

# Exploring the issues of gender oppression sociology essay



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In order to explore the question of domestic violence, I will address the possible nature and scope of gender oppression in contemporary Britain. This will involve exploring and assessing the views of feminist writers on this issue.

Patriarchy can be seen as a system of society or government in which men hold the power, and women are largely excluded from it. Patriarchy can be said to permeate key social institutions and agents of socialisation in society, including the media, the education system and the family.

Domestic violence can be defined as being where one person harms another person with whom they have (or have had) some sort of relationship.

Statistics suggest that the main perpetrators of domestic violence are men. For a long time these types of crime were considered a private matter rather than a public concern, and domestic violence has been largely 'invisible'. Criminologists have sought to investigate the true incidence of this 'dark figure' of crime through victimisation surveys. Attitudes towards domestic violence have arguably changed considerably in the second half of the twentieth century and into the early 21st century. The response of criminal justice agencies has shifted from mediation to interventionism. Under the Crime and Disorder Act (1998) New Labour introduced specialist domestic violence units and a zero-tolerance approach to domestic violence involving an emphasis on arresting, charging and prosecuting offenders.

Despite formal moves towards gender equality, substantive equality appears to be a continuing challenge, and patriarchy or gender oppression arguably persists. At this point it may be useful to unpack the concept of patriarchy.

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Walby private patriarchy (1990: 20) defines patriarchy more precisely as ‘ a system of social structures and practices in which men dominate, oppress, and exploit women.’

Rather than identifying a single cause of patriarchy, such as the family, Walby identifies interacting structures in which patriarchy operates i. e. housework, paid work, State, male violence, cultural institutions.

Perhaps a key factor underlying domestic violence is the lack of ‘ symmetry’ in domestic relationships. It is argued by some feminists that women are still expected to perform a triple shift consisting of domestic labour, emotional labour, and paid employment. Perhaps key here is that, despite other constraints and burdens, women are expected to perform an expressive role. From the perspective of Marxist feminists this involves women acting as a safety valve.

According to functionalist sociologists (Parsons, 1951), the family performs a key function in the stabilisation of adult personalities. This is often called ‘ warm bath theory’, in which the woman is stereotypically expected to attend to the emotional needs of the man and help him de-stress from the stresses and strains of the instrumentalist role. If the woman fails to attend to the man’s needs arguably this can result in domestic violence. Feminists tend to support family diversity and regard the growth of single parent families and the legal and social changes facilitating divorce as liberating for women in empowering them to escape from abusive, empty-shell relationships.

Marxist feminists, like radical feminists, look at the family in a negative and critical way. They argue though that the main cause women’s oppression is <https://assignbuster.com/exploring-the-issues-of-gender-oppression-sociology-essay/>

capitalism – class oppression being the root of gender oppression. Women are said to serve capitalism in looking after men who work for the bosses; giving birth to the next generation of workers and as ‘takers of shit’ (Ansley, 1972). Here the stabilisation of adult personalities function carried out by women is seen in negative sense in that it perpetuates the capitalist system and hence women’s subjugation.

Arguably, In the late 20th century, with the deindustrialisation of society, mainly working class men have experienced a crisis of masculinity, where men are experiencing uncertainty in their gender roles (Faludi, 1999). The rise of female independence and changes in working practices are said have fundamentally changed the experience of men. In response to these structural and cultural changes, men have arguably asserted a violent masculinity which might find expression in domestic violence. Working class women have perhaps not experienced the impact of feminism, instead experiencing both a breakdown of the gender deal and class deal.

It has been argued that the criminal justice system is biased against women. Gender-neutral laws perhaps fail to take account of the experiences of women in the context of their lives, i. e. substantive issues. For example, women, according to the slow-fuse argument may experience abuse over a period of time and then one day murder their abusive partner. The law is increasingly taking account of these qualitatively different circumstances experienced by women. (Kennedy, 2005)

Walby argues that huge progress has been made in private patriarchy, meaning domination in the household. However, Walby argues that public

patriarchy still persists. A question perhaps unexplored by Walby is how much does this public patriarchy impact upon the private sphere? The proliferation of ' lads mags' arguably objectifying women could be seen as reproducing gender oppressive relations.

Walby, S. (1990) *Theorizing Patriarchy*, Blackwell, Oxford.

Kennedy, S (2005) *Is the Criminal Justice System Skewed Against Women*

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\* The Observer, Sunday 5 September 2010