision for maternity leave; hours of work are shorter; it is easier to afford help with childcare; and in any case women are on average having fewer children. However, most women still get paid lower wages than most men, and for most working-class families there are likely to be real financial benefits if the woman rather than the man withdraws from work.

To Brenner and Ramas the sexual division of labour was at least in part produced by the rational choices taken by members of the working class. Because, however, the situation has now changed, there is considerable potential for greater gender equality. If that potential is to be realized, though, it will require a political struggle in which more state nurseries are demanded. It is still cheaper for capitalism if the family rather than the state pays for childcare.

Michelle Barrett (1984) remains unconvinced by the arguments of Brenner and Ramas. She believes that ideology played a greater role in producing the family-household system than biology.

Marxist feminists continue to disagree amongst themselves as well as with other feminists, and they have yet to provide a conclusive explanation for gender inequalities. Marxism and feminism remain something of an unhappy marriage, but the writers in this section have begun to explore how best to avoid separation, or even divorce, of the two perspectives.

Sylvia Walby – *Theorizing Patriarchy*

Sylvia Walby has developed an approach to understanding gender in contemporary societies which does not fit into any of the types of feminism described in earlier sections. Indeed, she starts her 1990 book, *Theorizing Patriarchy* (1990), by pointing out the main criticisms that have been made of other approaches.

Criticisms of existing perspectives

1 Radical feminism has been criticized for 'a false universalism which cannot understand historical change or take sufficient account of divisions between women based on ethnicity and class'.

2 Marxist feminism has been criticized for concentrating on gender inequalities under

capitalism and therefore being unable to explain the exploitation of women in non-capitalist societies.

3 Liberal feminism has been seen as lacking 'an account of the overall social structuring of gender inequality'. Its approach can provide no more than partial explanations. For example, it offers no explanation of how gender inequalities first developed.

4 Walby also criticizes what she calls dual-systems theory. By this she means approaches such as that of Hartmann (see pp. 149–50) which explain women's exploitation in terms of two separate systems of capitalism and patriarchy. Walby criticizes Hartmann for underestimating the amount of tension between capitalism and patriarchy and for failing to take account of aspects of patriarchy such as violence and sexuality.

Walby tries to improve on other perspectives by incorporating their strengths into her own theory while avoiding their weaknesses.

Patriarchy

To Walby, the concept of patriarchy must remain central to a feminist understanding of society. She says that '"patriarchy" is indispensable for an analysis of gender inequality' (Walby, 1990). However, her definition of patriarchy is different from that of other feminists. She argues that there are six patriarchal structures which restrict women and help to maintain male domination. These are:

1 paid work
2 patriarchal relations within the household
3 patriarchal culture
4 sexuality
5 male violence towards women
6 the state.

Each of these structures has some independence from the others, but they can also affect one another, reinforcing or weakening patriarchy in a different structure. Each structure is reproduced or changed by the actions of men and women, but the existence of the structure also restricts the choices that humans, particularly women, can make.

Walby claims that patriarchy is not a fixed and unchanging feature of society (as some radical feminists seem to imply) but both its strength and its form change over time. For example, she believes that patriarchy in Britain during the last two centuries has become slightly less strong and has changed from private patriarchy to public patriarchy. (We will examine the idea of a shift from private to public patriarchy at the end of this section.)

Walby's concept of patriarchy does not regard relations between males and females as the only source of inequality. She acknowledges that there are also 'divisions between women based on ethnicity and class', and she discusses the ways that patriarchy, racism and capitalism interact.

We will now examine in detail how Walby uses her concept of patriarchy to explain gender inequalities.

The structures of patriarchy

As we saw earlier, Walby identifies six structures of patriarchy. We will examine each of these in turn before looking at Walby's overall conclusions about changes in patriarchy.

Paid employment

Walby believes that paid employment has been and remains a key structure in creating disadvantages for women. In nineteenth-century Britain, regulations excluded women from whole areas of work altogether. Male-dominated trade unions and the state ensured that women's opportunities were severely restricted. In the twentieth century, women, and particularly married women, were able to take employment, but not on equal terms with men. In recent years, 'the degree of inequality between men and women in terms of pay, conditions, and access to well-rewarded occupations has declined only very slightly'. The gap between men's and women's wages has only been reduced a little and women continue to predominate in low-paid, part-time employment. In theory, the state has supported greater equality between men and women in the labour market by passing the Equal Pay (1970) and Sex Discrimination (1975) Acts, but in practice such policies are not 'pursued with vigour'.

Walby believes that the labour market has more influence than the family on women's decisions about whether to take paid employment. When women decide not to seek paid work they do so more because of the restricted opportunities open to them than because of cultural values that suggest that mothers and wives should stay at home. According to Walby, when opportunities have been presented to women in the labour market, they have taken advantage of them. For example, the removal of the bar on married women working in some occupations during the Second World War led to a big increase in the numbers of married women in paid work. Feminist struggles and capitalism's demands for cheap labour have created a big increase in women's employment but have failed to prevent exploitation at work. Some women continue to stay at home because the wages they are likely to earn are too low to make paid work worthwhile.

Household production

According to Walby, households sometimes involve distinctive patriarchal relations of production. Individual men directly exploit women by gaining benefits from women's unpaid labour, for example in the home. In the nineteenth century, many women were forced into patriarchal relations of production through their exclusion from the labour market. In the twentieth century, exploitation within this structure was reduced, at least for some women. Women now spend more time in paid work, and the relaxation of divorce laws means that women 'are no longer necessarily bound to an individual husband who expropriates their labour till death does them part'.

For some groups of women, life within households may seem like an escape from exploitation. For example, Walby points out that some Black feminists believe that the family can be 'a site of resistance to racism', and life within the family may be less exploitative for black women than life in the labour market where they tend to receive the least desirable jobs.

However, Walby does not see exploitation of women in the household as having disappeared. Women who are housewives spend as many hours on domestic labour as they did decades ago. Women with children who leave their husbands are disadvantaged in a 'patriarchally structured labour market'. They are unlikely to find a job with reasonable pay so that '"Liberation" from marriage is then usually a movement into poverty.' Some women continue to allow themselves to be exploited by their husbands because the alternatives are so unappealing. Marriage may offer personal survival and greater material comfort for many women when most women have such poorly paid work, but the short-term benefits of marriage for particular women undermine women's 'long-term interests in the eradication of the oppression which exists within the family'. This oppression is sometimes manifested in terms of violence and sexuality, which we will examine shortly.

Culture

Walby believes that the culture of Western societies has consistently distinguished between men and women and has expected different types of behaviour from them. She says that 'while variable across class, ethnicity and age in particular, femininity is consistently differentiated from masculinity over the last century and a half'. However, although the differentiation has remained strong, the characteristics which are seen as making a woman feminine have changed significantly.

In the nineteenth century, women were thought more feminine if they confined their activities to the domestic sphere and did not take paid work. Walby claims that 'the key sign of femininity today ... is sexual attractiveness to men'. Furthermore, 'it is no longer merely the femininity of young single women that is defined in this way, but increasingly that of older women as well'. Sexual attractiveness was also important in Victorian times, but less important than today. It was also 'relatively undercover' compared to contemporary culture.

Escaping from the confinement of domesticity has created greater freedom for women, but the new emphasis on sexuality is not without its costs. Pornography, in particular, increases the freedom of men while threatening the freedom of women. To Walby, 'the male gaze, not that of women, is the viewpoint of pornography', and pornography encourages the degradation of women by men and sometimes promotes sexual violence.

Sexuality

Walby argues that 'heterosexuality constitutes a patriarchal structure'. However, she accepts that the nature of this patriarchal structure has undergone important changes.

In the nineteenth century, women's sexuality was subject to strict control and was largely confined by a 'plethora of practices' to sex within marriage. Women's sexuality was therefore 'directed to one patriarchal agent for a lifetime', although the result was to reduce women's 'sexual interest in anything, including marriage'.

In the twentieth century it became easier for women to be sexually active. Improved contraception reduced the risk of unwanted pregnancy, and the increasing availability of divorce created the possibility of exchanging 'an inadequate husband for a new one'. Walby refers to a study by Lawson and Sampson conducted in 1988 which found that of women marrying in the 1960s, 75 per cent had remained faithful to their husbands during the first ten years of marriage whereas only 46 per cent of those who had married since the 1970s had done so. The study also found that for those married in the earlier period men had been more likely to be unfaithful, whereas for those married in the later period more women had had affairs.

Women themselves played an important part in fighting for greater sexual freedom in campaigning for birth control, abortion and easier divorce, but sexual liberalization has not worked to their advantage in every respect. For example, Walby says 'the sexual double standard is still alive and well'. Young women who are sexually active are condemned by males as 'slags'; those who are not are seen as 'drags'. On the other hand, males with many sexual conquests are admired for their supposed virility.

There is more pressure on women today to be heterosexually active and to 'service' males by marrying or cohabiting with them. Thus heterosexuality remains patriarchal, even though women have made some genuine gains.

Violence

Walby starts her discussion of violence by noting that 'male violence against women includes rape, sexual assault, wife beating, workplace sexual harassment and child sexual abuse'. Like other feminists, she sees violence as a form of power over women. The use of violence, or the threat of violence, helps to keep women in their place and discourages them from challenging patriarchy.

According to Walby, the lack of reliable evidence from the past makes it impossible to determine whether the amount of violence against women by men has increased or decreased. She does believe, however, that it is possible to detect changes in the response to male violence. The state, and in particular the police, have become more willing to take action against the worst offenders. Nevertheless, action against violent husbands is still infrequent and some women continue to be subject to male violence while other women continue to fear it.

The state

State policies relating to gender have changed considerably since the nineteenth century. For example there has been:

> *the cessation of legal backing to exclusionary practices in employment; the increased ease of divorce and financial provision for non-wage earners; the ending of state backing to exclusionary practices in education and the removal of most forms of censorship of pornography; the decriminalization of contraception and abortion under most circumstances; and minor changes in the law making it marginally easier for a woman to leave a violent man.*
>
> Walby, 1990

Most of these changes have been gains for women but, to Walby, 'the state is still patriarchal as well as capitalist and racist'. State policies are no longer directed at confining women to the private sphere of the home, yet there has been little real attempt to improve women's position in the public sphere. Women still receive lower wages than men, and equal opportunities legislation is not often enforced. Women in one-parent families receive little state benefit and women have been harmed by the greater availability of pornography. While the state itself is not so obviously as patriarchal as it used to be, it still does little to protect women from patriarchal power in society.

From private to public patriarchy

As we have seen in each of the preceding sections on the different structures of patriarchy, Walby recognizes that important changes have taken place in every aspect of gender relations. Liberal feminists tend to see these changes as progress. Radical feminists tend to argue that little has changed and patriarchal domination remains firmly intact. Marxists usually claim that industrialization and the advent of capitalism led to a deterioration in the position of women and since the Industrial Revolution little has improved.

Walby does not accept any of these general views, arguing instead that the nature of patriarchy has changed. To her, different aspects of patriarchy are interrelated and together they produce a system of patriarchy and it is this system which has changed.

In the nineteenth century, patriarchy was predominantly private; in the twentieth century, it became public. Table 3.1 summarizes how Walby characterizes this change.

Private patriarchy

In private patriarchy an individual patriarch, the male head of household, controls women 'individually and directly in the relatively private sphere of the home'. It is 'the man in his position as husband or father who is the direct oppressor and beneficiary, individually and directly, of the subordination of women'. Women remain oppressed because they are prevented from entering the public sphere in areas such as employment and politics.

Although household production was the most important structure of private patriarchy, it was backed up by the other patriarchal structures which excluded women.

The shift away from private patriarchy

The shift away from private patriarchy was in part a consequence of first wave feminism. Between 1850 and 1930, women in the USA and Britain campaigned for much more than just voting rights. They also sought:

> *the containment of predatory male sexual behaviour (Christabel Pankhurst's slogan was 'Votes for women, chastity for men'), access to employment, training and education, reform of the legal status of married women so they could own property, for divorce and legal separation at the woman's behest as well as that of the husband ... for the collective rather than private organization of meal preparation.*
>
> Walby, 1990

These campaigns took place 'against the background of an expanding capitalist economy' and capitalists

Table 3.1 Private and public patriarchy

Form of patriarchy	Private	Public
Dominant structure	Household production	Employment/State
Wider patriarchal structures	Employment	Household production
	State	Sexuality
	Sexuality	Violence
	Violence	Culture
	Culture	
Period	Nineteenth century	Twentieth century
Mode of expropriation	Individual	Collective
Patriarchal strategy	Exclusionary	Segregationist

Source: S. Walby, (1990) *Theorizing Patriarchy*, Blackwell, Oxford, p. 24.

requiring a larger workforce. There was pressure from male trade unionists to continue to exclude women from employment so that they could not compete for men's jobs.

The result was a series of compromises in which women gained greater access to the public sphere, capitalists were able to employ more women in their enterprises, and male workers ensured that women were restricted in the employment opportunities open to them. (We will discuss Walby's ideas on male trade unionism and female employment later in the chapter. See pp. 172–3 for further details.) These compromises led to the emergence of a new public form of patriarchy.

Public patriarchy 'is a form in which women have access to both public and private arenas. They are not barred from the public arenas, but are nonetheless subordinated within them'. In the public sphere, women tend to be segregated into certain jobs which are lower-paid and are given a lower status than men's jobs. The state and employment become the dominant structures of patriarchy but the other structures remain important. Women are no longer exploited so much by individual patriarchs but instead are exploited collectively by men in general through their subordination in public arenas. As Walby puts it, 'women are no longer restricted to the domestic hearth, but have the whole society in which to roam and be exploited'.

Variations in patriarchy

Walby believes that there has been some reduction in patriarchal exploitation in certain areas as a consequence of the change from private to public patriarchy. The extent of any such reduction varies between groups of women, however, as does the balance between public and private elements of patriarchy. For example, Walby believes that Muslim women are more restricted by family structures than other women, and are therefore more subject to private patriarchy than other groups. Afro-Caribbean women, on the other hand, are more likely to have paid employment and to head their own families than other ethnic groups, and are therefore more subject to public patriarchy.

Walby's arguments are largely confined to an examination of Britain and the USA, but she does give some indications of how these compare to other countries. She suggests that the state has played a more important role in public patriarchy in some countries, whereas in others the labour market has been more important. In the former communist countries of Eastern Europe, for instance, it was the state which was predominant. In the USA, the most capitalist and free-market of Western countries, employment has been of greatest importance. In Western Europe, with more developed welfare states, the state and employment have played a more equal role in public patriarchy.

Gender Transformations

In *Gender Transformations* (1997), Walby reviews changes in patriarchy in the 1990s. Although she discovers plenty of evidence that patriarchal structures remain in place in Britain, she also finds evidence of important changes. In particular, she claims that there is evidence of a generational difference between older and younger women. Older women tend to be restricted by the constraints of private patriarchy, which was the dominant form of patriarchy in their early lives. They are likely to have few qualifications and therefore have limited opportunities in the labour market. They are more

likely than younger women to be dependent upon a male partner for their material well-being. They are particularly vulnerable with the increasing divorce rate which makes reliance upon a male partner problematic.

Younger women, on the other hand, have benefited from some of the changes that have taken place. Using official figures, Walby notes that women made up 49.6 per cent of employees in Britain in 1995. She also points out that female school leavers now have more qualifications than their male counterparts. Women are also catching up male peers in higher education. In other areas, women of all generations have made some gains, although the biggest beneficiaries have mostly been younger women. For example, the police have become more willing to intervene in dealing with male violence against women. There is more awareness of sexual harassment at work, and increasingly employers have policies to deal with it. Furthermore, 'there has been a decline in the discourse and practice of confining sexuality to marriage and an increase in its public presence'. Subjects such as AIDS and the affairs of the royal family have made the discussion of sexuality more open and, according to research, women are becoming more likely to engage in extra-marital sexual relationships. Women are also increasingly entering the public sphere by taking part in political and social movements such as environmental movements, the refuge movement for victims of domestic violence, and protest movements such as that against the poll tax in spring 1990.

However, the impact of such gains is tempered both by a polarization between different groups of women and by areas in which women have made little progress. Well-qualified young women have generally been able to take advantage of new opportunities in the labour market. The same is not true of most of those with few qualifications. The move towards a post-Fordist (see Chapter 10 for a discussion of post-Fordism) and 'flexible' labour market in Britain has relied upon the employment of large numbers of young women in low-paid and insecure jobs. Women have become more independent of men (74 per cent of women in Britain were married in 1979, but just 57 per cent in 1994), but conversely this has made some low-paid women poorer. The increasing number of female single-parents are particularly disadvantaged because childcare responsibilities greatly restrict their opportunities to do paid work.

In most of the most powerful positions in public life, women continue to be seriously under-represented. Walby notes that in 1992 only 9.2 per cent of MPs were women, there were no women Chief Constables until the 1990s, and in 1994 only one in 25 High Court judges was a woman. In 1996, there was only one woman among 50 British ambassadors or heads of overseas missions. There are very few women heading major corporations or public bodies.

For these reasons, Walby argues that a 'system of patriarchy' continues to exist, although 'gender regimes' affect groups of women differently. She argues that:

> *different forms of gender regime coexist as a result of the diversity in gender relations consequent upon age, class, ethnicity and region. As a result of the recent changes, older women will be more likely than younger women to be involved in a more domestic gender regime. Women whose own occupations place them in higher socio-economic groups are more likely to be involved in a more public form of patriarchy. Women of Pakistani and Bangladeshi descent are more likely to be in a domestic form and Black Caribbean women more likely to be in a more private form than white women. There are complex interactions between these different forms of gender regime, as well as between gender, ethnicity and class.*
>
> Walby, 1997, p. 6

Evaluation of Walby

Walby's theory of patriarchy incorporates the insights of many different feminists. Like Marxist and socialist feminists, she acknowledges the importance of economic inequality. Like many radical feminists, she discusses how factors such as violence, sexuality and culture can maintain patriarchy. Like liberal feminists, she attaches some importance to changes in the law and accepts that in some respects women's campaigns have won important citizenship rights. Walby recognizes that patriarchy has undergone significant changes and she attempts to explain and understand these changes through the use of the concepts of private and public patriarchy.

Nevertheless, her work has been criticized. Floya Anthias and Nira Yuval-Davis (1992) criticize her for using what they see as a three-systems approach. According to them, Walby treats gender, 'race' and class as separate systems which interact with one another. Anthias and Yuval-Davis believe that patriarchy, capitalism and racism are all part of one system which advantages some groups and disadvantages others.

Jackie Stacey (1993) praises Walby for 'an all-encompassing account of the systematic oppression of women in society' and for showing an awareness of historical changes in the position of women. However, she criticizes her for her use of the concept of structure. Stacey says that 'some structures are

more clearly conceptualised than others (for example, paid employment and culture)'. In the case of some other structures, Walby does not make such a good case for the existence of relatively fixed relationships which contain women. Stacey believes that Walby neglects 'any consideration of identity and lived experience' by focusing on a structuralist analysis which 'fails to explain how people negotiate such a system'.

To Stacey, good feminist sociology pays more attention to the subjective states of women and to how women come to terms with or resist the oppression of which they are a victim. Similar reservations are expressed by Anna Pollert (1996) who questions the usefulness of the whole concept of patriarchy

Anna Pollert – *The Poverty of Patriarchy*

Anna Pollert (1996) has criticized the use of the term patriarchy by feminists in general, and by Sylvia Walby in particular. She notes that feminists have attacked the use of male 'grand narratives', such as the Marxist analysis of capitalism and the whole idea of progress, but have stubbornly stuck to using the idea of patriarchy. Pollert, on the other hand, believes that the concept is of little use and tends to hold back feminist analysis rather than helping it to develop.

Pollert's central point is that the idea of patriarchy often involves the use of a circular argument. Patriarchy is used both as a description of inequalities between men and women and as an explanation of those inequalities. She uses the example of Heidi Hartmann's work (see pp. 149–50). According to Pollert, Hartmann sees patriarchy as based upon male control over female labour power. In doing so, she fails to explain how men come to control women's labour power in the first place. Hartmann argues that the control comes from the exclusion of women from independent work and control over their work, but this can only be explained in terms of the control over women's labour power which it is supposed to be explaining. Thus Pollert believes that Hartmann is arguing, in effect, that men have control over women because men have control over women. Such circular arguments are typical of most theories that employ the concept of patriarchy.

Other theories, such as that of Walby, can be criticized because they claim, but fail to establish, that patriarchy is a system which forms part of society. Thus Walby sees patriarchy as a system which is sustained by sub-structures such as violence, sexuality, culture, and so on. Pollert does not believe that patriarchy is a system or a structure in the same sense as capitalism. She says that 'there is no intrinsic motor or dynamic within "patriarchy" which can explain its self-perpetuation. Capitalism, on the other hand, does have such an internal dynamic: the self-expansion of capital – profit – which drives the system.' Capitalists are constrained to pursue profit. If they fail to do so, they will go out of business. Gender systems are not constrained in the same way. Men and women can treat each other differently, or even change sex, 'without social production grinding to a halt, or abolishing all gender relations between men and women'.

Pollert believes that theories such as those of Walby lose sight of 'agency'. That is, they neglect the choices made by individual actors as they reproduce or resist existing sets of social relationships. She describes Walby's division of patriarchy into six structures as 'an arbitrary exercise' which 'leads to the static perspective of arbitrating parts in which agency is even more absent than before.

Pollert believes that Walby has not succeeded in breaking free from dual systems theory, seeing capitalism and patriarchy as two separate if linked systems. Pollert argues they are not separate at all. She says 'class relations are infused with gender, race and other modes of social differentiation from the start'. Because class and gender are intertwined it is inappropriate to use structural analysis to understand how they relate to one another. Instead, it is necessary to carry out detailed empirical studies of how they and other social differences relate to each other in particular contexts.

Pollert is in favour of using a materialist analysis which stresses economic inequalities and favours detailed qualitative research. She herself has conducted research of this type with women working in a hosiery factory (Pollert, 1981). However, as Pollert acknowledges, this is not the only way in which sociologists have reacted to criticisms of structural concepts such as patriarchy. Postmodernists too have tended to reject any overarching theory of gender in favour of describing the viewpoints of different women. Pollert rejects postmodernism because it uses obscure language which is hard for ordinary people to understand. It is also relativistic, that is it records the viewpoints of different women but is unwilling to say that any viewpoint is stronger than any other. It therefore loses any sense of trying to change and improve the lives of women.

Notwithstanding Pollert's criticisms, postmodernism has become a major influence on the theories of gender which we will now consider.

a similar culture to white British. She could therefore 'hazard the guess that over the next decades in Britain the West Indian migrants and their children will follow in the steps of the Irish' and achieve almost complete assimilation into British society.

John Richardson and John Lambert – a critique of the immigrant-host model

Strengths and weaknesses of the immigrant-host model

Richardson and Lambert (1985) are generally critical of the immigrant-host model, but do believe that it has some strengths. They believe that the process of migration can influence relationships between ethnic groups and that it is therefore well worth studying. They argue:

> *The model effectively drew attention to the dislocation caused by migration, it bravely addressed the complexities of assimilation, and it demonstrated the dynamic processes of change, rather than settling for a misleadingly static view of black-white conflict.*
>
> Richardson and Lambert, 1985

It raised important issues and, although it 'failed to supply satisfactory answers to all the issues, at least it stimulated further development of the debates'.

Richardson and Lambert identify four main flaws or limitations in the immigrant-host model:

1 First, they argue that it tends to be unclear about the status of the different stages that are usually outlined. Sometimes it is seen as inevitable that a society will move through these stages with a gradual movement towards assimilation; at other times the process seems less than inevitable. Both Patterson and Park recognized that there could be long delays before a society moved on to the next stage and that sometimes reversals were possible. However, at times Park also suggested that the 'race relations cycle' was an inevitable process. Thus some of the theories contradict themselves. Richardson and Lambert argue that concepts like accommodation and assimilation 'are not really spelled out, and in practice it remains difficult to identify the exact stage of "adjustment" which has been reached'.

2 Second, Richardson and Lambert question the assumption built into these theories that assimilation is desirable. The theories tend to assume that migrant groups will, or should want to, give up their distinctive cultures to become fully integrated into the host society. They tend to neglect the possibility that both the immigrants and the hosts might value the cultural diversity of a multicultural society. The model also places most of the emphasis on the migrants changing and does not see the need for major changes in the host society. It can therefore be seen as ideologically biased in supporting the cultural domination of the majority ethnic group in a society.

3 Third, the immigrant-host model attaches little importance to the existence of racism as a cause of ethnic conflict and inequality. Many writers argue that, in Britain and elsewhere, ethnic conflict results from the deeply and widely held racist views of the host society. The hosts are far more than suspicious or cautious about the newcomers: they have been brought up to have stereotypical views and hostile attitudes. In Brixton, for example, it could be argued that the 'nicknames' and 'jocular remarks' described by Patterson were evidence of outright racism on the part of the white Londoners and were scarcely indicative of a 'live-and-let-live' attitude. (Racism is discussed in detail on pp. 237–49.)

4 Fourth, the immigrant-host model has been criticized by conflict theorists for assuming that there is a consensus in the host society. It hides divisions between males and females and different classes as well as between ethnic groups. It tends to ignore the cultural diversity and the wide variations in values that may already exist in the host society. For example, some groups may be very strongly opposed to immigration and hold entrenched racist views while other groups might welcome cultural diversity and be in favour of relaxing or removing immigration controls.

Conclusion

While processes of migration remain important, it can be argued that they are becoming less important in Britain. As discussed above (see p. 216), increasing proportions of the main ethnic minority groupings have been born in Britain and are not migrants. They can be seen as belonging to one of an increasingly diverse range of British cultures. It is no longer possible (if it ever was) to see Britain as possessing one dominant culture from which other cultures diverge. As will be discussed later, some sociologists see Britain as possessing a range of increasingly well-established new ethnicities (see pp. 272–6). These may be hybrids of different cultural traditions. They are too far removed from the process of migration to be seen in terms of an immigrant-host model.

Stephen Castles and Godula Kosack – a Marxist view of migration

In a 1973 study of migration to France, Germany, Britain and Switzerland, Castles and Kosack advanced a very different theory of migration from the immigrant-host model. Rather than seeing relations between immigrants and hosts in terms of cultural differences, they argued that migration had to be