

Is patriarchy the main cause of gender inequality?

[Sociology](#), [Social Issues](#)



This view is held by Radical feminists, they believe that patriarchy is society is the reason that women are oppressed and exploited by men, and Marxists for example hold the view that the capitalist system is the reason for the gender inequality. Feminists believe that women are unequal to men, and as a result society benefits men whilst exploiting men. Feminist investigate the effects that this inequality has on women's power, status, roles and life chances.

They believe that gender inequality is socially constructed an example is gender roles; these are taught to children at very young ages and encourage these gender inequalities to become part of society's norms. The different type of feminists believe different reasons for gender inequality, there are liberal, radical Marxist and postmodern feminists, radical are arguably the most extreme and controversial feminist group. Radical feminist believe patriarchy has been socialised into society making it accepted, this results in the unequal gender inequality for women.

People in society are taught male patriarchy through education, male dominance is enforced and a masculine view of the world is presented to children, this is shown through the gendered subjects and the teacher treatment of male and female students. They argue that male dominance has become accepted in society so much so that this leads to violence towards women being accepted in the home and on the streets. Radical feminists believe that men exploit and oppress women. They believe that the family plays a significant role in aiding this oppression, as women can be exploited by their male partners through abuse and the additional work they do.

However, Marxist criticise radicals for generalising women's experiences, women's experiences vary greatly depending on their class, ethnicity and household type. If a woman was from a middle class background she is more likely to suffer in the family, as it's accepted that only the man works, bringing greater equality than if they both worked. Radical feminists are criticised by liberals for failing to acknowledge any change to gender becoming more equal, for example car insurance since 2012 is now the same amount for both men and women, Radicals are often critiqued for having an 'outdated' look on gender inequality.

Marxist feminists fundamentally believe unlike Radicals that women's oppression is strongly linked to the capitalist system. They believe that women are exploited mainly at home and in the workforce, in the home they reproduce the next generation of workers whilst ensuring the stability of the current generation. This is illustrated through Ansley's study, which concluded that women are disadvantaged as they absorb the frustration and anger from husbands who are in turn exploited at work. The Patriarchy ideology present in society enables women to accept the inequality that's present.

Marxists acknowledge that there has been a shift in the male aspect of domestic and child care, however it's women who still have to do the majority and are therefore the most disadvantaged. Women are more disadvantaged than men as they form the 'reserve labour army' this means they work at cheaper rates and can be hired and fired much more freely than men, this also leads to women being more likely to partake in part time and shorter hour jobs, this encourages the dependency that women have upon men.

However the reserve army of labour fails to acknowledge the gendered nature of jobs, it doesn't explain why women are the reserve army. Radical feminists argue that Marxist feminists pay too little attention to patriarchy, the main cause of women's oppression instead focus greatly on the capitalist system which could be seen as completely irrelevant in terms of women's inequality. Black feminists highlight that they ignore ethnic minority groups, and like Radicals categorise women's experiences into a common group.

Postmodern feminists hold the view that there are a wide range of masculinities and femininities to pick and choose from in today's society, therefore allowing women to choose the lifestyle they lead, this suggests that women don't suffer they only chose to be unequal if they desire. This also suggests that patriarchal views aren't necessarily held anymore, and if they are they have subsequently less impact as people can have more choice in society. They also believe that women's oppression can't be summed up into one common ground, every circumstance is greatly different.

And they acknowledge that there are fundamental differences between women which will inevitably affect the choices they make. They believe that other forms of feminism are outdated and in some cases have a negative effect as they are making women unhappy with their lifestyles, instead of correcting the problems present in society they feel that feminists particularly Radicals just highlight the problems. They hold the same opinions as Hakim in regards to feminism having a negative rather than positive effect on women.

Hakim however believes that feminism has created myths about women's life, and argues like Postmodern feminism that feminism is having a

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negative effect on women, she believes that patriarchy isn't the reason for gender inequality and in actual fact gender inequality is less prominent than feminist make it out to be. Hakim accuses feminist of inventing their own myths about women's work attitudes and behaviour. She found there were five main myths about feminism. Some examples are women employment has been rising, and childcare is the main barrier preventing women competing fully with men, these myths clearly contradict feminist views.

She also found that men and women do have different work orientation, and that it shouldn't necessarily be seen as a negative thing, they just happen to be different. She also believed another myth was that the gender turnover was different, she believes that men and women get paid the same regardless of sex, Marxist would strongly disagree as the women are only the reserve army of labour so therefore don't earn as much as the breadwinning males. Half of two thirds of women hold traditional gender views, suggesting that overall women's attitudes to work are weaker than men's.

However Ginn argues Hakims claims are oversimplified, and there are considerable gaps between groups. Women's attitudes fluctuate and change over time and so the divisions can't be fixed. Ginn also argues that Hakim also has no convincing explanation, she has just stated the problems not why they occur. Other reasons for women's attitudes could be shaped by the wider social context; this could be influenced by the patriarchal system. Hakim suggests that women's attitudes are changing but much slower than feminists think. Delamont also found weakness in Hakims argument, as she based her evidence on only one large scale survey.

This presents numerous flaws as it wasn't over a long period time p and the methods themselves could be incorrect, so the findings were very unlikely to represent the population as a whole. In conclusion, radical feminist believe patriarchy is the main reason for gender inequality. Marxist feminist however see the capitalist system as the reason for gender inequality. Hakim strongly disagrees that patriarchy is the reason for gender inequality and instead argues that childcare prevents women competing with men, particularly in the workplace.