

The contributions of
feminism and
marxism to an
understanding of
gender socialisa...



In society women are still perceived as unequal to their counterparts men. This can be shown in a number of ways such as unequal pay, restricted roles and relationships in the work place and with partners and sexual harassment. Although with the equal rights of employment women still experience a situation called the glass ceiling effect. This means basically that a woman can work her way up in an industry or company but may only be able to reach a certain level where the above positions of the are dominantly occupied by males. Some of the main disadvantages faced by women at work are; Lower pay than men, lower status jobs, concentration in lower-level jobs and a greater chance of part-time/casual/temporary work than men. For these reasons this can be seen as a form of social control because women do not have full movement in the workplace. There are five main forms of feminism - Liberal Feminism, Marxist Feminism, Radical Feminism, Dual-System Feminism and Black Feminism. These all take certain views to feminism but all look at identifying the extent of female inequality in a society and the various forms it takes.

Patriarchy - (the control of society by men and the role of men in oppressing women). It can be seen all men are in opposing group to women and benefit from patriarchy. (Millet 1971). For most of the 20th century feminists fought for civil rights that was legal equality for all adults regardless of sex. However it was only in the 1960's that a woman's movement with much broader aims emerged. (Jill Mitchell 1971) argues that the woman's liberation movement in the USA was partly triggered by the radical movements of the middle and late 1960's.

In Britain in 1968 the women's liberation movement according to David Bouchier (1983), more influenced by the labour movement. In 1968 working class women trade unionists went on strike at the Ford motor plant in Dagenham, this in turn prompted the union movement in a whole to take a more active interest in women's issues. In 1975 60% of women were economically active, by 1996 the proportion had risen to 71%. In the same period the proportion of men working fell from 90% to 85% for the first time the number of women working in full time and part time jobs exceeded the number of men.

In 1996 67% of women returned to work within 11 months of a birth of a child compared with 45% of women in 1988 (The Sunday Times 25th Jan 1998). Joan Ruddock believes Feminism has become irrelevant to the current generation, she acknowledges Feminists gave the confidence to be the people they are today she says that now we are getting on with it we do not need a new feminist brigade to tell us how to lead our lives. In the 1950's gender socialisation in terms of women was that of one which did not contain equal status which narrowed opportunities for women in education and the workforce.

Women were expected to be the 'Homebuilder' while the man was seen as the bread winner. An extract from the 1950's Home economics text book (Good Wives Guide) suggests that a woman's goal is to try and make sure your home is a place of peace, order and tranquility where your husband can renew himself in body and spirit. There is a broad spectrum of feminist theories the main ones are - Liberal Feminism - This is primarily concerned to

examine the process of socialisation and the sex role conditioning in order to show that the gender roles of male and female are not biologically based.

Criticisms of Liberal Feminism are that :- It does not uncover the wider structural factors leading to female oppression. It also does not see that patriarchy is prevalent in all situations not just certain areas eg media.

Marxist Feminism - This theory sees women's oppression within the nature of capitalist society. Capitalism exploits and oppresses both male and females, and by exposing and then replacing capitalist society both females and males will be liberated.

Women are seen as important reproductive agents in capitalism, who physically produce and care for the next generation of labourers, and who socialise the next generation into submissive attitudes. Criticisms of Marxist feminism - there is an over emphasis on capitalism. The target for women and for analysis should be patriarchy in whatever context. Radical Feminism - This assumes that the real cause of oppression of women is men.

Patriarchy exists because men deliberately or unknowingly benefit from this and wish to continue.

Women are categorised as an inferior class to and are exploited. Some radical feminists argue that women fall into the category of the underclass because on political, social and economic grounds their experiences are significantly worse than men's. Criticisms of radical feminism - It over emphasises the extent to which women share common experiences of exploitation and downgrades class and race relations. It fails to take account in its analysis of other factors besides patriarchy.

Dual-System theory - Combines elements of radical feminism and Marxist feminism, it argues that two systems of exploitation are intertwined and oppression exists. The first of these is capitalism which ensures the exploitation of all workers but in particular women; the second is that at the same time women are oppressed by men within this capitalist structure. The interconnected roles of women in the labour forces and in the home combine to form a system of oppression that maintains women are in their oppressed position while benefiting men and capitalism.

Criticisms of the dual system theory - the system underplays the active role of women's oppression by seeing men's actions as their response to capitalism. The Sex Discrimination Act was passed by the Labour government in 1975 as part of a range of measures to enhance and protect the position of women. At the same time, the Equal Opportunities Commission was set up with the duty of enforcing the law.