

Contemporary Sociological Theory and Its Classical Roots

The Basics

THIRD EDITION

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pp. 735–740. Examination of the history and current status of exchange theory whose senior author is one of the most important living contributors to that theory.

- NOAH FRIEDKIN "Exchange Networks." In George Ritzer, ed., *The Encyclopedia of Social Theory*, 2 volumes. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2005, pp. 264–265. Entry focused on the concept that gets to the heart of a more integrated exchange theory.
- IRA COHEN "Structuration." In George Ritzer, ed., *The Encyclopedia of Social Theory*, 2 volumes. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2005, pp. 811–814. Readable overview of Giddens's dense and difficult structuration theory by one of its foremost analysts.
- IRA COHEN *Structuration Theory*. London: Macmillan, 1989. Makes structuration theory as accessible as possible.
- IAN CRAIB *Anthony Giddens*. London: Routledge, 1992. A critical examination of Giddens's work, including structuration theory.
- MARGARET ARCHER *Culture and Agency: The Place of Culture in Social Theory*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988. The source for Archer's views on Giddens and her own ideas on the integration of culture and agency.
- DAVID SWARTZ *Culture and Power: The Sociology of Pierre Bourdieu*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997. Excellent overview of the contributions of Pierre Bourdieu to social theory.
- CRAIG CALHOUN "Pierre Bourdieu." In George Ritzer, ed., *The Blackwell Companion to Major Social Theorists*. Malden, MA, and Oxford, England: Blackwell, 2000, pp. 696–730. Much briefer review of Bourdieu's work and contributions.
- RICHARD JENKINS "Pierre Bourdieu." In George Ritzer, ed., *The Encyclopedia of Social Theory*, 2 volumes. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2005, pp. 66–71. Broad overview of the person and his work that includes a discussion of the relationship between habitus and field.
- RICHARD JENKINS "Habitus." In George Ritzer, ed., *The Encyclopedia of Social Theory*, 2 volumes. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2005, pp. 352–353. More detailed examination of the best-known and most influential of Bourdieu's concepts.

Contemporary Feminist Theories

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The Basic Theoretical Questions

The Classical Roots

Contemporary Feminist Theories

Toward a Feminist Sociological Theory

Summary

Suggested Readings

Feminist theory is a generalized, wide-ranging system of ideas about social life and human experience developed from a woman-centered perspective. It is woman-centered in two ways. First, the starting point of all its investigation is the situations and experiences of women in society. Second, it seeks to describe and critically evaluate the world from the distinctive vantage points of women. Feminist theory differs from most sociological theories in that it is the work of an interdisciplinary community. Feminist sociologists seek to broaden and deepen sociological knowledge by incorporating discoveries being made by this interdisciplinary community.

This chapter has four main sections: an overview of the basic questions that guide feminist theory; a sketch of the classical roots of contemporary feminist theory; a description of the various types of contemporary feminist theory, emphasizing the contributions of sociologists to those theories; and an integrated statement of a general feminist sociological theory developed out of these various theoretical traditions. The theoretical traditions are presented in terms of basic questions of feminism.

feminist theory A generalized, wide-ranging system of ideas about social life and human experience developed from a woman-centered perspective.

THE BASIC THEORETICAL QUESTIONS

Historically feminist theory has developed in relation to feminist activism, which is usually described in terms of “waves” of collective mobilization. The classic roots of contemporary feminist theory are in first-wave feminist activism (ca. 1848–1920), which centered on women’s struggle for the vote and for admission to the political process. Contemporary feminist theory began with second wave activism (1960–1990), which worked to translate basic political rights into tangible economic and social equality with men, and is continued in third-wave activism (1990–present), which will be determined by those of you who will spend the majority of your life in the 21st century.

The impetus for contemporary feminist theory begins in a deceptively simple question: *And what about the women?* In other words: Where are the women in any situation being investigated? If they are not present, why? If they are present, what exactly are they doing? How do they experience the situation? What do they contribute to it? What does it mean to them?

A half century of posing this question has produced some general conclusions. Women are present in most social situations. Where they are not present, the reason is not because of their lack of ability or interest but because there have been deliberate efforts to exclude them. Where they are present, women have played roles very different from the popular conception of them (e.g., as passive wives and mothers). Indeed, as wives and as mothers and in a series of other roles, women have, along with men, actively created the social world. Yet though women are actively present in most social situations, academics and people in general, both male and female, have often been blind to their presence. Moreover, women’s roles in most social situations, although essential, have been different from and less privileged than those of men. Their invisibility is only one indicator of this inequality.

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

The third question for all feminists is: *How can we change and improve the social world to make it a more just place for all people?* This commitment to social transformation in the interest of justice is the distinctive characteristic of critical social theory. This commitment is shared in sociology by feminism, Marxism, neo-Marxism, and social theories being developed by racial, ethnic and sexual minorities and in postcolonial societies. The commitment to critical theory

requires that feminist theorists ask how their work will improve the lives of the people they study.

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

But feminist theory is not just about women, nor is its major project the creation of a middle-range theory of gender relations. Posing and answering feminist theory’s basic questions has produced a theory of social life universal in its applicability and comparable to the revolution in thought produced by Marx. Marx, more than a century ago, showed social scientists that the knowledge people assumed to be an absolute and universal statement of truth about society in fact reflects the experiences of those who economically and politically rule the social world and that it is possible to view the world from the vantage point of the world’s workers, the economically and politically subordinate. Today, feminism’s basic theoretical questions are producing a similar radical transformation of our understanding of the world. What we have taken as universal and absolute knowledge is in fact knowledge derived from the experiences of a powerful section of society, men as masters. That master’s knowledge is relativized if we rediscover the vantage point of women who though subordinated have been indispensable in sustaining and recreating the society we live in.

Feminism not only relativizes established knowledge, but also deconstructs such knowledge. Feminism deconstructs established systems of knowledge by showing their masculinist bias and the gender politics framing and informing them. But feminism itself is now experiencing two relativizing and deconstructionist pressures. First, women of color, women in postcolonial societies, working-class women, lesbians are confronting the white, privileged-class, heterosexual status of many leading feminists. These women, speak from what bell hooks calls margin to center and question whether there is a unitary woman’s standpoint. Second, a growing postmodernist literature (see Chapter 9) raises questions about the reality of gender and of the individual self and hence challenges the validity of talking about a standpoint of women. Nevertheless, the practice of doing theory from the standpoint of women remains vital in sociology because empirically one half of the world’s population in their daily lives know themselves, are interacted with by others, and defined by macrostructures as “women.”

THE CLASSICAL ROOTS

Posing the question “And what about the women?” has resulted in studies like our own work in the history of women in sociology, *The Women Founders: Sociology and Social Theory, 1830–1930*. This work shows within the discipline of sociology itself the ways that women can be major players in the creation and

Harriet Martineau

Biographical Vignette (1802–1876)

Born on June 12, 1802 in Norwich, England to a Unitarian manufacturing family, Harriet Martineau received a good education for a woman in her times because of the family's religious principles which emphasized human reason as the way to transcendental experience. But she was left penniless with the failure of the father's textile business in 1829 and had to choose, as she later said, between making her living by the needle or by the pen. She had written for Unitarian publications in her youth with success in the form of monetary prizes and so she turned to writing. She became a household name in England, outselling even Charles Dickens, with the publication of *Illustrations of Political Economy* (1832–1834), a series of novels designed to teach the general public the principles of what was then economics. The effort left her with enough financial independence to be able to choose her new project and at the same time disillusioned with the possibilities of economics. She turned to the new science of sociology and to a test of this new science in the new world, the United States, where she felt she would be able to view a society in the making (a view shared by her contemporary Alexis de Tocqueville (see Chapter 1), whose time in America overlapped with hers). On her way to the U.S. in 1835, she drafted the first methods text in sociology, *How to Observe Morals and Manners*. She used many of the principles therein as a guide to the field research that produced *Society in America* in 1836/37. In 1853, she published her translation, reorganization, and abridgement of Auguste Comte's six-volume *Positive Philosophy*, a version Comte liked so much that he had it retranslated into French, where it became a standard version. Long-recalled only for this last work, Martineau is now being studied for her original work of the 1830s and recognized as being, along with Comte, one of the inventors of sociology. Martineau was a prolific writer in many genres of literature, publishing some seventy books and over 1500 newspaper articles. Deaf from her early teens, she was the first sociologist to write about illness and disability. She died on June 27, 1876.

development of a field and yet have their contributions remain invisible—a process we call “erasure.” Women were active creators of both sociology and social theory in the first century of the discipline. Indeed, the claim can be made that in the founding generation, it was the work of a woman, Harriet Martineau (1802–1876), along with Auguste Comte (see Chapter 2), that produced the first formal mapping of sociology as a way of thinking and as a method (see Biographical Vignette). Later, in the classic generation (1890–1930), at the same time that Durkheim, Weber, Simmel and Mead were creating what would become the academic field of sociology, a group of women who formed a broad and connected network of social reformers were also developing pioneering sociological theories.

These women included Jane Addams (1860–1935), Anna Julia Cooper (1858–1964), Charlotte Perkins Gilman (1860–1935), Florence Kelley (1859–1932), Beatrice Potter Webb (1858–1943), Marianne Weber (1870–1954), and

Ida B. Wells-Barnett (1862–1931). With the possible exception of Cooper, they can all be connected through their relationship to Jane Addams—and Cooper was influenced by Addams. That they have not been known or recognized in conventional histories of the discipline as sociologists or sociological theorists is dramatic evidence of the power of gender politics within sociology. Although the sociological theory of each of these women is a product of individual theoretical effort, when they are read collectively, they represent a coherent statement of early feminist sociological theory.

The chief hallmarks of their theories are characteristics they share with contemporary feminist sociological theory and are also the very qualities which may account for their being passed over in the development of professional academic sociology. First, they practice a critical rather than a descriptive or even simply explanatory analysis. They understand sociology as part of the general progressive movement of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries and claim that the purpose of sociology is social amelioration and that the main problem to be ameliorated is social inequality. Second, they emphasize women's experience and women's lives and works as being equal in importance to men's. A third hallmark is a conscious awareness that they—like all people—speak from a situated and embodied standpoint and that this understanding must be central to sociological method. And, fourth, they have a concern with *domination* as the chief practice by which inequality is maintained in the world; domination is the power relation in which the superordinate makes the subordinate an instrument of his will, denying the subordinate's individual capacity for thought and opinion.

What distinguishes the classical women theorists from each other is the nature of and the remedy for the inequality on which they focused—gender, race, or class, or the intersection of these factors. But all these women translated their views into social and political activism and helped shape and change the North Atlantic societies in which they lived. This activism was as much a part of their sense of practicing sociology as was creating theory. They believed in social science research as part of both the theoretical and activist practices of sociology. They were, consequently, highly creative innovators of social science method. As the developing discipline of sociology marginalized these women as sociologists and sociological theorists, it often incorporated their research methods into its own practices, while using the women's activism as an excuse to define them as “not sociologists.” Thus, the women are remembered as social activists, community organizers, and social workers rather than sociologists. Their heritage is a sociological theory that is a call to action as well as to thought.

CONTEMPORARY FEMINIST THEORIES

In this section we look at how feminist sociologists have incorporated the insights of feminist theory into the theory and practice of sociology. The first basic point is that feminist theory takes several forms. One map of this variety is given by sociologist Judith Lorber in terms of how the theories approach gender

inequality. She identifies three approaches: theories that aim to “reform” the gender system by equalizing opportunities for women and men—including liberal and socialist theories; theories that aim to “resist” the gender system by actively promoting the value of women’s ways of being—including radical, cultural, and psychoanalytic theories; and theories that “rebel” against the gender system by challenging the existence of gender itself—including post-modern and queer theories. We offer a somewhat different mapping from Lorber—but the important first point is that while there is variety within feminist theory, there is an underlying unity based in a dedication to understanding and improving women’s position in society.

Our typology classifies the various feminist theories in terms of their answer to feminism’s most basic question, “And what about the women?” In our mapping, there are four basic answers to this question.

1. Women’s location in, and experience of, most situations is *different* from that of the men in those situations.
2. Women’s location in most situations is not only different from but also less privileged than or *unequal* to that of men.
3. Women’s situation also has to be understood in terms of a direct power relationship between men and women. Women are *oppressed*: that is, restrained, subordinated, molded, and used and abused by men.
4. Women’s experiences of difference, inequality, and oppression vary according to their total location within societies’ arrangements of *structural oppression* or vectors of oppression and privilege: class, race, ethnicity, age, affectional preference, marital status, and global location.

These general answers can be further broken down in terms of the second basic question of feminist theory, “Why is all this as it is?” (see Table 8.1).

Table 8.1 needs to be read with the following cautions in mind. One caution is that the typology outlines theoretical positions, not the location of specific theorists; a given theorist may write over the course of a career from several of these positions. A second caution is that feminist theory and feminist sociological theory are dynamic enterprises that change over time. Over the last few years, there has been a steady movement toward synthesis, toward seeing how elements of these various theories complement each other. There has also been a shift in the focus of much feminist theorizing from women’s oppression to oppressive practices and structures that impact the lives of the majority of the world’s population, men and women. A major line of tension has developed between interpretations that emphasize culture and meaning and those that emphasize the material consequences of power. Part of this debate over what explains most—meaning or materiality—has focused on problematizing gender. Theorists are exploring and deconstructing the taken-for-granted meanings of gender. And finally, the theories identified in the chart do not exist on a level playing field: at this moment, some are relatively dormant, that is, have made significant contributions in the past but are not now being elaborated—most notably psychoanalytic feminism but also to some degree radical feminist

TABLE 8.1 Overview of Varieties of Feminist Theory

Basic varieties of feminist theory— answers to the descriptive question: What about the women?	Distinctions within theories— answers to the explanatory question: Why is women’s situation as it is?
<i>Gender Difference</i>	
Women’s location in, and experience of, most situations is <i>different</i> from those of men in the situation.	Cultural feminism Phenomenological Institutional Interactional
<i>Gender Inequality</i>	
Women’s location in most situations is not only different but also less privileged than or <i>unequal</i> to that of men.	Liberal feminism Rational Choice feminism
<i>Gender Oppression</i>	
Women are <i>oppressed</i> , not just different from or unequal to, but actively restrained, subordinated, molded, and used and abused by men.	Psychoanalytic feminism Radical feminism
<i>Structural Oppression</i>	
Women’s experiences of difference, inequality, and oppression vary by their social location within capitalism, patriarchy, and racism.	Socialist feminism Intersectionality theory

theory; other theories are currently dynamic and expanding—most notably, ethnomethodology and intersectionality.

Gender Difference

By “theories of gender difference,” we mean theories that describe, explain, and trace the implications of ways men and women are or are not the same in behavior and experience. Theories of gender difference have to confront the problem of “the essentialist argument.” The essentialist argument is the thesis that the fundamental differences between men and women are givens that cannot be changed. That immutability is traced to three factors: biology, the needs of social institutions for men and women to perform different roles, and the mental need humans have to think in terms of a category of “Otherness” as part of defining the self. The closest feminist theory and feminist sociological theory come to the essentialist argument is in theories of sociobiology. Sociologist Alice Rossi has explored the thesis that human biology determines many social differences between men and women. But overall the feminist

response to sociobiology has been oppositional. We will look at theories of gender difference in terms of general feminist theory, first, and then sociological theories of gender difference.

General Feminist Theories of Difference

There are two major theories of gender difference in general feminist theory: cultural feminism and existential (or phenomenological) feminism.

Cultural feminism is unique among theories analyzed here because it does not focus on explaining the origins of difference but rather it explores (and celebrates) the social value of women's distinctive ways of being, that is, of the ways in which women are different from men. This approach allows cultural feminism to sidestep rather than resolve problems posed by the essentialist thesis. The essentialist thesis was first used against women in male patriarchal discourse to claim that women are inferior to men. But that argument was reversed by some First Wave feminists who created cultural feminism. Cultural feminism extols the positive qualities of what it defines as "the female character" or "personality." Theorists such as Margaret Fuller, Frances Willard, Jane Addams, and Charlotte Perkins Gilman argued that the governing of society needed women's virtues like cooperation, pacifism, and nonviolence in the settling of disputes. This tradition has continued in the present day in arguments about women's distinctive standards for ethical judgment, mothers' particular quality of consciousness, female communication style, women's capacity for openness to emotion, women's lower level of aggression than men. The best-known contemporary work of this type is psychologist Carol Gilligan's thesis that women make their moral decisions based on "an ethic of care" which is different from what she sees as the typical male ethic, an ethic of rights derived from abstract principles. Cultural feminism suggests that women's ways of being may be a healthier template for producing a just society than those of an androcentric (or male-centered) culture.

Existential or phenomenological feminism has developed one of the most enduring themes of feminist theory: that women are marginalized as "Other" in a male-created culture. This theme is given its classic formulation in Simone de Beauvoir's analysis in *The Second Sex*. The theme has also been developed by Mary Daly in *Beyond God the Father: Toward a Philosophy of Women's Liberation*, a text widely used in the sociology of religion. Existential or phenomenological feminism sees people being born into a world that is shaped by a culture that reflects male experience and ignores or marginalizes women's experience. De Beauvoir argues that human thought and culture tend to organize around

a binary opposition—an either/or logic. A major binary opposition is male/female. One is either male or female. But de Beauvoir says, in a world built on male experience, woman is not just part of either/or, she is "Other." Woman is assigned all the "other" qualities that are the opposite of the agentic male subject. She is seen as passive where he is active, as timid where he is brave, as simple where he is complex, etc. Women's difference from men results in part from this fact of cultural construction which excludes them. It also results in part from their internalizing this "otherness" so that they do not experience themselves as actors in the world but as objects that wait for men to desire them. Existential or phenomenological feminism raises crucial questions about difference: can women liberate themselves from the status of object/other? Must they become like men to do so? One answer being asserted in French feminism by thinkers like Hélène Cixous and Luce Irigaray is that liberation will come for women only when they develop a consciousness and culture that is uniquely theirs.

Sociological Theories of Difference

Feminist institutional theory posits that gender differences result from the different roles that women and men play within various institutional settings. A major source of difference is the sexual division of labor in the family to which all people are socialized both as children and adults. This sexual division of labor links women to the functions of wife, mother, and household worker; to the private sphere of home and family; and thus to a lifelong series of events and experiences very different from those of men. Women's roles as mothers and wives in producing and reproducing a female personality and culture have been analyzed by theorists like Jessie Bernard in *The Future of Marriage* (see Liberal Feminism below), Nancy Chodorow in *The Reproduction of Mothering*, and Miriam Johnson in *Strong Mothers, Weak Wives*. Repeated experience in these settings is pictured as a carrying over into other institutions and producing differences between women and men in political behavior (e.g., the gender gap in voting), in choice of careers (e.g., the caring professions for women), in styles of corporate management, and in possibilities for advancement (e.g., the "mommy track"). Institutional placement theories have been subject to two criticisms. First, they do not account for the persistence of gender difference when men and women occupy the same institutional position. Second, many sociologists see these theories as presenting too static and deterministic a model.

Feminist interactionist theory is currently the most elaborated sociological understanding of the origins of gender difference. It is anchored in

cultural feminism A feminist theory that explores and celebrates the social value of women's distinctive ways of being.

existential or phenomenological feminism A feminist theory of difference that sees people born into a world shaped by culture that reflects male experience and ignores or marginalizes women's experience.

feminist institutional theory A feminist theory that sees gender differences as resulting from the different roles that women and men play within various institutional settings.

feminist interactionist theory A feminist theory that views gender as an accomplishment by skilled actors in interaction with others who hold them accountable for conforming to appropriate gender behavior.

ethnomethodology's analysis of gender as an *accomplishment*. Ethnomethodology (see Chapter 6) claims that institutional order, culture, and stratification are maintained by the ongoing activities of individuals in interaction. When this idea is applied by them to gender, it produces the understanding that "people do gender"—or what is called in shorthand "doing gender." West and Zimmerman's 1987 article "Doing Gender" distinguishes among sex, sex category, and gender. A baby is born with some configuration of biological sex (though this may be more or less clear); on the basis of what the adults attending to the birth interpret as its sex, the baby is assigned to a sex category; after that assignment, everyone around the child and the child itself over time begin to do gender, to act in ways considered appropriate to the sex category designations. The question of how they know what is appropriate is resolved in ethnomethodology by the principle of *accountability*—people do not just act any way they choose; people in interactions hold other people "accountable" for behaving in ways that are expected, or useful, or understandable.

Thus, gender is constantly being produced by people in interaction with each other as a way of making sense of and letting the world work. For instance, using the "right" public restroom is a way of avoiding all sorts of potential embarrassments; it is a method of getting through the day okay—and it is one so taken for granted that the person doing it hardly considers it doing gender. Ways of hugging, laughing, complaining—conveying the whole range of human emotions—are deeply gendered and are situationally enacted by people as they attempt to communicate with other people. Indeed, one question that emerges from the doing gender perspective is whether it is possible *not* to do gender.

While the elemental understanding of "doing" holds constant for women and men, interactionist theorists recognize that a part of the substance of the doing in gender is "doing difference," is acting to make distinctions, to distinguish oneself as masculine not feminine or, conversely, as feminine not masculine. These acts of distinction are repeated from situation to situation to maintain gender identity.

The major criticism of this approach is the sense—felt about much ethnomethodology—that it is not clear where the standards for accountability come from, that it is perhaps too voluntaristic in its orientation because people in individual interactions do for the most part produce remarkably similar behaviors in doing gender. Other sociologists have argued that the approach is too concerned with how gender gets reproduced and does not account enough for moments of resistance.

"Doing gender" as a theory has gained additional attention because of its similarities with the thesis of postmodernist philosopher Judith Butler that gender is a "performance." Everyday meanings of "doing" and "performance" have led to a confusion about whether the two ideas are really the same. Three differences are important. First, there is the difference in the beginning points of the two theories: the ethnomethodologists begin from an attempt to understand how gender is produced in everyday life; Butler begins from an unease with the most basic categories of feminism—"woman" and "gender." For Butler, the

category of woman arises out of the process that produces gender, a process she names "performativity." The concept of "performativity" comes from speech act theory where a performative is an act of speaking that makes something happen. For instance, according to this theory, when a minister says, "I now pronounce you man and wife," the act of speaking makes the marriage happen. Butler sees gender as arising as people perform it in interaction with each other. In Butler's thinking, people do not begin life with an internal identity as man or woman; rather they get hold of certain understandings of man and woman depending on their personal biographies and their locations in history. These meanings suggest ways of acting and as people look around they can see other people engaged in similar ways of acting. Thus, gender is created as people imitate other people trying to act in accord with culturally given ideas about masculinity and femininity. These ideas so effectively bring into being what they name that people take as real the idea of a core gendered self—even though all that is really there is an ongoing chain of imitative performances.

A second difference between ethnomethodology and Butler's performativity is that ethnomethodology, like nearly all sociology, does believe in a unified, basically rational self—there is a being behind the doing (or the imitating) and that being makes choices. Butler like other postmodernists calls the existence of this unified self into question. A third difference is that ethnomethodology has in its principle of accountability a way of understanding what controls the particular "imitations" that a person undertakes to achieve.

In seeking to bring about change, theorists of difference demand that women's ways of being be recognized as viable alternatives to male modes and that public knowledge, academic scholarship, and the organization of social life be adjusted to take serious account of female ways of being. At its most militant, this theoretical approach makes the centuries-old feminist claim: When a major infusion of women's ways becomes part of public life, the world will be a safer, more just place for us all.

Gender Inequality

Four themes characterize feminist theories of gender inequality. Men and women are situated in society not only differently but also unequally. Women get less of the material resources, social status, power, and opportunities for self-actualization than do men who share their social location—whether it is a location based on class, race, occupation, ethnicity, religion, education, nationality, or any other socially significant factor. This inequality results from the organization of society, not from any significant biological or personality differences between women and men. All human beings are characterized by a deep need for freedom to seek self-actualization and by a fundamental malleability that leads them to adapt to the constraints or opportunities of the situations in which they find themselves. To say that there is gender inequality, then, is to claim that women are situationally less empowered than men to realize the need they share with men for self-actualization. All inequality theories assume that both women and men will respond fairly easily and naturally to more

egalitarian social structures and situations. They affirm, in other words, that it is possible to change the situation. In this belief, theorists of gender inequality contrast with the theorists of gender difference, who present a picture of social life in which gender differences are, whatever their cause, more durable, more penetrative of personality, and less easily changed.

Liberal Feminism The major expression of gender inequality theory is liberal feminism, which argues (1) that women may claim equality with men on the basis of an essential human capacity for reasoned moral agency, (2) that gender inequality is the result of a sexist patterning of the division of labor, and (3) that gender equality can be produced by transforming the division of labor through the repatterning of key institutions—law, work, family, education, and media. The basic ideas of liberal feminist theory have been so intertwined with the history of U.S. feminist activism, realized and elaborated in practice, and successfully incorporated into the daily life of the society, that its foundational principle now seems unremarkable. That principle is that women and men are equal, an idea now so taken-for-granted, that it may be hard to envision it as the starting point of a theory. But in 1848, at the time of the first women's rights convention in world history, at Seneca Falls, New York, women were only barely even second class citizens: They could neither vote nor serve on juries (even if the defendant was a woman) nor hold public office nor practice medicine or law or theology. If married, the woman could not hold property in her own name, claim her wages from work outside the home as her own, have a right to custody of her children in the case of divorce, or even sign her own will; her husband had the right and—many, including judges, held—the duty to physically chastise her, that is, to beat her in order to preserve order in the commonwealth. The Seneca Falls convention concluded with the adoption of “the Declaration of Sentiments,” which opens by revising the Declaration of Independence: “We hold these truths to be self-evident: that all men and women are created equal” (“and women” is added). This was a radical claim, both politically and conceptually. It situated the women's quest for justice in the intellectual discourses of the Enlightenment, the American and French revolutions, and the Abolitionist Movement, and it conceptualized the woman not in the context of home and family but as an autonomous individual with rights in her own person. These rights empower women to enter the political process to secure full equality through organized appeals to a reasonable public and the use of the state.

Liberal feminism, thus, rests on the beliefs that (1) all human beings have certain essential features—capacities for reason, moral agency, and self-actualization; (2) the exercise of these capacities can be secured through legal

liberal feminism A feminist theory of inequality that argues that women may claim equality with men on the basis of an essential human capacity for reasoned moral agency, that gender inequality is the result of a patriarchal and sexist patterning of the division of labor, and that gender equality can be produced by transforming the division of labor through the repatterning of key institutions—law, work, family, education, and media.

recognition of universal rights; (3) the inequalities between men and women assigned by sex are social constructions having no basis in “nature”; and (4) social change for equality can be produced by an organized appeal to a reasonable public and use of the powers of government.

Where cultural feminism (see Gender Difference above) argued that women had a duty to bring from home and family their ways of knowing to the running of the state, classical liberal feminism argued that women, like men, carried in their human personhood the right to participate in the government of society on their own behalf.

Contemporary liberal feminism has become the foremost theoretical proponent of gender as a social construction, divorced from biology. It is the ideas and practices associated with gender that lead to differences in the treatment of men and women. All such practices of differential treatment are seen as unjust, unfair, and disadvantageous to women.

The fact that such barriers existed and that attempts to remove them met with intense resistance is explained by liberal feminists in terms of **sexism**, which is defined as a system of discriminatory attitudes and practices connected by a theme of privileging male experience and devaluing female experience. Contemporary feminist theory has expanded to include a global feminism which confronts racism in North Atlantic societies and works for the human rights of women everywhere.

In sociology, contemporary liberal feminism is in part focused on the intellectual project of defining gender as a structure. Barbara Risman contrasts this approach with past analyses that have explained gender in terms of social structure (such as those of institutional placement discussed above under Gender Difference). Risman argues that gender must be understood as a highly complex structure in its own right; a structure that patterns human behavior at three levels—individual, cultural/interactional, and institutional—and creates a system of stratification. Liberal feminism sees that gender as a system of stratification produces a gendered division of labor, an organization of society into public and private spheres, and a cultural dimension of sexist ideology.

The sexual division of labor in modern societies divides production in terms of genders and areas of life called “spheres” which are denoted as “public” and “private.” Women are given primary responsibility for the private sphere. Men are given privileged access to the public sphere, which liberal feminists see as the sphere that offers the major rewards of social life—money, power, status, freedom, opportunities for growth, and self-worth. The fact that women have the access to the public sphere that they do is one of the achievements of liberal feminism. The two spheres interact in the lives of women more than they do in men's, and both spheres are shaped by patriarchal ideology and sexism which are pervasive in mass culture.

sexism A system of discriminatory attitudes and practices connected by a theme of privileging male experience and devaluing female experience.

One feature of contemporary liberal feminist sociology is the attempt to understand the interactions of these spheres in women's lives. Arlie Hochschild in *The Second Shift* and *The Time Bind* has been the primary theorist naming the tensions women face. On the one hand, women find their experience within the public sphere of education, work, politics, and public space still limited by practices of discrimination, marginalization, and harassment. On the other hand, in the private sphere, they find themselves in a "time bind" as they return home from paid employment to a "second shift" of home and child care infused by an ideology of intensive mothering. Women's ability to compete in career and profession is hindered by the demands of the private sphere and by what Joan Williams calls "the ideal worker norm" of the public sphere. The ideal worker norm assumes the life schedule available to the typical male worker as the basis for organizing and evaluating all work; this assumption puts women workers, who carry "the second shift," at an ongoing disadvantage.

A recurring theme in liberal feminist analysis is the problem of achieving equality in marriage. This theme is given its classic formulation in Jessie Bernard's *The Future of Marriage*, which addresses the recurring topic of the problem of achieving equality in marriage. Bernard analyzes marriage as at one and the same time a cultural system of beliefs and ideals, an institutional arrangement of roles and norms, and a complex of interactional experiences for individual women and men:

1. Culturally, marriage is idealized as the destiny and source of fulfillment for women; a mixed blessing of domesticity, responsibility, and constraint for men; and for American society as a whole, an essentially egalitarian association between husband and wife.
2. Institutionally, marriage empowers the role of husband with authority and with the freedom, indeed, the obligation, to move beyond the domestic setting; it meshes the idea of male authority with sexual prowess and male power; and it mandates that wives be compliant, dependent, self-emptying, and essentially centered on the activities and demands of the isolated domestic household.
3. Experientially then there are two marriages in any institutional marriage:
 - The man's marriage, in which he holds to the belief of being constrained and burdened, while experiencing what the norms dictate: authority; independence; and a right to domestic, emotional, and sexual service by the wife.
 - The wife's marriage, in which she affirms the cultural belief of fulfillment, while experiencing normatively mandated powerlessness and dependence, an obligation to provide domestic, emotional, and sexual services, and a gradual dwindling away of the independent young person she was before marriage.

The results of all this are to be found in the data that measure human stress: Married women, whatever their claims to fulfillment, and unmarried men, whatever their claims to freedom, rank high on all stress indicators, including heart palpitations, dizziness, headaches, fainting, nightmares, insomnia, and

Jessie Bernard (1903–1996)

A Biographical Vignette

Bernard's life is marked by a series of transitions, or "outgrowths," from old to new ways of being. Born Jessie Ravitch on June 8, 1903, in Minneapolis, she made her first outgrowth when she moved from her Jewish immigrant family to the University of Minnesota at the age of 17. At the university, she studied with Pitirim Sorokin, who later founded the Harvard sociology department, and with L. L. Bernard, who helped found the *American Sociological Review* and whom she married in 1925. Her study with Bernard gave her a grounding in positivistic sociology that showed in her later work in her ability to integrate quantitative research into increasingly qualitative and critical studies. She completed her Ph.D. at Washington University in St. Louis in 1935.

By the mid-1940s, the Bernards were at Pennsylvania State University, and Jessie was in the midst of outgrowing positivism. The Nazi Holocaust destroyed her faith that science could know and produce a just world, and she moved toward a sense of knowledge as contextualized rather than objective. She also began to establish an independent academic reputation. Her husband died in 1951, but she remained at Penn State until about 1960, teaching, writing, and raising her three children. In the 60s, she moved to Washington, D.C., to devote herself fully to writing and research.

The most dramatic outgrowth was in the last third of her life, from 1964 to her death in 1996. This period is significant for both Bernard's extraordinary output and what it says about career patterns in women's lives.

fear of nervous breakdown; unmarried women, whatever their sense of social stigma, and married men rank low on all the stress indicators. Marriage then is good for men and bad for women and will cease to be so unequal in its impact only when couples feel free enough from the prevailing institutional constraints to negotiate the kind of marriage that best suits their individual needs and personalities. Recent studies have suggested that Bernard's analysis still holds for most marriages but that some couples are achieving, through dedicated effort, the liberal feminist ideal of egalitarian marriage.

Liberal feminism's agenda for change is consistent with its analyses of the basis for claiming equality and the causes of inequality: They wish to eliminate gender as an organizing principle in the distribution of social goods, and they are willing to invoke universal principles in their pursuit of equality. They pursue change through law—legislation, litigation, and regulation—and through appeal to the human capacity for reasoned moral judgments, that is, the capacity of the public to be moved by arguments for fairness. They argue for:

- Equal educational and economic opportunities.
- Equal responsibility for the activities of family life.
- The elimination of sexist messages in family, education, and mass media.
- Individual challenges to sexism in daily life.

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

Rational choice feminist theory has been little developed since its original potential was suggested by Debra Friedman and Carol Diem in 1993 and reinforced by Janet Chafetz in 1997. We explore it briefly here because it offers a conceptual framework for refining the study of gender inequality proposed in liberal feminism. As its name suggests, rational choice theory (see Chapter 6) conceives of the human being as a rational decision-maker and it seeks to study social outcomes as the result of decisions by such people. Rational choice theory understands the rational decision-maker as a purposive actor who makes decisions based on the best information available to her and in terms of external and internal constraints. There are two kinds of external constraints—institutional constraints and opportunity costs. Institutional constraints are the ways that social structures function to limit one's agency. Opportunity costs are the benefits a person has to give up when deciding to pursue one course of action over another; the course of action not pursued is an opportunity cost—to do A, one must forego doing B. Internal restraints take the form of preferences—there are things that people would like or feel are necessary or good. In the context of explaining why women's condition is as it is, rational choice theory urges sociologists to consider women as rational decision-makers who labor under more institutional constraints and more pressing opportunity costs than do men. For instance, for women the "ticking of the biological clock" is a constant opportunity cost that they have to weigh as they make decisions about marriage and career. These opportunity costs may combine with institutional constraints to produce an outcome—when both are weighed by a purposive actor. For instance, a woman in medical school may be more influenced than a man by the need in her future to balance her medical practice with childcare responsibilities and this may affect her choice of specialty. Her understanding of the institutional constraints of some specialties may lead her to feel that dermatology is a better specialty than cardiology because of the absence of emergencies in the former.

Rational choice theory also offers possibilities for explaining collective outcomes like political action groups. Friedman and Diem look at Kristen Luker's

study of antichoice women and argue that the women in her study have benefited from the traditional role of wife and mother. The presence of on-demand abortion makes it more possible for women to compete in the economic job market and reduces the difference in the positions of men and women. But the antichoice women have chosen not to so compete and have made the institutional constraints of gender difference a part of their life choice equations. Introducing the possibility of such competition alters those equations and can be seen as hurting rather than helping these women.

The major contributions of rational choice theory are to give a way to analyze the specific mechanisms by which gender inequality is produced and to conceptualize women as actors whose choices are guided by a desire to produce the outcome that is most beneficial to them, given their preferences. "Preference" is an open concept and is not in anyway limited to wealth or material goods; it may as easily be marriage or children or a day to oneself. Feminist rational choice theory valorizes women's preferences by treating them as part of the actions of autonomous moral agents.

Gender Oppression

Theories of gender oppression describe women's situation as the consequence of a direct power relationship between men and women in which men have fundamental and concrete interests in controlling, using, subjugating, and oppressing women: that is, in the practice of domination. By **domination**, oppression theorists mean any relationship in which one party (individual or collective), the dominant, succeeds in making the other party (individual or collective) the subordinate, an instrument of the dominant's will, refusing to recognize the subordinate's independent subjectivity. Conversely, from the subordinate's viewpoint, it is a relationship in which the subordinate's assigned significance is solely as an instrument of the will of the dominant. Women's situation, then, for theorists of gender oppression, is centrally that of being used, controlled, subjugated, and oppressed by men.

This pattern of gender oppression is incorporated in the deepest and most pervasive ways into society's organization, a basic structure of domination most commonly called patriarchy. Patriarchy is not the unintended and secondary consequence of some other set of factors, like biology or socialization or sex roles or the class system. It is a primary power structure sustained by strong and deliberate intention. Indeed, to theorists of gender oppression, gender differences and gender inequality are by-products of patriarchy.

Two major variants of oppression theory are psychoanalytic feminism and radical feminism.

rational choice feminist theory Rational choice feminist theory sees women as rational decision-makers who labor under more institutional constraints and more pressing opportunity costs than men.

domination To oppression theorists, any relationship in which one party (individual or collective), the *dominant*, succeeds in making the other party (individual or collective) the *subordinate*, an instrument of the dominant's will, and refuses to recognize the subordinate's independent subjectivity.

Psychoanalytic Feminism Psychoanalytic feminism attempts to explain patriarchy by reformulating the theories of Freud and his intellectual heirs. These theories, broadly speaking, map and emphasize the emotional dynamics of personality, focusing on emotions often deeply buried in the subconscious or unconscious areas of the psyche; they also highlight the importance of infancy and early childhood in the patterning of these emotions. In attempting to use Freud's theories, however, feminists undertake a fundamental reworking of his arguments. They follow through on directions implied by Freud's theories while rejecting his gender-specific conclusions, which are sexist and patriarchal.

Psychoanalytical feminists operate with a particular model of patriarchy. Like all oppression theorists, they view patriarchy as a system in which men subjugate women. It is universal, pervasive in its social organization, durable over time and space, and triumphantly maintained in the face of occasional challenge. Distinctive to psychoanalytic feminism, however, is the view that this system is one that all men, in their individual daily actions, work continuously and energetically to create and sustain. Women resist only occasionally but are to be discovered far more often either acquiescing in or actively working for their own subordination. The puzzle that psychoanalytical feminists set out to solve is why men bring everywhere enormous, unremitting energy to the task of sustaining patriarchy and why there is an absence of countervailing energy on the part of women.

In searching for an explanation to this puzzle, these theorists give short shrift to the argument that a pragmatic calculation of practical benefits is sufficient for the intense energy that men invest in patriarchy, especially because men may not always and everywhere be certain that patriarchy is of unqualified value to them. Moreover, an argument anchored in the cognitive pursuit of self-interest suggests that women would as energetically mobilize against patriarchy. Instead, these theorists look to those aspects of the psyche so effectively mapped by the Freudians: the zone of human emotions, of half-recognized or unrecognized desires and fears, and of neurosis and pathology. Here they find a clinically proven source of extraordinary energy and debilitation, one springing from psychic structures too deep to be recognized or monitored by individual consciousness. In searching for the emotional underpinnings of patriarchy, psychoanalytical feminists have identified as one possible explanation for male domination of women the socioemotional environment in which the personality of the young child takes form.

Two important explorations by sociologists of early childhood development from a psychoanalytic perspective are Nancy Chodorow's *The Reproduction of Mothering* and Jessica Benjamin's *The Bonds of Love*. These works focus

on two facets of early childhood development: (1) the assumption that human beings grow into mature people by learning to balance a never-resolved tension between the desire for freedom of action—individuation—and the desire for confirmation by another—recognition; and (2) the observable fact that in all societies infants and children experience their earliest and most crucial development in a close, uninterrupted, intimate relationship with a woman, their mother or mother substitute.

As infants and young children, for considerable periods lacking even language as a tool for understanding experience, individuals experience their earliest phases of personality development as an ongoing turbulence of primitive emotions: fear, love, hate, pleasure, rage, loss, desire. The emotional consequences of these early experiences stay with people always as potent but often unconscious feeling memories. Central to that experiential residue is a cluster of deeply ambivalent feelings for the woman/mother/caregiver: need, dependence, love, possessiveness, but also fear and rage. Children's relationship to the father/man is much more occasional, secondary, and emotionally uncluttered.

From this beginning, the male child, growing up in a culture that positively values maleness and devalues femaleness and increasingly aware of his own male identity, attempts to achieve an early, rapid individuation and emotional separation from the woman/mother. This culturally induced separation is not only partial but also destructive in its consequences. In adulthood the emotional carryover from early childhood toward women—need, love, hate, possessiveness—energizes the man's quest for a woman of his own who meets his emotional needs and yet is dependent on and controlled by him: that is, he has an urge to dominate and finds mutual recognition difficult.

The female child, bearing the same feelings toward the woman/mother, discovers her own female identity in a culture that devalues women. She grows up with deeply mixed positive and negative feelings about herself and about the woman/mother and in that ambivalence dissipates much of her potential for mobilized resistance to her social subordination. She seeks to resolve her emotional carryover in adulthood by emphasizing her capacities for according recognition—often submissively with males in acts of sexual attraction and mutually with females in acts of kinship maintenance and friendship. And rather than seeking mother substitutes, she recreates the early infant-woman relationship by becoming a mother.

Psychoanalytical feminist theorists have extended the analyses beyond individual personality to Western culture. The emphases in Western science on a distinct separation between man and nature, on man as the dominator of nature, and on a scientific method derived from these attitudes and promising objective truth have been challenged and reinterpreted as the projection by the overindividuated male ego of its own desire for domination and its own fear of intersubjective recognition. Motifs in popular culture, such as the repeated positioning in both plot and image of the male as dominant over the female, are interpreted by psychoanalytical theorists as a sign of a breakdown in the requisite tensions between a need for individuation and a need for recognition. When

psychoanalytic feminism An effort to explain patriarchy through the use of reformulated theories of Freud and his successors in psychoanalytic theory.

patriarchy A system in which men subjugate women. It is universal, pervasive in its social organization, durable over time and space, and triumphantly maintained in the face of occasional challenge.

this breakdown reaches, in a culture or personality, severe enough proportions, two pathologies result: the overindividuated dominator, who recognizes the other only through acts of control, and the underindividuated subordinate, who relinquishes independent action to find identity only as a mirror of the dominator.

Psychoanalytical feminists, then, explain women's oppression in terms of men's deep emotional need to control women, a drive arising from near-universal male neuroses centering on ambivalence toward the mothers who reared them. Women either lack these neuroses or are subject to complementary neuroses, but in either case they are left psychically without an equivalent source of energy to resist domination. Much clinical psychiatric evidence supports the argument that these neuroses are in fact widespread in Western societies. But these theories, in drawing a straight line from universal human emotions to universal female oppression, fail to explore the intermediate social arrangements that link emotion to oppression and fail to suggest possible lines of variation in emotions, social arrangements, or oppression. Several theorists have discussed the unacknowledged ethnic, class, and nationality assumptions in these theories—their generalization from white, upper-middle-class, North Atlantic family experience. Moreover, and partly because of these omissions, psychoanalytic feminist theory suggests very few strategies for change, except perhaps that we restructure our childbearing practices. These theories thus give us some provocative insights into and deepen our understanding of the roots of gender oppression, but they require a great deal more elaboration of both sociological factors and change strategies.

Radical Feminism Radical feminism is based on two emotionally charged central beliefs: (1) that women are of absolute positive value as women, a belief asserted against what they claim to be the universal devaluing of women; and (2) that women are everywhere oppressed—violently oppressed—by the system of patriarchy. From this passionate mixture of love and rage, radical feminists elaborate a theory of social organization, gender oppression, and strategies for change. The classic statement of radical feminism is Adrienne Rich's "Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence." Sociological contributions to this perspective include Pauline Bart and Eileen Moran's *Violence Against Women: The Bloody Footprints*, and Diane Scully's *Understanding Sexual Violence: A Study of Convicted Rapists*.

Radical feminists see in every institution and in society's most basic structures—heterosexuality, class, caste, race, ethnicity, age, and gender—systems of oppression in which some people dominate others. Of all these systems of domination and subordination, the most fundamental structure of oppression is gender, the system of patriarchy. Not only is patriarchy historically

radical feminism A theory of social organization, gender oppression, and strategies for change that affirms the positive value of women and argues that they are everywhere oppressed by violence or the threat of violence.

the first structure of domination and submission, but it continues as the most pervasive and enduring system of inequality, the basic societal model of domination. Through participation in patriarchy, men learn how to hold other human beings in contempt, to see them as nonhuman, and to control them. Within patriarchy, men see and women learn what subordination looks like. Patriarchy creates guilt and repression, sadism and masochism, manipulation and deception, all of which drive men and women to other forms of tyranny. Patriarchy, to radical feminists, is the least noticed and yet the most significant structure of social inequality.

Central to this analysis is the image of patriarchy as violence practiced by men and by male-dominated organizations against women. Violence may not always take the form of overt physical cruelty. It can be hidden in more complex practices of exploitation and control:

- In standards of fashion and beauty.
- In tyrannical ideals of motherhood, monogamy, chastity, and heterosexuality.
- In sexual harassment in the workplace.
- In the practices of gynecology, obstetrics, and psychotherapy.
- In unpaid household drudgery and underpaid wage work.

Violence exists whenever one group controls in its own interests the life chances, environments, actions, and perceptions of another group, as men do women.

But the theme of violence as overt physical cruelty lies at the heart of radical feminism's linking of patriarchy to violence: rape, sexual abuse, femicide, enforced prostitution, spouse abuse, incest, sexual molestation of children, hysterectomies and other excessive surgery, the sadism in pornography, the historic and cross-cultural practices of witch burning, the stoning to death of adulteresses, the persecution of lesbians, female infanticide, Chinese foot-binding, the abuse of widows, and the practice of clitorrectomy.

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

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

rank orders to these functions and therefore lead to cross-cultural variations in the patterning of patriarchy. Radical feminists give us both an explanation of universal gender oppression *and* a model for understanding cross-cultural variations in this oppression.

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

How does one evaluate radical feminism? Emotionally each of us will respond to it in light of our own degree of personal radicalism, some seeing it as excessively critical and others as entirely convincing. But in attempting a theoretical evaluation, one should note that radical feminism incorporates arguments made by both socialist and psychoanalytical feminists about the reasons for women's subordination and yet moves beyond those theories. Radical feminists, moreover, have done significant research to support their thesis that patriarchy ultimately rests on the practice of violence against women. They have a reasonable, though perhaps incomplete, program for change. They have been faulted in their exclusive focus on patriarchy. This focus seems to simplify the realities of social organization and social inequality and thus to approach the issues of ameliorative change somewhat unrealistically.

Structural Oppression

Structural oppression theories, like gender oppression theories, recognize that oppression results from the fact that some groups of people derive direct benefits from controlling, using, subjugating, and oppressing other groups of people. These theories analyze how those interests in domination are enacted through mechanisms of social structure, that is, through recurring and routinized large-scale arrangements of social interaction. Structural oppression theorists see that these arrangements are always arrangements of power that have arisen over time. They focus on the structures of patriarchy, capitalism, racism, and heterosexism; and they locate enactments of domination and experiences of oppression in the interplay of these structures, that is, in the way they mutually enforce each other. Structural oppression theorists do not absolve individuals who engage in domination of responsibility for their actions, but they examine

how those individual actions are the product of structural arrangements. This section deals with two types of structural oppression theory: socialist feminism and intersectionality theory.

Socialist Feminism Socialist feminism attempts to achieve a critique of the distinctive yet interrelated oppressions of patriarchy and capitalism from a standpoint in women's experience. To do this, socialist feminists develop methods for social analysis out of an expanded understanding of Marxist historical materialism (Chapter 2). Socialist feminists seek to bring together what they perceive as the most valuable feminist traditions: Marxian and radical feminist thought.

Radical feminism, as discussed previously, is a critique of patriarchy. Marxian feminism like Marxian theory is a critique of capitalism that focuses on class oppression. The problematic part of the Marxian analysis is that it makes patriarchy a by-product of economic relations. Socialist feminists accept the radical feminist argument and proof that patriarchy, while interacting with economic conditions, is an independent structure of oppression.

Socialist feminism sets out to bring together these dual knowledges—knowledge of oppression under capitalism and of oppression under patriarchy—into a unified explanation of all forms of social oppression. One term used to try to unify these two oppressions is **capitalist patriarchy**. But the term perhaps more widely used is *domination* (defined previously). Socialist feminism's explanations of oppression present domination as a large-scale structural arrangement, a power relation between groups or categories of social actors. This structure of domination both patterns and is reproduced by the agency, the willful and intentional actions, of individual actors. Women are central to socialist feminism in two ways. First, as with all feminism, the oppression of women remains a primary topic for analysis. Second, women's location and experience of the world serve as the essential vantage point on domination in all its forms. Ultimately, though, these theorists are concerned with all experiences of oppression, either of women or of men. They also explore how some women, themselves oppressed, may yet actively participate in the oppression of other women, as, for example, privileged-class women in American society who oppress poor women. Indeed, one strategy of all socialist feminists is to confront the prejudices and oppressive practices *within* the community of women itself.

Both the focus on capitalist patriarchy and that on domination are linked to a commitment, either explicit or implicit, to historical materialism as an

socialist feminism An effort to develop a unified theory that focuses on the role of capitalism and patriarchy in creating a large-scale structure that oppresses women.

capitalist patriarchy A term that indicates that the oppression of women is traceable to a combination of capitalism and patriarchy.

analytical strategy. **Historical materialism**, a basic principle in Marxian social theory, refers to the claim that:

- The material conditions of human life, inclusive of the activities and relationships that produce those conditions, are the key factors that pattern human experience, personality, ideas, and social arrangements.
- Those conditions change over time because of dynamics immanent within them.
- History is a record of the changes in the material conditions of a group's life and of the correlative changes in experiences, personality, ideas, and social arrangements.

In linking historical materialism to their focus on domination, socialist feminists attempt to realize their goal of a theory that probes the broadest of human social arrangements, domination, and yet remains firmly committed to precise, historically concrete analyses of the material and social arrangements that frame particular situations of domination.

But in their use of the principle of historical materialism, socialist feminists move beyond the Marxians in three crucial ways.

First, they broaden the meaning of the concept of the "material conditions of human life." Marxians typically mean by this idea the economic dynamics of society, particularly the ways in which goods of a variety of types are created for and exchanged in the market. In these various exploitative arrangements, which make some wealthy and others poor, they locate the roots of class inequality and class conflict. Socialist feminist analysis includes economic dynamics but also other conditions that create and sustain human life: the human body, its sexuality and involvement in procreation and child rearing; home maintenance, with its unpaid, invisible round of domestic tasks; emotional sustenance; and the production of knowledge. In *all* these life-sustaining activities, exploitative arrangements profit some and impoverish others. This redefinition of the concept of material conditions transforms the Marxian assumption that human beings are producers of goods into a theme of human beings as creators and sustainers of all human life.

Second, socialist feminism emphasizes the role of ideas, which some Marxians dismiss as mere byproducts of economic life. The emphasis on ideas includes consciousness, motivation, ideas, social definitions of the situation, knowledge, texts, ideology, the will to act in one's interests or acquiesce to the interests of others. To socialist feminists all these factors deeply affect human

historical materialism The Marxian idea that the material conditions of human life, inclusive of the activities and relationships that produce those conditions, are the key factors that pattern human experience, personality, ideas, and social arrangements; that those conditions change over time because of dynamics immanent within them; and that history is a record of the changes in the material conditions of a group's life and of the correlative changes in experiences, personality, ideas, and social arrangements.

personality, human action, and the structures of domination that are realized through that action. Moreover, these ideas are produced by social structures that are inextricably intertwined with, and as elaborate and powerful as, those that produce economic goods. Within all these structures, too, exploitative arrangements enrich and empower some while impoverishing and immobilizing others.

Third, socialist feminist analysis is not primarily concerned with class inequality but with the complex intertwining of a wide range of social inequalities. Socialist feminism develops a portrait of social organization in which the public structures of economy, polity, and ideology interact with the intimate, private processes of human reproduction, domesticity, sexuality, and subjectivity to sustain a multifaceted system of domination. The workings of this system are discernible both as enduring and impersonal social patterns and in the more varied subtleties of interpersonal relationships. To analyze this system, socialist feminists shuttle between a mapping of large-scale systems of domination and a situationally specific, detailed exploration of the mundane daily experiences of oppressed people.

A contemporary socialist feminist classic, Chrys Ingraham's *White Weddings*, explores how capitalism, patriarchy, and racism play out in the institution of the wedding as an increasingly mandatory and enormously costly public ceremony marking two people's private intentions. Ingraham demonstrates the importance of the wedding for capitalism with raw financial data—this is a billion-dollar industry, part of the profits arising from the exploitation of workers around the world—about diamond mine workers in Africa, honeymoon resort workers in the Caribbean, sweatshop sewers of wedding gowns in Southeast Asia. She shows capitalism's ideological practices as it sells persistently the image of the wedding fantasy through toys, films, TV shows, and women's magazines. She also demonstrates how this ideological appeal is deeply intertwined with patriarchy. The ritual of the white wedding has become the sacred ceremony of what Adrienne Rich earlier termed "compulsory heterosexuality" and Ingraham calls heteronormativity. Heteronormativity lies at the heart of patriarchy. It is the collectively enforced belief that adult needs for family, security, and intimacy must only be satisfied in a relation between a man and a woman, that is, between two people who within patriarchy's gender stratification are unequal in power, rights, status. Ingraham shows how the white wedding is passionately desired by brides and their families because it encodes the "heterosexual imaginary": the idealized image of romantic love between a man and a woman that obscures and erases from the mind all knowledge of the work required to maintain a relation between unequals, the risks of noncommunication, and ultimately divorce. To be told, as women are, that one's wedding day is "the happiest day of one's life" is to say that one's significance as a human being is not in accomplishment but in being chosen as an object of desire.

Socialist feminists' program for change calls for a global solidarity among women to combat the abuses capitalism works in their lives, the lives of their communities, and the environment. They call on the feminist community to

Patricia Hill Collins (1948–)

A Biographical Vignette

Collins writes that her experiences of educational success were permeated by the counterexperience of being the first, or only, African-American (or woman, working-class person, etc.) in various social settings. She learned that educational success seemed to demand that she distance herself from her black working-class background. This created for her a loss of voice.

Her response to these tensions has been to formulate an alternative understanding of social theory and an alternative way of doing theory. This project led her to discover the theoretical voice of her community and to reclaim her own voice by situating it in that community. It culminated in *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and Empowerment* (1990), a landmark text in feminist and social theory. *Black Feminist Thought* presents social theory as the understandings of a specific group, black women; to this end, Collins draws on a wide range of voices—some famous; others obscure. What she presents is a community-based social theory that articulates that group's understanding of its oppression by intersections of race, gender, and class—and its historic struggle against that oppression. In 2009 Collins served as the first African-American Woman President of the American Sociological Association.

be ever vigilant about the dangers of their own co-optation into a privileged intelligentsia that serves capitalist interests. Their project is to mobilize people to use the state as a means for the effective redistribution of societal resources through the provision of an extensive safety net of public services like publicly supported education, health care, transportation, child care, housing; a progressive tax structure that reduces the wide disparities of income between rich and poor; and the guarantee of a living wage to all members of the community. They believe that this mobilization will be effective only if people become aware of and care about the life conditions of others as well as their own. The feminist social scientist's duty is to make visible and experientially real the material inequalities that shape people's lives.

Intersectionality Theory Intersectionality theory begins with the understanding that women experience oppression in varying configurations and in varying degrees of intensity. The explanation for that variation (and this explanation is the central subject of intersectionality theory) is that while all women potentially experience oppression on the basis of gender, women are, nevertheless, differentially oppressed by the varied intersections of other arrangements of social inequality. We may describe these arrangements of inequality

intersectionality theory The view that women experience oppression in varying configurations and in varying degrees of intensity.

as **vectors of oppression and privilege** (or in Patricia Hill Collins's phrase, "the matrix of domination" [1990]), which include not only gender but also class, race, global location, sexual preference, and age. The variation of these intersections qualitatively alters the experience of being a woman; and this alteration, this diversity, must be taken into account in theorizing the experiences of women. The argument in intersectionality theory is that the pattern of intersection itself produces a particular experience of oppression—not merely the salience of any one variable, the working out of one vector. Kimberly Crenshaw, for example, shows that black women frequently experience discrimination in employment because they are black women, but courts routinely refuse to recognize this discrimination—unless it can be shown to be a case of what is considered general discrimination, sex discrimination (read "white women") or race discrimination (read "black men"). In characterizing these as vectors of oppression and privilege, we wish to suggest a fundamental insight of intersectionality theories—that the privilege exercised by some women and men turns on the oppression of other women and men. Theories of intersectionality at their core understand these arrangements of inequality as hierarchical structures based in unjust power relations. The theme of injustice signals the consistent critical focus of this analysis.

Intersectionality theory recognizes the fundamental link between ideology and power that allows dominants to control subordinates by creating a politics in which difference becomes a conceptual tool for justifying arrangements of oppression. In social practice, dominants use differences among people to justify oppressive practices by translating difference into models of inferiority/superiority; people are socialized to relate to difference not as a source of diversity, interest, and cultural wealth but evaluatively in terms of better or worse. These ideologies operate in part by creating what Audre Lorde calls a mythical norm (in the United States, examples include white, thin, male, and heterosexual) against which people evaluate others and themselves. This norm not only allows dominants to control social production (both paid and unpaid), but it also becomes part of individual subjectivity—an internalized rejection of difference that can operate to make people devalue themselves; reject people from different groups; and create criteria within their own group for excluding, punishing, or marginalizing group members. Gloria Anzaldúa describes this last practice as **othering**, an act of definition done within a subordinated group to establish that a group member is unacceptable, an "other," by some criterion. This definitional activity, she points out, erodes the potential for coalition and resistance.

vectors of oppression and privilege The varied intersections of a number of arrangements of social inequality (gender, class, race, global location, sexual preference, and age) that serve to oppress women differentially. Variation in these intersections qualitatively alters the experience of being a woman.

othering An act of definition within a subordinated group to establish that a group member is unacceptable, an "other," by some criterion; this erodes the potential for coalition and resistance.

The intersection of vectors of oppression and privilege creates variations both in the forms and the intensity of people's experience of oppression. Much of the writing and research done out of an intersectionality perspective presents the concrete reality of people's lives as those lives are shaped by the intersections of these vectors. The most studied intersections by feminists are of gender and race, gender and class, and race, gender, class. Other analyses include gender and age, gender and global location, and gender and sexual preference.

In response to their material circumstances, women create interpretations and strategies for surviving and resisting the persistent exercise of unjust power. One part of the project of intersectionality theory is to give voice to the group knowledges worked out in specific life experiences created by historic intersections of inequality and to develop various feminist expressions of these knowledges, for example, black feminist thought or chicana feminism.

Intersectionality theory develops a critique of earlier feminist writings in which it sees that work reflecting the experience and concerns of white privileged-class feminists in North Atlantic societies. Some of this work of critique is paralleled by work done in postmodernism, but this parallelism should not be overstated. Intersectionality theory is one of the oldest traditions in feminism. This critique has produced questions about what we mean by categories such as woman, gender, race, and sisterhood. It has focused on the diversity of experience in such seeming universals as mothering and family and has reinterpreted theoretical works like the sociological-psychoanalytic studies of Chodorow. This critique has prompted a repositioning of the understandings of whiteness by white feminists who seek to understand whiteness as a construction, the ways that whiteness results in privilege, what they can actively do to reduce racism, and how they can contribute to producing a more inclusive feminist analysis.

This process of theory-building, research, and critique has brought intersectionality theory to one of its central themes and one of the central issues confronting feminism today: how to allow for the analytic principle and empirical fact of diversity among women, while at the same time holding to the valuational and political position that specific groups of women share a distinctive standpoint. Explaining **standpoint** (see the Key Concept box titled Standpoint), Patricia Hill Collins proposes that it is the view of the world shared by a group characterized by a heterogeneous commonality. Thus, Collins concludes that a group's standpoint is constituted not out of some essentialism but out of a recognition that everyone is in the same boat. Although vectors of oppression and privilege—race, class, gender, age, global location, sexual preference—intersect in all people's lives, these theorists argue that the way they intersect markedly affects the degree to which a common standpoint is affirmed. Among factors facilitating this affirmation are the group's existence over time, its sense of its own history as a group, its location in relatively segregated identifiable spaces,

and its development of an intragroup system of social organizations and knowledges for coping with oppression. But a group standpoint is never monolithic or impermeable; the very fact that the group is constituted out of intersections of vectors means that group members can pivot between varying senses of self. Group members frequently move from the home group into the larger society where their experience is that of **the outsider within**. Moreover, the home group is subject to permeation by outside ideas and is not undifferentiated; it has its own internal dynamics of difference and may even be constituted by its existence at what Anzaldúa names a cultural borderland. Intersectionality theorists warn that, although it is easy to locate the experience of intersection and of standpoint in individuals, this reductionism is theoretically and politically dangerous, erasing the historic structures of unequal power that have produced the individual experience and obscuring the need for political change.

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

TOWARD A FEMINIST SOCIOLOGICAL THEORY

Drawing on all the lines of feminist argument reviewed above, feminist sociologists have begun to create a general theory that addresses the key concerns of all sociological theories: the relation between social structure and individual action (or agency), the relation between macrosocial and microsocial, the nature of power, the causes of inequality, and the origins of change.

This emergent feminist theory views human agents as living and acting within a complex field of power that they are determined by and that in their agency they both reproduce and contest. Social life is presented as an ongoing series of enactments of oppression by agents who cannot be absolved from their responsibility for the reproduction of domination even when we can explain the social structures framing those enactments. Social life can also be understood as an ongoing series of individual and group responses to oppression, responses like coping, challenging, witnessing, subverting, rebelling, resisting—a politics of resistance in which individual and collective agency oppose structures and agents of domination. Significant to oppositional politics are the existence and persistence of group *standpoints* (see Key Concept box); these group standpoints are ways of understanding society that develop out of social structural

standpoint The perspective of embodied actors within groups that are differentially located in social structure.

the outsider within The frequent experience of group members when they move from the home group into the larger society.

Key Concept
Standpoint

Much of feminist theory is premised on the idea that people operate from a particular **standpoint** in the social world, from the perspective of the positions of embodied actors within groups that are differentially located in social structure. As a result, what everyone sees and knows is always partial and interested, never total and objective. Knowledge is produced in and varies among groups and, to some degree, among actors within groups. That knowledge is always affected by power relations—whether it is formulated from the standpoint of dominant or subordinate groups.

A feminist sociological theory begins here because feminists attempt to describe, analyze, and change the world from the standpoint of women, and because, working from women's subordinated position in social relations, feminist sociological theorists see that knowledge is part of the system of power governing the production of knowledge, as it governs all production in society. Feminist sociological theory attempts to alter the balance of power within sociological discourse—and within social theory—by establishing the standpoint of women as one of the standpoints from which social knowledge is constructed.

In attempting to do sociology from the standpoint of women, feminist sociological theorists have to consider what constitutes a standpoint of women. A standpoint is the product of a social collectivity with a sufficient history and commonality of circumstance to develop a shared knowledge of social relations. All women under patriarchy have been assigned to the tasks of social reproduction (childbearing, child-rearing, housekeeping, food preparation, care of the ill and dependent, emotional and sexual service); hence, this work, which is done without material compensation, is exploitative. This shared and historic relation to social reproduction in circumstances of subordination is the basis for the feminist claim of the standpoint of women, but the intersection of gender inequality with race inequality, class inequality, geo-social inequality, and inequalities based on sexuality and age produces a complex system of unequally empowered standpoint groups relating through shifting arrangements of coalition and opposition. These intersectionalities are now an integral part of the feminist description and analysis of women's standpoint.

arrangements and that serve as motivations for individual and group reproduction of or resistance to domination. Even though the structural determinist may argue that standpoints are the product of social structures, feminist analysis points to the human capacity to hope and act for better things even in circumstances of the most brutal oppression. Feminist analysis emphasizes the emotional responsiveness of embodied human subjects to structures, their capacity to respond in anger and to turn anger to constructive uses. The emotional response of anger—and the willingness to turn that anger into a stand against injustice or a demand for justice—cannot be accounted for by the structures

standpoint The perspective of embodied actors within groups that are differentially located in social structure.

of oppression that produce it. In this affirmation, feminism bases its hope for liberationist politics and offers a solution to the theoretical problematic of the structure versus agency debate.

Feminist theorists have also been developing a vocabulary for talking about the various and simultaneous realities of macro- and micro-relations. Dorothy Smith has introduced the concepts of relations of ruling; generalized, anonymous, impersonal texts; and local actualities of lived experience.

1. **Relations of ruling** refers to the complex, nonmonolithic but intricately connected social activities that attempt to control human social production.
2. Human social production must by its material nature occur at some moment in the **local actualities of lived experience**: that is, the places where some actual person sits while writing or reading a book (or plants food or produces clothing).
3. The relations of ruling in late capitalist patriarchy manifest themselves through **texts** that are characterized by their essential anonymity, generality, and authority. These texts are designed to pattern and translate real-life, specific, individualized experience into a language form acceptable to the relations of ruling. This criterion of acceptability is met when the text imposes the dominants' definition on the situation. The texts may range from contracts to police reports to official boards-of-inquiry statements to school certificates to medical records. Everywhere they alter the material reality—reinterpreting what has occurred, determining what will be possible. Thus, in seeking to interact with the relations of ruling, even at a fairly local level, a given individual (such as a student applying for a summer job in a restaurant owned by a family friend) finds that she or he must fill out some texts (e.g., tax forms) that have been established not by the employer face-to-face but by part of the apparatus of ruling. These texts continuously create intersections between the relations of ruling and the local actualities of lived experience. It is important to observe that this intersection works both ways: At some series of moments in historic time, embodied actors, situated in absolutely individual locations, sit at desks or computer workstations or conference tables generating the forms that will become part of the apparatus of ruling.

All three aspects of social life—relations of ruling, local actualities of lived experience, and texts—are widespread, enduring, constant features of the organization

relations of ruling The complex, nonmonolithic but intricately connected social activities that attempt to control human social production.

local actualities of lived experience The places where actual people act and live their lives.

texts "Written documents issued out of the relations of ruling, having the power to organize relations of production in the everyday life world and having the quality of generality and anonymity so that they may be seen as applicable in various everyday life circumstances; texts include licenses, diplomas, contracts, purchasing orders, laws, college catalogues, etc."

Dorothy E. Smith (1926–)

A Biographical Vignette

Dorothy E. Smith explained that her sociological theory derived from her life experiences as a woman, moving between the male-dominated academic sphere and the female life experience which she describes the single parent. Remembering herself studying for a doctorate in sociology as “not so much . . . a career as a series of contingencies, of accidents.” This theme of contingency is an important hallmark of her sociology of women.

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

Smith’s ideas are foundational to feminist macro-theory, integrated feminist-theory, and socialist feminism.

of social life and of domination. All three features at the same time can and must be studied as the actions, relationships, and work of embodied human subjects. Each dimension has its distinctive internal dynamic: the drive for control in the relations of ruling, the drive for production and communication in the local actualities, and the drive toward objectification and facticity in the generalized texts. This world is both gendered and racialized. Thus, although no one can totally escape life in the local actuality—everyone has to be physically somewhere in time and space—women are much more deeply implicated in the never-ending maintaining of the local actualities, and men are much freer to participate as dominants in the relations of ruling; these same divisions are repeated for economic and racial subordinates and dominants. The texts that strive for objectification and facticity are drawn in ways that make it impossible for all to share equally in the activity the text organizes. Those inequalities are created along lines of race, gender, class, age, global location; that is, difference is an organizational principle of the texts of the relations of ruling. Through this lens the elements of structure and interaction are fused. Domination and production become the problematic, and their manifestations involve and thus absorb the age-old sociological distinctions of micro-macro and agency-structure.

Feminist sociological theorists describe a micro-social order in which there is a radical difference in the world of everyday life experienced by society’s dominants and society’s subordinates, of whom women compose the overwhelming majority worldwide. In other words, micro-social life experience is shaped and pervaded by relations of power and inequality in macro-social structures. This vision of micro-social life is at odds with that of traditional mainstream sociology that tends to see the micro-social world as operating in a kind of democratic ethos of equals trying to work things out together or at least of situations in which any individual could emerge as the “winner” or “definer.” But feminist sociological theory argues that the ongoing social experiences of action, interaction, self, and consciousness are radically different for women and other subordinates from those same experiences for dominants.

Action, for someone with some configuration of the various forms of privilege—conferred by patriarchy, capitalism, and racism in the macro-social order—involves the purposive setting of goals, and the pursuit of those goals through linear courses of action in which one can compartmentalize and focus on the project at hand. In contrast, women’s lives have a quality of incidentalism, as women find themselves caught up in agendas that shift and change with the vagaries of marriage, husbands’ courses of action, children’s unpredictable impact on life plans, divorce, widowhood, and the precariousness of most women’s wage-sector occupations. In their daily activities, women find themselves not so much pursuing goals in linear sequences as responding continuously to the needs and demands of others, oriented not so much to their own goals as to the task of monitoring, coordinating, facilitating, and moderating the wishes, actions, and demands of others.

For society’s dominants the experience of *interaction* with others may involve a mutuality of orientation, a pressure to arrive at common understandings, and the freedom to move in and out of interactional settings. Any interpersonal equality or dominance that women as individuals may achieve is effectively offset, with the interactive process itself. The macrostructural patterning of gender inequality affects the broad division of labor, that is, who sets and who implements projects. It also affects details like the enactment of authority and deference in seating and seating-standing arrangements, forms of address and conversation, eye contact, and the control of space and time. This assumption of inequality as a feature in interactive situations is intensified and complicated when factors of race and class are included in the feminist analytic frame.

Persons with power arrive at a knowledge of *self* by learning to see themselves as others like them see them. Women are socialized to see themselves through the eyes of men—the genuine other. Feminist theory calls into question the existence for the socially disempowered of a unified generalized other. The subordinate has to pivot between a world governed by a dominant generalized other, or meaning system, and locations in home groups that offer alternative understandings and generalized others.

Contemporary Applications Domestic Violence

Domestic violence has reached epidemic proportions in the United States, with some estimates running as high as three women a day being killed by a husband or boyfriend and over 3 million reports of physical abuse yearly. This macrosocial trend is fleshed out in newspapers daily with dramatic stories of violence and pain inflicted by men on women in primary relationships of intimacy. One such story that haunted readers in Washington, D.C. involved Yvette Cade, 32, whose request for the extension of a protective order against her estranged husband Roger B. Hargave was denied by Prince Georges County Judge Richard Palumbo; three weeks later Hargave attacked Cade at work, doused her with gasoline and set her afire. He was charged with attempted murder; she was left horribly burned but determined to become an advocate for victims of domestic violence; Judge Palumbo was forced to retire because of his contemptuous attitude toward women complainants.

As the figures suggest, that story is repeated in some form almost daily in the U.S.—vivid evidence for the validity of radical feminist claims. Here, however, we look at domestic violence from the perspective of Dorothy E. Smith's feminist sociology. The world of domestic violence, like the world in general, can be divided into the local actuality of lived experience—the place where Cade is doused with gasoline and set afire—and the extralocal relations of ruling—the place where texts like protective orders are issued by male judges like Palumbo, who regularly trivialized the life experiences of women whom he described in court as being like buses, “if you miss one, there’ll be another one along in a few minutes.” The protective order is one of the weapons that liberal feminists have worked to put in place to try to help women. But its success depends on its being issued and on police officers taking its enforcement seriously. The ability to successfully navigate the court system, to make the relations of ruling act in your favor, is affected by the intersection of vectors of oppression and privilege; gender, race, class, age, sexual preference all influence judges and police.

And none of these operate in a vacuum. The news media, which report these incidents with such regularity and attention to detail, at the same time also create an atmosphere in which women's suffering is defined not as suffering caused by gender as an unjust social structure but as suffering arising out of the strange workings of the human heart. As domestic violence was racking up millions of victims a year, 95 percent of them women, a white male columnist, Hendrik Hertzberg, writing in *The New Yorker* at the time of Barack Obama's defeat of Hillary Clinton, declared that justice had been done because while “not [to] belittle the oppressions of gender . . . in America the oppressions of race have cut deeper . . . [T] there is no gender equivalent of the nightmare of disenfranchisement, lynching, apartheid, and peonage.” As Hertzberg notes, but then ignores, it does little good to compare oppressions; yet, from the standpoint of feminist theory, it is clear that someone must speak in response to his column: three women dying every day in domestic violence is close to a gender equivalent. And it is the practice of sexist and patriarchal ideology to dismiss it (but trivialization remains a chief weapon of sexism). The slick commentary of *The New Yorker* is another form of text issuing from the relations of ruling and controlling the lives of women in the local actuality of lived experience.

For women, the most pervasive feature of the cognitive style of everyday life is what Dorothy Smith calls a **bifurcated consciousness**, developing along a line of fault between their own personal, lived, and reflected-on experience and the established types available in the social stock of knowledge to describe that experience. A feminist sociology of subjectivity asks, how do people survive when their own experience does not fit the established typifications of that experience? We know already that some do so by avoiding acts of sustained reflection, some by cultivating their own series of personal types to make sense of their experience, some by seeking community with others who share this bifurcated reality, and some by denying the validity of their own experience. But it is out of this line of fault, this division between what one knows from living and what a world organized by capitalist racist patriarchy says, that the possibility of change emerges, that one learns to see through and question the taken-for-granted and to believe that things can be different because one knows from living that they are different.

Summary

1. Feminist theory is a generalized, wide-ranging system of ideas about social life and human experience developed from a woman-centered perspective.
2. Feminist theory raises several basic questions: What about the women? Why is all this as it is? How can we change and improve the social world to make it a more just place for women and all people? What about the differences among women?
3. Contemporary feminist sociology has its historical roots in the work of earlier generations of women theorists, who, in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries made important contributions to the formulation of sociology, but whose accomplishments were erased from the record by a politics of gender.
4. One type of feminist theory focuses on gender difference.
5. Cultural feminism extols the positive aspects of being female.
6. Explanatory theories locate the source of gender differences in biology, institutional roles, socialization, and social interaction.
7. The second type of feminist theory focuses on gender inequality.
8. Liberal feminism argues that women may claim equality with men on the basis of an essential human capacity for reasoned moral agency, that gender inequality is the result of a patriarchal and sexist patterning of the division of labor, and that gender equality can be produced by transforming the division of labor through the repatterning of key institutions: law, work, family, education, and media.
9. Theories of gender oppression describe women's situation as the consequence of a direct power relationship between men and women in which men have fundamental and concrete interests in controlling, using, subjugating, and oppressing women: that is, in the practice of domination.

bifurcated consciousness A type of consciousness characteristic of women that reflects the fact that, for them, everyday life is divided into two realities: the reality of their actual, lived, reflected-on experience and the reality of social typifications.

10. Psychoanalytic feminism maps and emphasizes the emotional dynamics of personality, emotions often deeply buried in the subconscious or unconscious areas of the psyche; it also highlights the importance of infancy and early childhood in the patterning of these emotions.
11. Radical feminism is based on the belief that women are of absolute positive value as women, a belief asserted against what they claim to be the universal devaluing of women, and that women are everywhere oppressed—violently oppressed—by the system of patriarchy.
12. Structural oppression theories recognize that oppression results from the fact that some groups of people derive direct benefits from controlling, using, subjugating, and oppressing other groups of people. These theories analyze how those interests in domination are enacted through mechanisms of social structure: that is, through recurring and routinized large-scale arrangements of social interaction.
13. Socialist feminists seek to bring together Marxian and radical feminist thought.
14. Intersectionality theory begins with the understanding that women experience oppression in varying configurations and in varying degrees of intensity. The explanation for that variation is that, although all women potentially experience oppression on the basis of gender, women are, nevertheless, differentially oppressed by the varied intersections of other arrangements of social inequality.
15. Feminist sociological theory links structure and agency, micro-social and macrosocial, through the concepts of standpoint, extra-local relations of ruling, local actualities of lived experience, texts, incidentalism, responsive action, and bifurcated consciousness.

Suggested Readings

- PATRICIA MADOO LENGERMANN and JILL NIEBRUGGE-BRANTLEY *The Women Founders: Sociology and Social Theory 1830–1930*. New York: McGraw-Hill, 1998. Excellent treatment of the theories of the long-neglected early female contributors to sociology. Includes very useful selections from these thinkers.
- ARLIE HOCHSCHILD with ANNE MACHUNG. *The Second Shift*. London: Penguin Books, 2003. This is a new edition of the 1989 classic, honored as a *New York Times* notable book, with a new introduction by Hochschild.
- PATRICIA HILL COLLINS *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and Empowerment*. Boston: Unwin Hyman, 1990. Fast becoming a contemporary classic on the black feminist perspective and standpoint theory.
- PATRICIA HILL COLLINS *Fighting Words: Black Women and the Search for Justice*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1998. Later theorizing by the author of *Black Feminist Thought*.
- BETTY FRIEDAN *The Feminine Mystique*. New York: Dell, 1963. A modern classic within the tradition of liberal feminism.
- NANCY CHODOROW *The Reproduction of Mothering: Psychoanalysis and the Sociology of Gender*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978. A book that gave great impetus to psychoanalytic feminism.
- CHRYS INGRAHAM *White Weddings*. New York: Routledge, 2008. A classic of socialistic materialist feminism.
- JOAN WILLIAMS *Unbending Gender*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2000. Explores problems of balancing work and family.
- DOROTHY E. SMITH *The Everyday World as Problematic*. Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1987. Smith's major theoretical statement.

Postmodern Grand Theories

The Transition from Industrial to Postindustrial Society

Increasing Governmentality (and Other Grand Theories)

Postmodernity as Modernity's Coming of Age

The Rise of Consumer Society, Loss of Symbolic Exchange, and Increase in Simulations

The Consumer Society and the New Means of Consumption

Dromology

Feminism and Postmodern Social Theory

by Patricia Madoo Lengermann and Gillian Niebrugge

Summary

Suggested Readings

Chapters 4 and 5 dealt with a variety of modern grand theories. Most grand theories that deal with the contemporary world have been created by theorists who consider themselves to be modernists. This chapter discusses a series of grand theories (postmodern theorists have done comparatively little work on everyday life) that either deal with the postmodern world and/or were created by thinkers associated with postmodern social theory. The irony is that postmodern theorists are often critical of modern grand theories, although they themselves have created such perspectives.

THE TRANSITION FROM INDUSTRIAL TO POSTINDUSTRIAL SOCIETY

The work of Daniel Bell (1919–) on the coming of the postindustrial society represents something of a transition from Chapters 4 and 5 on modern grand theories to this one on postmodern grand theories. Even though he is decidedly a modernist, many commonalities exist between what he has to say on industrial-postindustrial societies and what the postmodernists argue about modern/postmodern societies. However, although grand theories seem to emerge unintentionally in the work of postmodernists, as a modernist, Bell has no hesitation