

# THEORIZING PATRIARCHY

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Basil Blackwell

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## 1

## Introduction

Why are women disadvantaged compared to men? Has this inequality been reduced in recent years? What difference, if any, does the increase in women's employment make to other areas of women's lives? Is the sexual double standard a thing of the past? Are contemporary forms of femininity as restricting as those of the past? Is it useful to talk of 'femininity' as if it had one form? Is the increase in the divorce rate a sign of women's independence or of men's flight from family responsibilities?

This book aims to be, firstly, a comprehensive overview of the variety of ways of explaining women's subordination in contemporary society, and, secondly, an argument about why recent changes have occurred.

Answers to the questions posed above fall into four distinctive perspectives: Marxist feminism, radical feminism, liberalism, and dual-systems theory. This book will compare and evaluate the variety of frameworks against theoretical and empirical evidence. Other debates which cross-cut these divisions will be explored when they are particularly important, for instance, the new interest in post-structuralism and the critique of essentialism. The theoretical debates are the substance of the book, but up-to-date empirical evidence of the nature of gender inequality is used to assist in their assessment.

The second aim of the book is to argue for a particular approach to the analysis of recent changes in gender relations. It will ask about the relative importance of different sites of women's oppression and how this varies over time and between different social groups. Finally I will argue for a new way of theorizing patriarchy.

The six main chapters will have a different substantive focus: paid work, housework, culture, sexuality, violence, and the state. In each the first part will review the existing debates; the second will address recent developments.

During the course of the book I shall argue that the concept of 'patriarchy' is indispensable for an analysis of gender inequality and put forward a theory as to how its constituent elements articulate in



contemporary Britain. Critics of the concept have argued that it necessarily invokes an essentialist, ahistoric analysis which is insensitive to the range of experiences of women of different cultures, classes and ethnicities (e.g., Barrett, 1980; Rowbotham, 1981). I shall argue that these criticisms are misplaced, relevant only to a few of the cruder early accounts. On the contrary, the concept and theory of patriarchy is essential to capture the depth, pervasiveness and interconnectedness of different aspects of women's subordination, and can be developed in such a way as to take account of the different forms of gender inequality over time, class and ethnic group.

The analysis of patriarchy in this book is most applicable to contemporary Western societies and their recent histories, in particular Britain. Since I am arguing that patriarchy can take different forms it would be inappropriate to assume that this model will necessarily apply elsewhere, though it may.

The book is structured by the cross-cutting of two questions: each chapter addresses the nature and significance of gender inequality in a different sphere as well as comparing different perspectives on that area. This introductory chapter will specify the different perspectives and some of the key debates. The conclusion draws together the argument as to the relative significance of different bases of women's oppression, by means of a historical analysis of the changing forms of patriarchy.

#### THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES

In Britain the classic debate within feminist analysis has been between radical feminism and Marxist feminism; in the USA it has been between radical feminism and liberal feminism (Mitchell, 1971; Eisenstein, Z. R., 1981). More recently there has been an attempt to synthesize Marxist feminist and radical feminist analysis in dual-systems theory. In this book I shall deal with all four of these feminist perspectives and their sub-types. I shall start with a simple summary of the main theoretical features of the different perspectives and the main sites that they focus upon. These rather crude ideal types will be explored in much more detail in subsequent chapters.

While most of the interesting work on gender inequality has been done within feminist perspectives, this is sometimes in reaction to the 'males-tream' orthodoxies. It is thus useful to give an account of these in order to understand not only errors of the conventional perspectives in the social sciences, but also the shape of the alternative feminist arguments. I

shall thus give accounts of both functionalism and class analysis and their mistakes.

#### *Radical feminism*

Radical feminism is distinguished by its analysis of gender inequality in which men as a group dominate women as a group and are the main beneficiaries of the subordination of women. This system of domination, called patriarchy, does not derive from any other system of social inequality; for instance, it is not a by-product of capitalism. The relationship of patriarchy to class inequality and racism is addressed in different ways among radical writers.

Radical feminist writers introduce a range of issues into social science which have conventionally not been considered to be part of an analysis of social inequality. Even personal aspects of life are seen as part of this, as the slogan 'the personal is political' indicates. The question of who does the housework, or who interrupts whom in conversation, is seen as part of the system of male domination.

There are differences between radical feminists over the basis of male supremacy, but often this is considered to involve the appropriation of women's sexuality and bodies, while in some accounts male violence is seen as the root cause (e.g., Brownmiller, 1976; Firestone, 1974; Rich, 1980). Sexual practice is seen to be socially constructed around male notions of desire, not women's. Further, sexuality is seen as a major site of male domination over women, through which men impose their notion of femininity on women. Heterosexuality is socially institutionalized in contemporary society and organizes many other aspects of gender relations. Male violence against women is considered to be part of a system of controlling women, unlike the conventional view which holds that rape and battering are isolated instances caused by psychological problems in a few men.

The main problems that critics have raised about radical feminism are a tendency to essentialism, to an implicit or explicit biological reductionism, and to a false universalism which cannot understand historical change or take sufficient account of divisions between women based on ethnicity and class. This issue will be dealt with in detail within the examination of Firestone's account of reproduction in the chapter on the household.

#### *Marxist feminism*

Marxist feminist analysis differs from that of radical feminism especially in considering gender inequality to derive from capitalism, and not to be

constituted as an independent system of patriarchy. Men's domination over women is a by-product of capital's domination over labour. Class relations and the economic exploitation of one class by another are the central features of social structure, and these determine the nature of gender relations.

The critical site of women's oppression also varies between Marxist feminists. Often it is the family which is seen as the basis as a consequence of the need of capital for women's domestic labour in the home (e.g., Secombe, 1974). Others focus on the ideological rather than material level.

The family is considered to benefit capital by providing a cheap way of providing the day-to-day care of workers, such as food and clean clothes, and for producing the next generation of workers. It is cheap because women as housewives do this for no wage, merely receiving maintenance from their husbands. Thus capital benefits from the unequal sexual division of labour within the home.

Other Marxist feminists have argued for a less economic analysis of both capitalism and gender relations (e.g., Barrett, 1980). Gender relations are seen as importantly constituted by discourses of masculinity and femininity which are not immediately reducible to the economic relations of capitalism.

Some Marxist feminists retain a materialist analysis of class relations and combine this with an analysis of gender relations in terms of ideology and culture.

The main problem raised by critics about Marxist feminism is that it is too narrowly focused on capitalism, being unable to deal with gender inequality in pre- and post-capitalist societies, and that it incorrectly reduces gender inequality to capitalism, rather than recognizing the independence of the gender dynamic.

### *Liberalism*

Liberalism differs from both the above in not having an analysis of women's subordination in terms of such overarching social structures, but rather conceives this as the summation of numerous small-scale deprivations.

While there is no one basis of women's disadvantage, there are two major foci of analysis. Firstly, the denial of equal rights to women in education and in employment are often important concerns (e.g., Kanter, 1977). Women's disadvantaged position is related to specific details of prejudice against women. This is often combined with a second theme, that of sexist attitudes which act to sustain the situation. Attitudes are

analysed as traditional and unresponsive to recent changes in real gender relations.

This approach has often generated empirical studies about gender relations which provide important information that can be analysed in a variety of ways. They provide extensive documentation of the lives of women. For instance, some of the major surveys of women's employment and the domestic division of labour might be considered to fall within this category (Martin and Roberts, 1984; Pahl, R. E., 1984).

Liberal feminism is often criticized for its failure to deal with the deep-rootedness of gender inequality and the interconnectedness between its different forms. For instance, the origin or reasons for persistence of patriarchal attitudes are not systematically addressed. In short the absence of an account of the overall social structuring of gender inequality gives rise to a series of partial accounts.

This does not exhaust the forms of feminist argument. For instance, there are attempts both to synthesize different forms of feminist analysis, and to synthesize feminist analysis with other mainstream frameworks.

### *Dual-systems theory*

Dual-systems theory is a synthesis of Marxist and radical feminist theory. Rather than being an exclusive focus on either capitalism or patriarchy, this perspective argues that both systems are present and important in the structuring of contemporary gender relations. Contemporary gender inequality is analysed as a result of the structures of a capitalist and patriarchal or capitalist-patriarchal society.

Existing dual-systems theory considers the articulation of patriarchy and capitalism in a range of ways. They vary, for instance, as to whether they see patriarchy and capitalism as fused into one system of capitalist patriarchy, as does Zillah R. Eisenstein (1981), or whether they are conceptualized as two analytically distinct, if empirically interacting, systems, as does Hartmann (1979). Eisenstein (1981) considers that the two systems are so closely interrelated and symbiotic that they have become one. Patriarchy provides a system of control and law and order, while capitalism provides a system of economy, in the pursuit of profit. Changes in one part of this capitalist-patriarchal system will cause changes in another part, as when the increase in women's paid work, due to capitalist expansion, sets up a pressure for political change, as a result of the increasing contradictions in the position of women who are both housewives and wage labourers.

Other writers keep the systems analytically distinct (Hartmann, 1979; Mitchell, 1975). These writers themselves differ in their mode of

separation of patriarchy and capitalism. Some allocate different levels of the social formation to the different systems, while others do not. For instance, Mitchell (1975) discusses gender in terms of a separation between the two systems, in which the economic level is ordered by capitalist relations, and the level of the unconscious by the law of patriarchy. It is in order to uncover the latter that she engages in her re-evaluation of the work of Freud. She rescues Freud's concept of the unconscious from the fierce criticism of his sexist interpretation of women's sexuality and desires, in order to argue for the significance of the level of the unconscious in understanding the perpetuation of patriarchal ideology, which would ostensibly appear to have no material basis in contemporary societies.

Hartmann's (1979) conception of the relation between capitalism and patriarchy is similar to that of Mitchell in that she wants to maintain the analytic separation of patriarchy and capitalism, while Eisenstein does not. But Hartmann is different in that she wishes to see patriarchal relations crucially operating at the level of the expropriation of women's labour by men, and not at the level of ideology and the unconscious. Hartmann argues that both housework and wage labour are important sites of women's exploitation by men. Within the field of paid work occupational segregation is used by organized men to keep access to the best paid jobs for themselves at the expense of women (Hartmann, 1979). Within the household women do more labour than men, even if they also have paid employment (Hartmann, 1981a). These two forms of expropriation also act to reinforce each other, since women's disadvantaged position in paid work makes them vulnerable in making marriage arrangements, and their position in the family disadvantages them in paid work. While capitalism changes the nature of employment to some extent, Hartmann argues that patriarchy pre-dates capitalism, and that this expropriation of women's labour is not new and distinctive to capitalist societies and hence cannot be reduced to it. Hartmann supports her argument with historical examples of how women have been excluded from the better jobs by organized male workers with, in some cases, the support of the state. It is a powerful and important contribution to the theoretical debate on gender relations.

One of the problems with 'dual-systems' analyses such as the three discussed here is whether they are able adequately to sustain the duality of capitalism and patriarchy. Young (1981) claims that this is an inherently impossible task. Dual-systems theorists usually sustain the distinction between capitalism and patriarchy by allocating them to different levels of society (in the way that Mitchell (1975) locates capitalism in the economy and patriarchy in the unconscious). If they do

not do this, then, Young argues, they are not able to establish and sustain an analytic distinction between patriarchy and capitalism. If they make this distinction, then they are not able to account for patriarchal aspects in that level they have allocated to capital, or for capitalist elements in the level allocated to patriarchy.

Young has identified a key problem in existing dualist texts, but she overstates the strength of her argument when she declares this to be an inherent flaw in any future dualist analysis. The specification of the nature of the separation between patriarchy and capitalism is necessary and achievable. It is inappropriate to allocate different levels of the social formation to the different systems, in the manner of Mitchell, for the reasons noted by Young. However, Hartmann's analysis is problematic in that it both underestimates the tension between patriarchy and capitalism and insufficiently specifies the different structures of patriarchy.

A further limitation of existing forms of dual-systems theory is that they do not cover the full range of patriarchal structures. For instance, sexuality and violence are given very little analytic space in the work of Hartmann and Eisenstein. Most accounts suggest that either the material level (Hartmann, Eisenstein) or the cultural (Mitchell) is the significant basis of patriarchy. I think this is a mistake, and that a broader range of structures should be theorized as part of the patriarchal side of the dual systems. This is a flaw, but not an insuperable one. Radical feminists have contributed primarily analyses of sexuality, violence, culture and the state, socialist feminists those on housework, waged work, culture and the state. I think a proper synthesis includes: waged work, housework, sexuality, culture, violence and the state.

These four approaches – radical feminism, liberal feminism, Marxist feminism and dual-systems theory – are the main strands of analysis in the literature. However, I shall also examine various other minor strands as the occasion merits – for instance, materialist feminism and functionalism – together with two 'malestream' perspectives – class analysis and functionalism.

#### CLASS AND GENDER

Class is the main concept used within sociology to theorize social inequality. Hence it is appropriate to ask in a systematic fashion what is the relationship, if any, between class and gender. Class analysis has dealt with three main issues. Firstly, the determination of the distinction



between class categories and the allocation of people to them. Secondly, the understanding of mobility between classes. Thirdly, the implications of class position and class mobility for political, or class, action and social consciousness – especially whether there is going to be revolution or not. I shall analyse the implications of different ways of dealing with the relationship of class and gender for each of these three aspects of class analysis.

Traditionally class analysis has ignored gender relations, only recently even attempting to justify this omission. Today there are several ways in which gender relations are fitted into the concerns of class theory. These will be scrutinized before moving on to more innovative ways of tackling the issue of class and gender. The second way of approaching the issue has been to liken gender relations to class relations and to mine the conceptual vocabulary of class analysis for tools with which to understand male domination. Thirdly, I shall examine the view that there is more than one system of class relations in contemporary Western societies, that there are class relations within both capitalism and patriarchy.

In this chapter I am taking class analysis to include both Marxist and Weberian accounts. While this may seem a little sweeping at first glance, there are in fact insufficient differences between them on the analysis of gender to warrant splitting them. Further, many modern British sociologists consider themselves to have integrated the positive features of each approach, so recent debates have seen some convergence of neo-Marxism and neo-Weberianism (Abercrombie and Urry, 1983).

In the 1960s, 1970s and early 1980s most writers on class ignored gender relations (Beteille, 1977; Lockwood, Goldthorpe et al, 1969; Blackburn and Mann, 1979; Stewart, Prandy and Blackburn, 1980; Goldthorpe, 1980). They rarely felt it necessary to establish the reasons for this, at best using resource constraints, in a footnote, to justify an all-male sample (e.g., Blackburn and Mann, 1979). The first full defence of this omission of gender was presented by Goldthorpe in 1983. This followed numerous criticisms of class theory for its sexist bias (e.g., Acker, 1973, 1980; Allen, 1982; Delphy, 1984; Garnsey, 1978; Murgatroyd, 1982; Newby, 1982; West, 1978).

Goldthorpe (1983) argues that women can be ignored for the purposes of class analysis because their position is determined by that of the man with whom they live, either husband or father. He argues that the family, not the individual, is the basic unit of social stratification. He suggests that in all important respects members of a family share the same life chances. He argues further that the position of the family is determined by that of the male breadwinner. He suggests that women do not bring

resources of any significance to the family so do not need to be taken into account in determining the position of the family unit.

Goldthorpe attempts an empirical substantiation of these points using data from the Oxford Mobility Survey. Firstly, he argues that women's employment is too 'limited', 'intermittent' and 'conditioned' by that of their husbands, to affect the position of the family as a whole. Women, he suggests, move in and out of employment in relation to domestic events and their husband's jobs. She attempts to correlate the pattern of a women's movements in and out of paid work at the time of childbirth with that of the level of her husband's occupation.

This position has many serious flaws. Firstly, as many critics of class analysis have pointed out, significant numbers of people do not live in traditional nuclear families of the male breadwinner, wife and children model (Acker, 1973, 1980; Allen, 1982; Garnsey, 1978; Murgatroyd, 1982; Oakley, 1974; Stanworth, 1984). Other types of household composition include: single-parent households, usually headed by women; single-person households; unemployed households in which no one has paid work; married couples where the woman earns and, for reasons of ill-health, unemployment, etc., the man does not. Further the proportion of traditional households is steadily declining. The existence of these types of household causes two main problems for the conventional approach. Firstly, and most obviously, there is no male breadwinner to determine the position of the family. In order to overcome this difficulty in these circumstances the conventionalists usually accept the woman as head of household when there is no man. However, this gives rise to the second problem, as Delphy (1984) points out. It introduces a second method of classification of women, so that women can oscillate between having a class position in their own right determined by their employment and having their class position determined by their husband when they have one. This oscillation reduces the robustness of class analysis.

The second major flaw in the conventional approach is that women's employment is empirically more important than Goldthorpe suggests. Today women typically take one break of five years from paid employment while having children (Martin and Roberts, 1984). Such a short break does not constitute an 'intermittent' work history, but rather one of continuity. Women's employment also brings significant, not limited, income into the household. A wife's wage prevents many households falling into poverty. Indeed the affluent-worker study found that the greater income of the white-collar families in their sample was due to the earnings of the wives, not the men (Lockwood, Goldthorpe et al, 1969: 129a).

Britten and Heath (1983) argue that women's employment is sufficiently important to count as one of the determinants of a family's class position. They argue that households derive their class position from the employment of both husband and wife, not husband alone. This creates a new classification of households, since, while some will involve same-class spouses, some will not. Cross-class families exist where the spouses have jobs in different class categories. In Britain the commonest type is that in which male skilled manual workers, who are classified working class, are married to female routine white-collar workers, who are classified as middle class.

Britten and Heath go on to argue that this has implications for analysis of class action as well as class position. Cross-class families have distinctive voting patterns; that is, the classification of the wife's job affects both husband and wife's voting patterns. Britten and Heath demonstrate empirically the importance of women's employment in the link between class position and class action. However, it produces a very complicated set of methodological issues in researching class. Further, they do not escape from the problem that not everyone lives in a traditional family unit.

In order to overcome these problems some writers use the individual rather than the family as the unit of analysis. Class position is then derived from the occupational position of each person's job, without complicated references back to the employment of their spouse as well. Indeed this method has been used by several Marxists without reference to the debate above. For instance, Braverman (1974) discusses the class position of clerks without significant reference to the fact that they are female. He argued that they were proletarian on the basis of the deskilled nature of their work alone.

A further problem in conventional class analysis is that it fails to deal adequately with the inequality and the social division of labour within the household itself. If class analysis is supposed to theorize inequalities based upon a division of labour, then it ought, logically, to be applicable to inequalities based upon the domestic division of labour. There are serious inequalities within the household which theories of social inequality need to be able to articulate. For instance, women spend more hours on housework than men; have less access to household goods (e.g., men usually drive the 'family' car to their workplace); have less money and time for leisure; and so on. Further, if the link between material position and political action is the central question for class analysis, then we need to ask about the implications of changes in women's material position for gendered political action. These two points lead the analysis beyond conventional class theory. Theorization of relations within the

household has not been part of the project of class analysis, neither has an investigation of political action beyond a narrowly defined class politics.

Some feminists have approached the issue of gender and class from a direction opposite to that discussed so far. Rather than asking how we can squeeze women into class analysis, they have asked how we can use the concept of class to theorize gender relations. This entails a reappraisal of the definition of class.

Definitions of class usually involve a notion of fundamental cleavage based upon different and economic position. Some add other levels to this, for instance, educational and other qualifications, common in neo-Weberian analysis; while others have a very tightly defined notion of economic difference, as in ownership or non-ownership of the means of production, in the manner of orthodox Marxist analysis. I shall examine attempts by two feminists to use the concept of class to capture the nature of inequalities between women and men: those of Delphy and Firestone.

Delphy argues that housewives constitute one class and husbands another. They have a relation of economic difference and of social inequality. She argues that housewives are the producing class, engaged in domestic labour, while husbands are the non-producing class, expropriating the labour of their wives. These classes exist within a patriarchal mode of production, in a manner similar to the classes in other modes of production identified by Marx. Delphy is thus arguing that housework is as much production as any other form of work. It is not a separate category, such as reproduction, consumption or an ideological activity. Women perform this work under patriarchal relations of production for the benefit of their husbands. Hence husbands are constituted as the expropriating class and housewives the direct producers.

Delphy has been criticized for stretching Marxist concepts of class and mode of production too far from their appropriate usage (Barrett and McIntosh, 1979; Molyneux, 1979). Her critics argue that there are too many differences between women for them to be appropriately placed in one class. Women married to middle-class men have a very different standard of living and way of life from those married to working-class men.

However, these are superficial differences which do not affect class position. A Marxist concept of class is based on relations of production, not lifestyle. Such contrasts in style of living are significant only if a Weberian definition of class is being utilized, which Delphy does not. All housewives gain their maintenance in the same way, even if they have different amounts. Since they have common relations of production, they

are, in Marxist terms, within the same class.

Barrett and McIntosh (1979) and Molyneux (1979) argue further that Delphy uses the concept of mode of production incorrectly. They assert that within a Marxist system there can be only one mode of production within a social formation, while Delphy's account is based on there being both a patriarchal and a capitalist mode of production in the same formation.

However, this point is contentious within various Marxist debates and is not an established principal. Various Marxist writers, including John G. Taylor (1979), have argued that a capitalist and non-capitalist mode of production may articulate in a social formation, and that this characterizes many developing countries, although others, such as Wallerstein (1979), argue there is one capitalist world system. Thus there is no Marxist orthodoxy to refute Delphy, merely an existing lively debate within Marxism.

A further problem is that not all women are housewives, so Delphy provides only a partial theorization of women's position. Delphy tries to slide past this by suggesting that, since all women expect to be housewives, we can treat all women as if they are. However, we can hardly criticize Goldthorpe for this same problem and not Delphy as well. A theorization of gender must deal with the fact that some women are full-time housewives, and some are not. A final criticism of Delphy is that her account is economistic; that she neglects cultural, sexual and ideological aspects of gender inequality in her account. It is argued that gender inequality cannot be captured by such an economistic concept as class. This is the most serious of the criticisms.

Firestone (1974) also attempts to develop Marxist concepts and theory to build her analysis of women's oppression. She uses a broader concept of class than Delphy: all women are in one, all men in another. Sex is class. It is not restricted to housewives and husbands. Again the basis is a material one, although she conceptualizes this as reproduction, not production. Women are disadvantaged by their position in reproduction — pregnancy, childbirth, breast-feeding, child care and so on. Unlike Delphy, Firestone has a theory about non-material aspects of gender relations. She draws upon Marxist notions of the material base determining the political and ideological superstructure.

Firestone has been criticized for biological determinism. But while there is some truth in this it is overdrawn, since she does have a notion that struggle over the means of production will change women's subordination.

The question here, however, is whether the concept of class is useful for analysis of gender relations. Its strength is, firstly, that it powerfully

captures social inequality and, secondly, that it captures the material aspect of this. Its weaknesses are, firstly, that it downplays the significance of non-economic aspects of women's subordination and, secondly, that it comes with a set of baggage that is difficult to drop about its relations to capitalist rather than patriarchal social relations.

While Delphy and Firestone have pointed to the centrality of material aspects of women's oppression, in particular those in the household, to the overall determination of gender inequality, many other analyses have not. For instance, violence is considered central by Brownmiller (1976), Hanmer (1978), Stanko (1985) and others. Institutional heterosexuality is considered central by Rich (1980) and MacKinnon (1982). Others, such as Hartmann (1979), in her analysis of segregation, consider paid work to be central.

Should the concept of class be expanded to cover gender inequality across all these areas? I think it should not be used to cover non-economic forms of inequality, since to do so would be to wrench the concept too far from its heritage. However, there are some major gendered economic cleavages to which it should be applied. So I would argue that housewives and husbands are classes, but that men and women are not. That is, certain aspects of patriarchal relations can be captured by the concept of class, but not all. Further, gender impacts upon class relations within capitalism. This means there are two class systems, one based around patriarchy, the other around capitalism.

#### RACE, ESSENTIALISM AND EPISTEMOLOGY

In addition to the debates between the perspectives discussed above there are a number of issues which cross-cut them. These are especially: the intersection of sexism and racism; essentialism and the sameness difference debate, as to whether there are essential differences between women and men; structure and agency; epistemology, especially whether feminist methods of enquiry are distinctive; and the nature and significance of anti-feminism.

#### *Race and feminist analysis*

The neglect of ethnic difference and inequality in many white feminist and non-feminist writings has come under intense scrutiny and critique in a number of recent texts (Amos and Parmar, 1984; Barrett and McIntosh, 1985; Brittan and Maynard, 1984; Carby, 1982; Davis, 1981; Hooks, 1982, 1984; Joseph, 1981; Lorde, 1981; Moraga and Anzaldúa,

1981; Parmar, 1982). Analyses from the perspective of women of colour have raised a number of important issues for theories of gender relations.

Firstly, the labour market experience of women of colour is different from that of white women because of racist structures which disadvantage such women in paid work. This means that there are significant differences between women on the basis of ethnicity, which need to be taken into account.

Secondly, ethnic variation and racism mean that the chief sites of oppression of women of colour may be different from those of white women. This is not simply a statement that women of colour face racism which white women do not, but also a suggestion that this may change the basis of gender inequality itself. The best example of this is the debate on the family, which has traditionally been seen by white feminist analysis as a major, if not the major, site of women's oppression by men. Some women of colour, such as Hooks (1984), have argued that, since the family is a site of resistance and solidarity against racism for women of colour, it does not hold the central place in accounting for women's subordination that it does for white women. There is here a warning against generalizing from the experience of a limited section of women (white) to that of women as a whole.

A third issue is that the intersection of ethnicity and gender may alter ethnic and gender relations. Not only is there the question of recognizing ethnic inequality and the different sites of oppression for women of different ethnicities, but the particular ways in which ethnic and gender relations have interacted historically change the forms of ethnic and gender relations.

This critique is not specific to texts which use the concept of patriarchy, but is applied to most white feminist writings, including those of socialist feminists and liberal feminists. It is a serious criticism of existing texts. It will be further examined on specific topics in later chapters.

However, most of these writers do not deny that there is inequality between men and women. They are arguing that this takes varied forms, and that racism may be of overriding political concern to women of colour.

### *Essentialism and postmodernism*

One of the issues in this debate on gender and ethnicity is whether existing feminist theory has a view of women as more uniform and undivided than is really the case. This question, of whether there is a unity among women and an essential difference between them and men,

is part of a wider debate on essentialism in feminist theory.

On the one hand many feminists have assumed that it is legitimate to write of 'women' as a social category distinct from 'men' and have discussed the collective interest of women as opposed to that of men. Indeed this has been a fundamental part of early feminist theory. On the other hand post-structuralists and postmodernists, together with some Marxist feminists and some black feminists, argue that concepts such as 'patriarchy', which presume some coherence and stability over time and culture, suffer from essentialism. Segal (1987), for instance, criticizes radical feminists, such as Daly, for essentialism and reductionism and inability to analyse historical change. Some postmodernists have gone further and argued that not only is the concept of patriarchy essentialist but so also is that of 'women'. For instance, the project of the journal *m/f* was to argue that not only is there no unity to the category of 'woman', but that analyses based on a dichotomy between 'women' and 'men' necessarily suffer from the flaw of essentialism. Instead, there are considered to be a number of overlapping, cross-cutting discourses of femininities and masculinities which are historically and culturally variable. The notion of 'women' and 'men' is dissolved into shifting, variable social constructs which lack coherence and stability over time (Alcoff, 1988; Barrett, 1980, 1987; Coward, 1978; Fraser and Nicholson, 1988; Eisenstein and Jardine, 1980).

Flax (1987) argues that feminist theory is necessarily postmodern in its challenge of the notion that gender relations are fixed and natural. However, most feminist postmodernists attack forms of feminist theory which emphasize the commonalities shared by women. Indeed some postmodern theorists (e.g., Boudillard) may be considered anti-feminist.

The postmodern feminists draw theoretically upon the deconstructionism of Derrida (1976), the discourse analysis of Foucault (1981) and the postmodernism of Lyotard (1978) (who themselves do not seriously consider gender). A parallel, but theoretically unrelated, critique of the unity of 'women' has come from the writings of some black feminists. The deconstruction of categories within specific texts is a technique developed by Derrida and is advanced especially by feminist analysts within the field of cultural studies.

One of the limitations of the new post-structuralism and postmodernism is a neglect of the social context of power relations. Power is not neglected in the analyses of Foucault, since for him the knowledge at the base of each of his discourses is also power, but it is very dispersed. This dispersal together with de-emphasis of economic relations makes analyses of gender within a Foucauldian tradition overly free-floating.

I think that the postmodern critics have made some valuable points

about the potential dangers in theorizing gender inequality at an abstract and general level. However, they go too far in denying the necessary impossibility and unproductive nature of such a project. While gender relations could potentially take an infinite number of forms, in actuality there are some widely repeated features. In addition the signifiers of 'woman' and 'man' have sufficient historical and cross-cultural continuity, despite some variations to warrant using such terms. It is a contingent question as to whether gender relations do have sufficient continuity of patterning to make generalizations about a century or two and a continent or so useful. While I agree that the answer to this cannot be given at a theoretical level, I shall argue in this book that in practice it is possible; that there are sufficient common features and sufficient routinized interconnections that it does make sense to talk of patriarchy in the West in the last 150 years at least.

However, many of the existing grand theories of patriarchy do have problems in dealing with historical and cultural variation. I think this is due to a contingent feature in their analyses, that they utilize a simple base-superstructure model of causal relations. In a theory in which there is only one causal element it is not surprising that there are difficulties in understanding variation and change. This problem can be solved by theorizing more than one causal base. I am arguing that there are six main structures which make up a system of patriarchy: paid work, housework, sexuality, culture, violence and the state. The interrelationships between these create different forms of patriarchy.

### *Epistemology*

Feminist challenges to mainstream social science have invoked a variety of approaches to knowledge. Some have argued that orthodox accounts are empirically incorrect on their own terms, while others have claimed that the very way that men have constructed what counts as authoritative knowledge is itself patriarchally constructed (Oakley, 1974; Smith, 1988; Stanley and Wise, 1983).

The more basic critique is that mainstream social science is simply empirically incorrect in relation to gender and those aspects of society that gender affects. For instance, conventional views that the source of the wages gap between men and women is largely due to women having less skill and experience than men can be shown to be untrue using econometric data (Treiman and Hartmann, 1981). Conventional views that there is little violence against women can be shown to be empirically untrue by new methods of collecting such information. That is, mainstream social science has a patriarchal bias which can be remedied by

more accurate and thorough social research. Harding (1986) labels this approach to knowledge that of the feminist empiricists. They use established methods of research to argue that previous assumptions about women are unfounded, an approach which argues for a really scientific attitude to knowledge rather than relying on the existing patriarchally biased knowledge which falsely passes as science.

The limitations to this critique are that they assume that the methods of research and the way knowledge is put together are themselves scientifically neutral. A more far-reaching critique argues that the very way that men have typically constructed what counts as authoritative knowledge is itself patriarchal (Smith, D., 1988; Stanley and Wise, 1983). This second school, labelled the feminist standpoint epistemologists by Harding (1986), argues that the only basis of unbiased knowledge of the world is women's own direct experience. These writers contend that it is the standpoint of the oppressed woman which provides the clearest vision of social relations. The position was initially articulated via the slogan 'the personal is political' (see Millett, 1977), and is today developed into a critique of abstract theorizing because it is considered to be the form of knowledge that is furthest removed from women's experience. That is, the very way that mainstream science and social science construct knowledge is biased against women. Feminist standpoint epistemologists assert that we need a new feminist methodology which is closer to women's own experience. This is argued partly on the basis that abstraction itself is problematic, and partly that the social institutions within which abstraction takes place are run by men and reflect their interests. MacKinnon (1982) argues that currently men's thought is constituted as 'objective' and women's as 'subjective', with the former more authoritative than the latter. Men objectify women; this objectification is simultaneously both general and sexual. Women's resistance must be by embracing their 'subjective' experience. In this way women can resist their objectification.

Qualitative techniques which allow women to speak for themselves are considered to be more in keeping with a feminist methodology by reducing the amount of distortion that a patriarchally based science would introduce. In practice this means a methodological imperative to use qualitative rather than quantitative methods, to interview women and to report faithfully on their views. Oakley's research on women's views of childbirth is a classic example of this (Oakley, 1981). The introduction of the experiences of women into social science is considered an important corrective to distorted theories. This approach goes along with a distrust of meta-theorizing, since this is considered to be more affected by patriarchal bias than the words of women interviewees.



The limits of this approach to feminist methodology are the limits of the views of the women interviewed. Concepts and notions about structures outside their experience are ruled out. I think this is very problematic, since it is not clear why women's everyday experiences should be less contaminated by patriarchal notions than are theories. All knowledge is mediated via ideas and concepts, and those available are necessarily affected by patriarchal relations. Systematic enquiry and theoretical development are more likely to elucidate the nature of patriarchal relations.

Harding (1986) provides a clear and erudite account of the problematic debate between the feminist empiricist and feminist standpoint positions and treads a delicate balance between the two. The fragmentation of the scientific project which is a consequence of postmodernist thought is both a strength and a weakness. She argues that while the first group, the feminist empiricists, have made valuable contributions, their best work is in fact done when they make use of their standpoint as women to ask new questions, not merely the old; that is, when they adopt some aspects of the second school's approach. Harding maintains that the most important issue is the setting of the questions to be researched and the allocation of resources to do this, drawing upon a post-Kuhnian recognition of the central issue of the social construction of the research questions themselves. Science is a 'black box', crucially structured by the political context in which it operates. Women, and indeed different groups of women, need to be able to set their own research agendas.

Harding is ambivalent as to whether some methods of seeking knowledge are 'better' than others. Indeed her concept of science dissolves into a more general notion of knowledge as she refuses to privilege one form of knowledge creation over another. She slides towards a relativism in which each social group creates its own knowledge, a postmodernist, post-structuralist position, but draws back from its full implications.

The strength of Harding's work is her demonstration of the greater significance of the construction of the questions to be asked and how this has been patriarchally organized, rather than the narrower question of whether specific methods of investigation are more feminist than others. The position taken in this book is that the selection of questions and the resources devoted to their research is a social and political issue which is shaped by patriarchal institutions, but that the answer to any given question is not one which is socially and politically relative.

A weakness in Harding's work is her ambivalence to the point of abandoning that aspect of the project of science which is to create

universalistically authoritative knowledge on the basis of systematic enquiry. In focusing on the social construction of science she denies the possibility of this project. In this I think she goes too far in that she tends to deny the utility and validity of each body of science within its own terms. There is one type of epistemology neglected by Harding in her otherwise excellent and thorough review of the literature which does retain the scientific project – that of realism. The realist approach maintains that there are deep structures, which can be discovered with systematic enquiry.

Realists such as Bhaskar (1979) argue that there are deep social structures, the discovery of which is key to our understanding of gender relations. These structures are not necessarily visible or immediately knowable. This approach contrasts with both positivist and standpoint epistemologies. Systematic study and scientific analysis are necessary to uncover these structures, which are emergent properties of social practices. They contain a duality of both structure and action (cf., Giddens, 1984). The theoretical project in this book is realist, in the sense that it is engaged in an identification of the underlying structures of social life. However, I do not think we need to make the distinction between necessary and contingent structures of a social system in the way that Sayer (1984) suggests, since patriarchy is an open social system which can take a variety of forms.

#### PATRIARCHY

The variety of definitions of patriarchy has been a problem in some early texts (see Barrett, 1980); however, it would be surprising if developing theories of patriarchy did not use the term in slightly different ways. Patriarchy as a concept has a history of usage among social scientists, such as Weber (1947), who used it to refer to a system of government in which men ruled societies through their position as heads of households (cf., Pateman, 1988). In this usage the domination of younger men who were not household heads was as important as, if not more important than, the element of men's domination over women via the household.

The meaning of the term has evolved since Weber, especially in the writings by radical feminists, who developed the element of the domination of women by men and who paid less attention to the issue of how men dominated each other, and by dual-systems theorists, who have sought to develop a concept and theory of patriarchy as a system which exists alongside capitalism (and sometimes racism too).

Yet the practice of incorporating a generational element into the

definition of patriarchy has been continued by some of the major contemporary writers on this question, most importantly by Hartmann (1979, 1981b). I think that the incorporation of a generational element into the definition is a mistake. It implies a theory of gender inequality in which this aspect of men's domination over each other is central to men's domination over women. Yet in practice few contemporary theories of gender inequality establish that this is the case. For instance, while Hartmann uses a definition which incorporates generational hierarchy among men, this is not central to her theory of patriarchy, which focuses upon men's organizational ability to expropriate women's labour in paid work, and hence in the household. Thus inclusion of generation in the definition is confusing. It is a contingent element and best omitted.

Before developing the details of its forms, I shall define patriarchy as a system of social structures and practices in which men dominate, oppress and exploit women.

The use of the term social structure is important here, since it clearly implies rejection both of biological determinism, and the notion that every individual man is in a dominant position and every woman in a subordinate one.

Patriarchy needs to be conceptualized at different levels of abstraction. At the most abstract level it exists as a system of social relations. In contemporary Britain this is present in articulation with capitalism, and with racism. However, I do not wish to imply that it is homologous in internal structure with capitalism. At a less abstract level patriarchy is composed of six structures: the patriarchal mode of production, patriarchal relations in paid work, patriarchal relations in the state, male violence, patriarchal relations in sexuality, and patriarchal relations in cultural institutions. More concretely, in relation to each of the structures, it is possible to identify sets of patriarchal practices which are less deeply sedimented. Structures are emergent properties of practices. Any specific empirical instance will embody the effects, not only of patriarchal structures, but also of capitalism and racism.

The six structures have causal effects upon each other, both reinforcing and blocking, but are relatively autonomous. The specification of several rather than simply one base is necessary in order to avoid reductionism and essentialism. The presence of only one base, for instance, reproduction for Firestone (1974) and rape for Brownmiller (1976), is the reason for their difficulty with historical change and cultural variation. It is not necessary to go to the other extreme of denying significant social structures to overcome the charge of essentialism, as some of the postmodernist post-structuralists have done. The six identified are real, deep structures and necessary to capture the variation in gender relations in Westernized societies.

Patriarchal production relations in the household are my first structure. It is through these that women's household labour is expropriated by their husbands or cohabitants. The woman may receive her maintenance in exchange for her labour, especially when she is not also engaged in waged labour. Housewives are the producing class, while husbands are the expropriating class.

The second patriarchal structure within the economic level is that of patriarchal relations within paid work. A complex of forms of patriarchal closure within waged labour exclude women from the better forms of work and segregate them into the worse jobs which are deemed to be less skilled.

The state is patriarchal as well as being capitalist and racist. While being a site of struggle and not a monolithic entity, the state has a systematic bias towards patriarchal interests in its policies and actions.

Male violence constitutes a further structure, despite its apparently individualistic and diverse form. It is behaviour routinely experienced by women from men, with standard effects upon the actions of most women. Male violence against women is systematically condoned and legitimated by the state's refusal to intervene against it except in exceptional instances, though the practices of rape, wife beating, sexual harassment, etc., are too decentralized in their practice to be part of the state itself.

Patriarchal relations in sexuality constitute a fifth structure. Compulsory heterosexuality and the sexual double standard are two of the key forms of this structure.

Patriarchal cultural institutions completes the array of structures. These are significant for the generation of a variety of gender-differentiated forms of subjectivity. This structure is composed of a set of institutions which create the representation of women within a patriarchal gaze in a variety of arenas, such as religions, education and the media.

The chapters in the book will follow the main sites of the six structures, in order to be able to deal with the existing literature. However, as will be seen, my own argument focuses on structures, not sites. The argument as to the model of patriarchy, in the second half of each chapter, will follow the more theoretically adequate concepts of patriarchal structures.

#### CONTEMPORARY CHANGE

Are gender relations changing? Have women won their liberation? Or are recent changes superficial and insignificant? Have women lost in

some areas as they have gained in others? What are the changes?

Women were 46 per cent of the paid workforce in 1988 as compared with 34 per cent in 1959 (*Employment Gazette*, Historical Supplement, Feb 1987, Table 1.1; May 1989, Table 1.1). They were paid 73.6 per cent of men's wages in 1986 as compared with 63.1 per cent in 1970, and 75.5 per cent in 1977 (Equal Opportunities Commission, 1988b: 45). Is this liberation in increasing numbers of women obtaining a wage for work, or entry to the most exploitative jobs?

More girls than boys have acquired 'O' levels since 1985, and the gap between male and female entrants to universities is closing steadily.

The illegitimacy rate, that is, the proportion of births outside of marriage as compared to inside, rose from 4.9 per cent in 1951 to 12.7 per cent in 1981 and 21.3 per cent in 1986 (Equal Opportunities Commission, 1988b: 8). The divorce rate rose from 5.9 per thousand marriages in 1971 to 12.9 in 1986 (Equal Opportunities Commission, 1988b: 5). Is this liberation from exploitative husbands or abandonment to poverty? The fertility rate in Great Britain fell from 2.86 per woman in 1965 to 1.78 in 1985 (Equal Opportunities Commission, 1988b: 9). Are women being liberated from child care; are they going on birth strike? Or is child rearing now a more intensive activity? Are men abandoning fatherhood?

Britain has the highest divorce rate in Europe. Britain has the joint lowest percentage of women elected to Parliament of any European country apart from Greece. Does this make Britain the most patriarchal country in Europe or the least?

Is the new reproductive technology progressive in its assistance to previously infertile women, or does it merely give men as experimental doctors a chance to gain control over women's power over reproduction?

Most of the theoretical perspectives described have implicit notions as to whether such changes constitute progress or stasis for women.

Most radical feminist writers see such changes as marginal, superficial modifications in the ways in which men exploit women. Only much more radical changes would count as real improvement in women's lives. Changes in household structure have meant that women shoulder the burdens of domestic labour increasingly by themselves, as men desert the responsibilities of fatherhood. The new reproductive technologies in practice help few infertile women and instead offer men power over reproductive material. As social relations change, men, as the dominant gender, remain in control over the new arena.

Liberal feminists typically view the changes optimistically, seeing the opening up of new fields for women, ranging from traditionally male jobs, to educational opportunities, to positions in formal politics, as

advances for women. The public sphere, previously closed to women, is seen to be becoming accessible. This access will in itself bring increasing freedom to women.

Marxist feminists usually link the changing position of women with that of the working class. Thus in countries like Britain, which have witnessed a shift of power away from labour, women are seen to lose out. This is especially so in areas involving welfare provision, such as social security, nurseries and health. However, in countries where the labour movement is still making advances, women are typically seen as making progress as well.

Class theorists have a divided view on whether women are seen as making progress, insofar as they have commented on gender relations. On the one hand, those who note the increase in the number of women in paid occupations regard this as an improvement in the position of women. On the other hand, since these are usually seen as proletarian positions, it is not regarded as much of an advance.

Dual-systems theorists do not have a common view on the character of changing gender relations.

Few writers on gender consider issues of historical regress in the position of women (exceptions such as Koontz (1987) on Nazi Germany are few), or even the social forces which oppose advance (Harrison's (1978) account of opposition to the suffrage movement and Campbell (1987) and Dworkin (1983) on conservative women are unusual). I think this is a serious gap in feminist scholarship. Men and some women have actively and effectively opposed feminist demands.

In the last chapter I shall argue that we need to separate the notion of progress in the position of women from that of changes in the form of gender inequality. That is, to distinguish analytically between changes in the degree of patriarchy from changes in its form. There have been major alterations in the form of patriarchy as well as in its degree.

#### FORMS AND DEGREES OF PATRIARCHY

There have been changes in both the degree and form of patriarchy in Britain over the last century, but these changes are analytically distinct. Changes in degree include aspects of gender relations such as the slight reduction in the wages gap between men and women and the closing of the gap in educational qualifications of young men and women. These modifications in degree of patriarchy have led some commentators to suggest that patriarchy has been eliminated. However, other aspects of patriarchal relations have intensified. I want to argue that there have

been changes not only in the degree of patriarchy but also in its form. Britain has seen a movement from a private to a public form of patriarchy over the last century.

I am distinguishing two main forms of patriarchy, private and public. Private patriarchy is based upon household production as the main site of women's oppression. Public patriarchy is based principally in public sites such as employment and the state. The household does not cease to be a patriarchal structure in the public form, but it is no longer the chief site. In private patriarchy the expropriation of women's labour takes place primarily by individual patriarchs within the household, while in the public form it is a more collective appropriation. In private patriarchy the principle patriarchal strategy is exclusionary; in the public it is segregationist and subordinating.

The change from private to public patriarchy involves a change both in the relations between the structures and within the structures. In the private form household production is the dominant structure; in the public form it is replaced by employment and the state. In each form all the remaining patriarchal structures are present – there is simply a change in which are dominant. There is also a change in the institutional forms of patriarchy, with the replacement of a primarily individual form of appropriation of women by a collective one. This takes place within each of the six patriarchal structures. (See Table 1.1.)

Table 1.1 Private and public patriarchy

Form of patriarchy	Private	Public
Dominant structure	Household production	Employment/State
Wider patriarchal structures	Employment State Sexuality Violence Culture	Household production Sexuality Violence Culture
Period	C19th	C20th
Mode of expropriation	Individual	Collective
Patriarchal strategy	Exclusionary	Segregationist

## 2

### Paid Employment

#### INTRODUCTION

There are three main empirical features of gender relations in employment that writers have addressed. Why do women typically earn less than men? Why do women engage in less paid work than men? Why do women do different jobs from men?

The chapter will begin by identifying some of the contemporary differences between men and women regarding pay and types and extent of work, move on to a consideration of the main perspectives on these issues, and finally suggest an alternative interpretation.

In 1986 women earned 74 per cent of men's hourly rates. The gap widens if we consider average gross weekly earnings, when women earn only 66 per cent of men's pay (New Earnings Survey, 1986). This increased gap reflects men's longer working hours and greater likelihood of shift and overtime premia. The disparity is even greater for part-time women workers, who earned only 76 per cent of full-time women's rates of pay in 1986 (New Earnings Survey, 1986).

In 1988 women constituted 46 per cent of the paid workforce (*Employment Gazette*, May 1989, Table 2.1). This percentage has been rising steadily since the Second World War. However, if we go back to the middle of the nineteenth century, we find that the female activity rate (the percentage of women employed or unemployed as a percentage of the total number of women) was as high in 1861 as it was in 1971, at 43 per cent (Hakim, 1980).

Unemployment rates among women are approximately the same as those of men, according to data from the Labour Force Survey. During 1984–6, 10 per cent of women and 11 per cent of men were unemployed (*Employment Gazette*, March 1988: 172). This is a higher rate for women than is shown in the official government statistics, since the latter include only unemployed people who are also claiming benefit; this excludes many married women, who are only allowed access to benefits