

**Essential notes**

**Discrimination** is the unfavourable treatment of an individual or social group compared to other individuals or social groups.

**Essential notes**

There are several pieces of legislation you should be aware of:

- The 1970 Equal Pay Act enacted in 1975
- 1982/1985: two laws which strengthened the Equal Pay Act
- 1975 Sex Discrimination Act
- 2006 Equality Act, enforceable from 2010.

**Examiners' notes**

Use appropriate sociological terminology **Sex** is a biological construct, gender is socially constructed. Sociologists usually use gender. Gender refers to men and women and therefore answers to exam questions which refer to gender must consider men and women.

**Essential notes**

The 'leaky pipeline' refers to the gradual loss of women in higher levels of an occupational area, and the 'concrete ceiling' to the experiences of black and Asian women who are not told about the opportunities they might aspire to, and therefore cannot see through a 'glass ceiling'.

**Gender and inequality**

Legislation over the last 40 years has failed to eradicate gender inequalities and discrimination in society. Gender inequalities can be found in areas of society such as the labour market, education, health and families and households. The extent to which women and men from different ethnic groups and social classes experience inequalities varies and it is not possible to make generalizations.

**Employment**

- Women form 45% of the workforce but 40% of them work part-time, compared to only 11% of men.
- The rate of unemployment for women is rising faster than for men and reached one million in 2010.
- Single parents are more likely to be unemployed than married mothers.
- Women have, until recently, been the main carers of children, and with the ageing population many women in their 50s undertake 'dual caring', of both the elderly and children. However, men are now doing almost as much (Carers UK 2007).

**Horizontal segregation**

This is the extent to which men and women are employed in different occupational groups.

- There are approximately 77 occupational groups and women are disproportionately clustered in the '5 cs' cleaning, caring, cashiering, catering and clerical (Women and Work Commission 2006).
- These five areas have significant numbers of low-paid, low-status jobs, many of which are part-time.

**Vertical segregation**

This is the extent to which men and women are at different levels in occupations or in the labour market generally.

- There are large numbers of women in nursing and primary education, but only a relatively small percentage have the higher-status or better-paid jobs such as senior nurses or head teachers.
- In 2009 women constituted 12% of the directors of the top 100 FTSE companies (Cranfield School of Management). This rose to 13.6% in 2010. In an attempt to break the glass ceiling, which for some women is more of a 'concrete' ceiling, the directors of leading companies have set up the 30% group (2010).
- Women experience the 'leaky pipeline' in some areas of employment, particularly those in science and technology where there are a lot of high-status, well-paid jobs.

**Gender pay gap**

- The average pay gap between men and women is 16.4%.
- This can affect pensions and lead to the feminization of poverty amongst the elderly.

- The gender pay gap is lowest for people under 30; for those in their 40s it is on average five times greater (Equality and Human Rights Commission, 2010). In education the gap is 12.9% whilst in banking and finance it is 37.8%, reflecting the higher status of that sector.
- For disabled men the pay gap between them and other male workers is 11%; for women it is 22%.

**Education**

- Girls of all ethnic backgrounds do better than boys.
- Girls from Chinese and Indian backgrounds do better than any other social group.
- Subject choices are gendered; for example, physics is male-dominated.
- The number of boys excluded, especially black boys, is four times that of girls.
- Girls are more likely to self-exclude by truanting (Osler and Vincent, 2003).
- Archer (2003) found that some Asian boys are becoming as disruptive as other boys, in her study *Race, Masculinity and Schooling*.

**Key study**

Using qualitative methods of data collection, Francis (2000) studied 14–16 year olds in three schools. She found that schools were male-orientated and boys tended to dominate the classroom, often with noisy and disruptive behaviour. Boys also dominated the playground by occupying space. She found that some teachers treated boys and girls differently and in some cases disciplined the boys more harshly. The disruptive behaviour of girls was much quieter and therefore less noticeable. Francis found that girls received less attention from teachers than boys, partly as a result of the different behaviours. Consequently they were disadvantaged by not being pushed to their full potential.

Jackson (2006) found there had been a shift in girls' behaviour; some were adopting **laddish** behaviours traditionally associated with boys, becoming **ladettes**.

**Health**

- Women have longer life expectancy than men, 82 years compared to 78, but the gap is closing (Department of Health, 2010).
- Women experience greater morbidity, including more stress-related illnesses.
- Women use health services more but that is inflated by pregnancy, care of children and their longevity.
- Men are more likely to be alcoholics and drug users.
- Young males engage in risky behaviour (**edgework**) increasing the risk of accidents or death (Lyng, 1990), but girls now join the boys in weekend binge drinking and violence (Winlow, 2007).

Source: Francis, B. (2000) *Boys, Girls and Achievement: Addressing the Classroom Issues*.

**Essential notes**

**Mortality** statistics refer to death rates, **morbidity** statistics to illness.

**Examiners' notes**

Gender inequalities are experienced by men and women. Read questions carefully to check whether you are being asked about gender inequalities or inequalities specifically faced by women or men. In addition, questions will sometimes ask for sociological explanations and sometimes feminist explanations; again, read the question very carefully.

**Essential notes**

Parsons argues that the family has two functions, socializing children and the stabilization of the adult personality. It is through the first of these that gendered roles are learnt.

**Essential notes**

Hakim (2004) argues there have been improvements in opportunities for women. Her theory is described as 'preference theory'. Women can choose to have a career, look after children or a combination of the two. They can make a 'rational choice' and exercise a preference.

**Explanations of gender inequality**

**Functionalism**

Functionalists argue that gender roles in families are different, not unequal. The difference, Parsons argues, is that women are more suited to the 'expressive' role of caring and nurturing and men to the 'instrumental' role of the breadwinner.

Murdock supports this view, arguing that one of the four functions of the family is to educate children into the accepted norms and values of society, which includes their gender roles.

**Human capital theory**

Some economists take a similar view, arguing that men have more human capital than women as far as work is concerned. They have a greater commitment to work, more experience and undertake more training. It is not surprising, therefore, that women will, on balance, be paid less and receive less training, and therefore have less chance of promotion.

**Marxism**

Abbott and Wallace (2005) argue that Marx marginalized women in his analysis of capitalism.

Engels, Marx's colleague, argued:

- The role of the family is to maintain and reproduce the labour force in order to support capitalism.
- The nuclear family enables men to pass on their property. Men need to control women so they know who are their heirs.

**Dual labour market theory**

The dual labour market theory has its roots in neo-Weberianism. Barron and Norris argue that:

- There are two labour markets: the primary one where jobs are secure, well paid and there are good working conditions; and the secondary labour market, characterized by lower paid jobs with less security, often part-time or temporary.
- Workers in the secondary labour market are easily replaced and employers can get away with paying them poor wages compared to those in the primary labour market.
- Women are more likely to be employed in the secondary labour market because employers think they are less interested in work than men.

The dual labour market theory has been criticized by Burchell and Rubery (1994), who argue that the division between primary and secondary labour markets is too simplistic. Their research revealed at least five divisions, and these were not all gendered.

**Liberal feminists**

Liberal feminists want equal opportunities for men and women. They argue this can be done by legislation and by changing attitudes.

They argue that:

- Gender roles are socially constructed through the family, education and the media.

- **Socialization** or sex-role conditioning leads to gender inequalities. Women are socialized into passive or subordinate roles and men into dominant ones. Oakley argues that a process of **canalization** and **manipulation** socializes children into specific gender roles.
- Teachers and careers advisors perpetuate the view that women and girls will be good at certain subjects and occupations (Kelly (1987), Colley (1986) and Grafton (1987)).
- Girls are still steered towards or still choose gendered subjects.
- Oakley argues that the dominant patriarchal ideology means women are perceived as wives and mothers and therefore as secondary in the job market.

**Gender roles in the family**

- There has been progress with regard to gender roles in the family; men are now doing more childcare and more domestic labour (Hauri and Hollingworth). Somerville (2000) argues that women are now better off; they can get divorced, have access to good jobs, obtain a good education and have control over their fertility.
- Things are changing, particularly for dual career, middle-class families.
- Wilkinson argues that there has been a 'genderquake' as the service sector has increased in size and women are being empowered.
- Lees and Sharpe both argue that women's position is changing. They have greater aspirations than they did in the 1970s.

**Key study**

Based largely on a review of the work of other feminists, Somerville takes a liberal feminist stance and argues there is considerable evidence to show progress in the position of women. They have greater freedom to take on paid work even when married with young children. They have more choice about the type of relationship and living arrangements they enter into, and the rise in the number of work-rich families has led to more men taking on domestic responsibilities. She argues that there is still a culture of men working long hours and an expectation that women will take on a greater share of childcare and domestic labour, but if there were more family-friendly flexible paid employment opportunities, even greater equality could be achieved.

**Evaluation**

Liberal feminism:

- does not take account of structural constraints women face in the workplace or of their class and ethnicity
- assumes socialization is a passive process and men and women accept what they are told
- is criticized by other feminists for working within the patriarchal system rather than challenging it
- tends to focus on the public sphere and ignore the private
- lacks a common theoretical basis – liberal feminists simply believe social change is possible.

**Essential notes**

Patriarchy is male domination: a patriarchal society is one which is dominated by men in all areas.

**Examiners' notes**

It is important to make links from one part of the unit to another and to other units – liberal feminism could be linked to the 'march of progress' theorists. (See page 34.)

**Examiners' notes**

Do not confuse positive action with positive discrimination. Positive discrimination is illegal; positive action is concerned with ensuring everyone has the same opportunities to, for example, apply for jobs.

**Source:** Somerville, J (2000), *Feminism and the Family; Politics and Society in the UK and USA*, Macmillan

**Essential notes**

Focusing on the public sphere means that liberal feminists have not addressed some of the family issues such as domestic violence, which affect women and, to a lesser extent, men. In addition, Marxist and radical feminists argue changes in the law are not enough. Patriarchy is still the dominant ideology.

**Essential notes**

Kerr argued that women served three bosses: their boss at work, their husband in the home and their husband's boss.

**Essential notes**

Women are cheap labour and, as Beechey and others have argued, are used as a reserve army of labour; occasionally in a recession they are used to replace more expensive male workers.

**Marxist feminism**

Marxist feminists argue:

- Women's oppression is inextricably linked to capitalism.
- Women are exploited by capitalism at work and at home; at home they meet the needs of capitalism by reproducing the next generation of workers and looking after the current workforce.
- They absorb the frustration and anger of husbands who are themselves exploited at work (Ansley, 1972).
- Women are encouraged by the patriarchal ideology to believe the system is fair.
- Despite the advent of the 'new man' and some shift in the amount of childcare and domestic labour men do, women still do the majority.
- At work they are low paid and form a part of the **reserve army of labour**; they are a cheap source of labour and can be brought in and out of the labour force as necessary. They are also more likely to be casual or part-time and non-unionized, which makes it easy to 'let them go' when a recession occurs.
- They tend to change jobs more frequently than men, as childcare demands.
- Sexism as well as racism keeps the working class divided.
- Doyal argues the NHS serves the needs of capitalism by ensuring a healthy workforce. She argues the health service is sexist and patriarchal.
- They argue 'power to the sisters must mean power to the class'; in other words, changes will only take place if men and women work together.

**Evaluation**

- The reserve army of labour theory fails to explain the gendered nature of jobs.
- Radical feminists argue that Marxist feminists pay too little attention to **patriarchy**.
- Black feminists argue that Marxist feminists tend to ignore minority ethnic groups.

**Radical feminism**

- Radical feminists argue that patriarchy is the oldest oppression; men exploit and oppress women.
- The family is the main source of this oppression and some argue that all-female households are the better option.
- Education contributes to patriarchal ideology by reflecting a masculine view of the world through the presentation of subjects and teacher behaviour towards girls and boys.
- They argue that male domination in society means women are oppressed and subjected to violence in the home and on the streets.
- Ehrenreich and English (1978) argue that medicine has historically controlled women.

**Evaluation**

- Marxist feminists say it is not realistic for radical feminists to suggest not all women share the same or similar experiences; the labour market experiences of middle-class women and working-class women are very different.

- Radical feminists ignore the extent to which progress or gender equality has been made.
- They are accused of ignoring the divisions between women in relation to class and ethnicity.

**Black feminism**

- Much of the work of feminists in the late 20th century has ignored ethnicity.
- Some black feminists argue families provide support in a racist society. They argue that the relationship between black men and women is different from that between white men and women.
- Black women are marginalized, oppressed and experience racialization. Mirza's study on black girls found that they developed strategies for dealing with these disadvantages.

**Key study**

Mirza (1992) combined a longitudinal survey approach with a school-based **ethnography** in her study of 62 young second-generation Caribbean working-class women, aged 15 to 19, and their white male and female peers. The study took place in two working-class schools in London and followed the girls as they moved from school into the workplace. As a group, the black females were the highest achieving group in the two schools; black males were the lowest achievers and the white males and females were in between.

Mirza found the black girls did not accept the negative, often racist, attitudes of teachers towards them and were very positive about their own cultural and racial identity. They challenged their teachers' low academic expectations of them but lacked power in the organization of the school hierarchy to be 'heard'. Mirza found that despite the unsatisfactory nature of the careers service and careers advice, the girls retained high aspirations in terms of the work they hoped to do after school. They were driven by what Mirza described as 'educational urgency', meaning they wanted to succeed against the odds.

**Postmodern feminists (sometimes described as difference feminists)**

- Take the view that there are a range of masculinities and femininities to 'pick' from.
- There is no one grand story to explain the oppression of women.
- There are differences between women which will affect the choices they make.

**Post-feminism**

Post-feminists argue that gender inequalities have largely disappeared and there is no longer a need for feminism. Some post-feminists see feminism as a negative influence, encouraging women to be dissatisfied with their family life.

Source: Mirza, H.S (1992) *Young, Female and Black*, Routledge

**Examiners' notes**

Line these points with the more general ideas of postmodernism described on pages 26–27.