

- pp. 735–740. Examination of the history and current status of exchange theory whose senior author is one of the most important living contributors to that theory.
- NOAH FRIEDKIN "Exchange Networks." In George Ritzer, ed., *The Encyclopedia of Social Theory*, 2 volumes. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2005, pp. 264–265. Entry focused on the concept that gets to the heart of a more integrated exchange theory.
- IRA COHEN "Structuration." In George Ritzer, ed., *The Encyclopedia of Social Theory*, 2 volumes. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2005, pp. 811–814. Readable overview of Giddens's dense and difficult structuration theory by one of its foremost analysts.
- IRA COHEN *Structuration Theory*. London: Macmillan, 1989. Makes structuration theory as accessible as possible.
- IAN CRAIB *Anthony Giddens*. London: Routledge, 1992. A critical examination of Giddens's work, including structuration theory.
- MARGARET ARCHER *Culture and Agency: The Place of Culture in Social Theory*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988. The source for Archer's views on Giddens and her own ideas on the integration of culture and agency.
- DAVID SWARTZ *Culture and Power: The Sociology of Pierre Bourdieu*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997. Recent and excellent overview of the contributions of Pierre Bourdieu to social theory.
- CRAIG CALHOUN "Pierre Bourdieu." In George Ritzer, ed., *The Blackwell Companion to Major Social Theorists*. Malden, MA, and Oxford, England: Blackwell, 2000, pp. 696–730. Even more recent, and much briefer, review of Bourdieu's work and contributions.
- RICHARD JENKINS "Pierre Bourdieu." In George Ritzer, ed., *The Encyclopedia of Social Theory*, 2 volumes. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2005, pp. 66–71. Broad overview of the person and his work that includes a discussion of the relationship between habitus and field.
- RICHARD JENKINS "Habitus." In George Ritzer, ed., *The Encyclopedia of Social Theory*, 2 volumes. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2005, pp. 352–353. More detailed examination of the best-known and most influential of Bourdieu's concepts.

## Contemporary Feminist Theories

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- The Basic Theoretical Questions
- Contemporary Feminist Theories
- Towards a Feminist Sociological Theory
- Summary
- Suggested Readings

**Feminist theory** is a generalized, wide-ranging system of ideas about social life and human experience developed from a woman-centered perspective. It is woman-centered in two ways: First, the starting point of all its investigation is the situations and experiences of women in society; second, it seeks to describe and critically evaluate the world from the distinctive vantage points of women. Feminist theory differs from most sociological theories in that it is the work of an interdisciplinary community, and that feminist sociologists seek to broaden and deepen disciplinary knowledge by incorporating discoveries being made by this interdisciplinary community.

Historically feminist theory has developed in relation to feminist activism, which is usually described in terms of "waves" of collective mobilization. The classic roots of contemporary feminist theory are in first-wave feminist activism (ca. 1848–1920), which centered on women's struggle for the vote and for admission to the political process. Contemporary feminist theory began with second-wave activism (1960–1990), which worked to translate basic political rights into tangible economic and social equality with men, and is continued in third-wave

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**feminist theory** A generalized, wide-ranging system of ideas about social life and human experience developed from a woman-centered perspective.

activism (1990–present), which will be determined by those of you who will spend the majority of your life in the 21st century.

## THE BASIC THEORETICAL QUESTIONS

The impetus for contemporary feminist theory begins in a deceptively simple question: And what about the women? In other words: Where are the women in any situation being investigated? If they are not present, why? If they are present, what exactly are they doing? How do they experience the situation? What do they contribute to it? What does it mean to them?

Forty years of posing this question have produced some generalizable conclusions. Women are present in most social situations. Where they are not present, the reason is not because of their lack of ability or interest but because there have been deliberate efforts to exclude them. Where they are present, women have played roles very different from the popular conception of them (e.g., as passive wives and mothers). Indeed, as wives and as mothers and in a series of other roles, women have, along with men, actively created many situations being studied. Yet though women are actively present in most social situations, scholars, publics, and social actors themselves, both male and female, have often been blind to their presence. Moreover, women's roles in most social situations, although essential, have been different from, less privileged than, and subordinate to, those of men. Their invisibility is only one indicator of this inequality.

Feminism's second basic question is: Why then is all this as it is? The first question calls for a description of the social world; this second question requires an explanation of that world. Description and explanation of the social world are two faces of any sociological theory. Feminism's attempts to answer these questions have therefore produced a theory of universal importance for sociology.

The third question for all feminists is: How can we change and improve the social world to make it a more just place for all people? This commitment to social transformation in the interest of justice is the distinctive characteristic of critical social theory, a commitment shared in sociology by feminism, Marxism, neo-Marxism, and social theories being developed by racial and ethnic minorities and in postcolonial societies. The commitment to critical theory requires that feminist theorists ask how their work will improve the lives of the people they study.

As the circle of feminists exploring these questions has become more inclusive of people from diverse backgrounds, both in the United States and internationally, feminist theorists have raised a third question: And what about the differences among women? Exploring this question leads to a general conclusion that the invisibility, inequality, and role differences in relation to men, which generally characterize women's lives, are profoundly affected by a woman's social location—that is, by her class, race, age, affectional preference, marital status, religion, ethnicity, and global location.

But feminist theory is not just about women. Posing and answering feminist theory's basic questions has produced a theory of social life universal in its applicability and comparable to the revolution in thought produced by Marx. Marx, more than a century ago, showed social scientists that the knowledge

people assumed to be an absolute and universal statement of truth about society in fact reflects the experiences of those who economically and politically rule the social world and that it is possible to view the world from the vantage point of the world's workers, the economically and politically subordinate. Today, feminism's basic theoretical questions are producing a similar radical transformation of our understanding of the world: What we have taken as universal and absolute knowledge is in fact knowledge derived from the experiences of a powerful section of society, men as masters. That knowledge is relativized if we rediscover the vantage point of women who in subordinated but indispensable serving roles have worked to sustain and recreate the society we live in.

Feminism's radical challenge to established systems of knowledge, by contrasting them with women-centered understandings of reality, not only relativizes established knowledge, but also deconstructs such knowledge. Feminism deconstructs established systems of knowledge by showing their masculinist bias and the gender politics framing and informing them. But feminism itself has become the subject of relativizing and deconstructionist pressures from within its own theoretical boundaries, especially in the last decade. Women of color, women in postcolonial societies, working-class women, lesbians are confronting the white, privileged-class, heterosexual status of many leading feminists. These women, speaking from what bell hooks call margin to center, show that there are many women-centered knowledge systems that oppose some feminist claims about a unitary woman's standpoint. The second deconstructionist pressure within feminism comes from a growing postmodernist literature (see Chapter 9) that raises questions about gender as an undifferentiated concept and about the individual self as a stable locus of consciousness and personhood from which gender and the world are experienced.

## CONTEMPORARY FEMINIST THEORIES

Feminist sociological theory grows out of and relates to feminist theory generally, and variations in feminist sociological theory reflect varied responses within the broad feminist movement to the question, "And what about the women?" This section offers a typology (summarized in Table 8.1) of the feminist theories arising from the answers to that question and most relevant to feminist sociological theory. There are four major answers:

1. Women's location in, and experience of, most situations is *different* from that of the men in those situations.
2. Women's location in most situations is not only different from but also less privileged than or *unequal* to that of men.
3. Women's situation also has to be understood in terms of a direct power relationship between men and women. Women are *oppressed*: that is, restrained, subordinated, molded, and used and abused by men.
4. Women's experiences of difference, inequality, and oppression vary according to their total location within societies' arrangements of *structural oppression* or vectors of oppression and privilege: class, race, ethnicity, age, affectional preference, marital status, and global location.

TABLE 8.1. Overview of Varieties of Feminist Theory

Basic varieties of feminist theory— answers to the descriptive question: What about the women?	Distinctions within theories— answers to the explanatory question: Why is women's situation as it is?
<i>Gender Difference</i>	
Women's location in, and experience of, most situations are <i>different</i> from those of men in the situation.	Cultural feminism Biological Institutional Interactional Phenomenological
<i>Gender Inequality</i>	
Women's location in most situations is not only different but also less privileged than or <i>unequal</i> to that of men.	Liberal feminism
<i>Gender Oppression</i>	
Women are <i>oppressed</i> , not just different from or unequal to, but actively restrained, subordinated, molded, and used and abused by men.	Psychoanalytic feminism Radical feminism
<i>Structural Oppression</i>	
Women's experiences of difference, inequality, and oppression vary by their social location within capitalism, patriarchy, and racism.	Socialist feminism Intersectionality theory

These general answers can be further broken down in terms of the second basic question of feminist theory, "Why is all this as it is?" (see Table 8.1).

Foundational to all these answers within feminist sociological theory is the idea of gender. **Gender** is understood as the socially constructed patterning of masculinity and femininity and of the relationships between men and women. To say that gender is **socially constructed** is to say that it is the product of collective acts of definition by human beings not the "natural" outgrowth of biological imperatives. This idea is in contrast to the belief held by some people and some nonsociological feminist theorists that gender reflects innate sexual difference. But feminist theory should not be confused with the sociology of

**gender** The socially constructed patterning of masculinity and femininity and of the relations between men and women.

**social construction** The process of collective definition by which humans create a social world that is perceived as "real," that is, as existing independent of human volition and of the original acts of definition that produced it.

gender. **Sociology of gender**, like sociology of deviance or small groups, is produced by sociologists turning their attention to a particular aspect of the social world, in this case, the study of male and female roles, relations, and identities. Feminist sociological theory takes the fact of gender as a starting point for creating a critical, woman-centered patterning of all social life.

The remainder of this section explores the feminist theories of gender difference, gender inequality, gender oppression, and structural oppression, describing the general features of each approach, key lines of variation within it, and recommendations for change. Three notes of caution are, however, important:

1. Many theorists' work resists neat categorization. One must either talk about their main theoretical emphasis or distinguish among their various theoretical statements.
2. One major trend in feminist work today is to weave together ideas drawn from several theories in order to focus on specific issues like the politics of the body or the nature of the state.
3. Given the volume of recent feminist writings, comprehensiveness is beyond the scope of this chapter.

## Gender Difference

The argument of fundamental gender difference has long been used against women to claim that their inferior qualities justify their subservience to men. That argument was reversed by some first-wave feminists who created a theory of **cultural feminism**, which extols the positive aspects of what is seen as the female character or feminine personality. Early theorists like Jane Addams and Charlotte Perkins Gilman argued that in governing the state, society needed such women's virtues as cooperation, caring, pacificism, and nonviolence in the settlement of conflicts. This tradition has continued to the present day in several arguments: women's distinctive standards for ethical judgment, caring attention as a mode of women's consciousness, different achievement motivation patterns, a female style of communication, women's capacity for openness to emotional experience, women's fantasies of sexuality and intimacy, and women's lower levels of aggressive behavior and greater capacity for creating peaceful coexistence.

Four major explanations of gender difference have been developed by feminist theorists and sociologists: biological, institutional, interactional, and phenomenological. Sociologist Alice Rossi has linked the different *biological* functions of males and females to different patterns of hormonally determined development over the life cycle and this development, in turn, to sex-specific variation in

**sociology of gender** The study of socially constructed male and female roles, relations, and identities.

**cultural feminism** A feminist theory of difference that extols the positive aspects of women.

such traits as sensitivity to light and sound and to differences in left- and right-brain connections. These differences, she argues, feed into different play patterns in childhood, the well-known female math anxiety, and the apparent fact that women are more predisposed to care for infants in a nurturing way than are men. Rossi recommends that sociocultural arrangements be adjusted to compensate through social learning for each gender's biologically given disadvantages.

*Institutional* explanations posit that gender differences result from the different roles that women and men come to play within various institutional settings. A major determinant of difference is seen to be the sexual division of labor that links women to the functions of wife, mother, and household worker, to the private sphere of home and family, and thus to a lifelong series of events and experiences very different from those of men. Women's roles as mothers and wives are learned in socialization. Children in particular (but also adults readying themselves, for instance, for marriage or motherhood) are prepared for playing these various life roles according to a gendered script. Some studies argue that women's experience of socialization and in institutional roles leads them to distinctive forms of political activism such as in environmental justice movements.

But some sociologists see socialization and role theories as presenting too static and deterministic a model. In an argument, increasingly referenced, feminist ethnomethodologists Candace West and Don Zimmerman emphasize people's active work in reproducing gender in contextualized, ongoing *interactional* practices, where cultural typifications of gender are enacted, performed, experimented with, and even transformed. They describe people as doing gender in all the various interactions of daily life, confirming to themselves and others that they are beings with gender.

Feminist thinkers offering *existential and phenomenological* analyses have developed one of the most enduring themes of feminist theory: the marginalization of women as Other in a male-created culture (This theme is given its classic formulation in Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex*). In such analyses, the world that people inhabit is seen as developed out of a culture created by men and assuming the male as the consciousness from which the world is viewed and defined. That culture, at best, pushes women's experience and ways of knowing themselves to the very margins of conceptual framing and, at its most frightening, creates a construct of the woman as "the Other," an objectified being, who is assigned traits that represent the opposite of the agentic, subject male. Women's difference from men results in part from this fact of cultural construction that excludes them and in part from their internalization of Otherness. Crucial questions here are whether women can liberate themselves from the status of object/other and whether in that liberation they must become like men or can achieve a distinctive subjectivity. The tilt in this argument (a tilt developed radically by French psychoanalytic feminists like Hélène Cixous and Luce Irigaray) is that women will develop a consciousness and culture that is uniquely theirs.

In seeking to bring about change, theorists of difference demand that women's ways of being be recognized as viable alternatives to male modes and

that public knowledge, academic scholarship, and the organization of social life be adjusted to take serious account of female ways of being. At its most militant, this theoretical approach makes the centuries-old feminist claim: When a major infusion of women's ways becomes part of public life, the world will be a safer, more just place for us all.

## Gender Inequality

Feminist theories of gender inequality argue that not only are men and women situated in society differently but also unequally. Women get less of the material resources, social status, power, and opportunities for self-actualization than do men who share their social location—whether it is a location based on class, race, occupation, ethnicity, religion, education, nationality, or any other socially significant factor. This inequality results from the organization of society, not from any significant biological or personality differences between women and men. All human beings are characterized by a deep need for freedom to seek self-actualization and by a fundamental malleability that leads them to adapt to the constraints or opportunities of the situations in which they find themselves. To say that there is gender inequality, then, is to claim that women are situationally less empowered than men to realize the need they share with men for self-actualization. All inequality theories assume that both women and men will respond fairly easily and naturally to more egalitarian social structures and situations. They affirm, in other words, that it is possible to change the situation. In this belief, theorists of gender inequality contrast with the theorists of gender difference, who present a picture of social life in which gender differences are, whatever their cause, more durable, more penetrative of personality, and less easily changed.

**Liberal Feminism** The basic ideas of liberal feminist theory have been so intertwined with the history of U.S. feminist activism, realized and elaborated in practice, and successfully incorporated into the daily life of the society, that its foundational principle now seems unremarkable. That principle is that women and men are equal, an idea now so taken-for-granted, that it may be hard to envision it as the starting point of a theory. But in 1848, at the time of the first women's rights convention in world history, at Seneca Falls, New York, women were only barely even second class citizens: They could neither vote nor serve on juries (even if the defendant was a woman) nor hold public office nor practice medicine or law or theology. If married, the woman could not hold property in her own name, claim her wages from work outside the home as her own,

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**liberal feminism** A feminist theory of inequality that argues that women may claim equality with men on the basis of an essential human capacity for reasoned moral agency, that gender inequality is the result of a patriarchal and sexist patterning of the division of labor, and that gender equality can be produced by transforming the division of labor through the repatterning of key institutions—law, work, family, education, and media.

### Jessie Bernard

*A Biographical Vignette*



Born Jessie Ravitch on June 8, 1903, in Minneapolis, she made her first outgrowth when she moved from her Jewish immigrant family to the University of Minnesota at the age of 17. At the university, she studied with Pitirim Sorokin, who later founded the Harvard sociology department, and with L. L. Bernard, who helped found the *American Sociological Review* and whom she married in 1925. Her study with Bernard gave her a grounding in positivistic sociology that showed in her later work in her ability to integrate quantitative research into increasingly qualitative and critical studies. She completed her Ph.D. at Washington University in St. Louis in 1935.

By the mid-1940s, the Bernards were at Pennsylvania State University, and Jessie was in the midst of outgrowing positivism. The Nazi Holocaust destroyed her faith that science could know and produce a just world, and she moved toward a sense of knowledge as contextualized rather than objective. She also began to establish an independent academic reputation. Her husband died in 1951, but she remained at Penn State until about 1960, teaching, writing, and raising her three children. In the 60s, she moved to Washington, D.C., to devote herself fully to writing and research.

The most dramatic outgrowth was in the last third of her life, from 1964 to her death in 1996. This period is significant for both Bernard's extraordinary output and what it says about career patterns in women's lives.

have a right to custody of her children in the case of divorce, or even sign her own will; her husband had the right and—many, including judges, held—the duty to physically chastise her, that is, to beat her in order to preserve order in the commonwealth. The Seneca Falls convention concluded with the adoption of “the Declaration of Sentiments,” which opens by revising the Declaration of Independence: “We hold these truths to be self-evident: that all men and women are created equal” (“and women” is added). This was a radical claim, both politically and conceptually. It situated the women's quest for justice in the intellectual discourses of the Enlightenment, the American and French Revolutions, and the Abolitionist Movement, and it conceptualized the woman not in the context of home and family but as an autonomous individual with rights in her own person. These rights empower women to enter the political process to secure full equality through organized appeals to a reasonable public and the use of the state.

Where cultural feminism (see Gender Difference above) argued that women had a duty to bring from home and family their ways of knowing to the running of the state, classical liberal feminism argued that women, like men, carried in their human personhood the right to participate in the government of society on their own behalf.

The theoretical voyage of liberal feminism from 1848 to the present has been a multilayered exploration and operationalization of the claim that women and men are equal. Does equality mean that people are the same? If equality does not mean

“sameness,” how is equality to be made a fact of social life across lines of difference? In answering these questions, contemporary liberal feminism has become the foremost theoretical proponent of gender as a social construction, divorced from biology. It is the ideas and practices associated with gender that lead to differences in the treatment of men and women. All such practices of differential treatment are seen as unjust, unfair, and disadvantageous to women.

Liberal feminism of the second wave pursued its agenda of equality by attempting to remove barriers to women's full participation in all major social institutions—education, economy, religion, health, science, family—by demanding that women be treated the same as men. The fact that such barriers existed and that attempts to remove them met with intense resistance is explained by liberal feminists in terms of **sexism**, which is defined as a system of discriminatory attitudes and practices connected by a theme of privileging male experience and devaluing female experience.

Liberal feminists explore the pervasiveness of sexism: Language allows “he” to be the generic pronoun for the general human actor; medical research and worker safety rules assume a male body as the standard; jobs and careers are organized around what Joan Williams has called “the male ideal worker norm,” which assumes the life schedule available to the typical male; family is understood in terms of a male breadwinner and a female helpmate; and the whole world is divided into separate and gendered “spheres”—a public sphere of paid work and participation in education, government, religion, to which men have privileged access, and a private sphere of unpaid work of caring attention in the home, which is the responsibility of women.

Liberal feminist theory argues that the pervasiveness of gender ideology and of sexism obscures the discriminatory practices in the everyday world. One of the major achievements of liberal feminist theory has been the critique of these taken-for-granted practices of inequality. They do this, partly, by naming what has hitherto been seen by both women and men as “the way things are”—for example, the gender wage gap, the glass ceiling, the double day, the second shift, domestic violence, sexual harassment, marital rape, date rape, and the feminization of poverty.

One of the classic works of critique in liberal feminism is Jessie Bernard's *The Future of Marriage*, which addresses the recurring topic of the problem of achieving equality in marriage. Bernard analyzes marriage as at one and the same time a cultural system of beliefs and ideals, an institutional arrangement of roles and norms, and a complex of interactional experiences for individual women and men:

1. Culturally, marriage is idealized as the destiny and source of fulfillment for women; a mixed blessing of domesticity, responsibility, and constraint for men; and for American society as a whole, an essentially egalitarian association between husband and wife.

**sexism** A system of discriminatory attitudes and practices connected by a theme of privileging male experience and devaluing female experience.

2. Institutionally, marriage empowers the role of husband with authority and with the freedom, indeed, the obligation, to move beyond the domestic setting; it meshes the idea of male authority with sexual prowess and male power; and it mandates that wives be compliant, dependent, self-emptying, and essentially centered on the activities and demands of the isolated domestic household.
3. Experientially then there are two marriages in any institutional marriage:
  - The man's marriage, in which he holds to the belief of being constrained and burdened, while experiencing what the norms dictate: authority; independence; and a right to domestic, emotional, and sexual service by the wife.
  - The wife's marriage, in which she affirms the cultural belief of fulfillment, while experiencing normatively mandated powerlessness and dependence, an obligation to provide domestic, emotional, and sexual services, and a gradual dwindling away of the independent young person she was before marriage.

The results of all this are to be found in the data that measure human stress: Married women, whatever their claims to fulfillment, and unmarried men, whatever their claims to freedom, rank high on all stress indicators, including heart palpitations, dizziness, headaches, fainting, nightmares, insomnia, and fear of nervous breakdown; unmarried women, whatever their sense of social stigma, and married men rank low on all the stress indicators. Marriage then is good for men and bad for women and will cease to be so unequal in its impact only when couples feel free enough from the prevailing institutional constraints to negotiate the kind of marriage that best suits their individual needs and personalities. Recent studies have suggested that Bernard's analysis still holds for most marriages but that some couples are achieving, through dedicated effort, the liberal feminist ideal of egalitarian marriage.

Liberal feminism's agenda for change is consistent with its analyses of the basis for claiming equality and the causes of inequality: They wish to eliminate gender as an organizing principle in the distribution of social goods, and they are willing to invoke universal principles in their pursuit of equality. They pursue change through law—legislation, litigation, and regulation—and through appeal to the human capacity for reasoned moral judgments, that is, the capacity of the public to be moved by arguments for fairness. They argue for:

- Equal educational and economic opportunities.
- Equal responsibility for the activities of family life.
- The elimination of sexist messages in family, education, and mass media.
- Individual challenges to sexism in daily life.

For liberal feminists, the ideal gender arrangement is one in which each individual acting as a free and responsible moral agent chooses the lifestyle most suitable to her or him and has that choice accepted and respected, whether it be for housewife or househusband, unmarried careerist or part of a dual-income family, childless or with children, heterosexual or homosexual. Liberal feminists

see this ideal as one that enhances the practice of freedom and equality—central cultural ideals in America. Liberal feminism, then, is consistent with the dominant American ethos in its basic acceptance of democracy and capitalism; its reformist orientation; and its appeal to the values of individualism, choice, responsibility, and equality of opportunity.

## Gender Oppression

Theories of gender oppression describe women's situation as the consequence of a direct power relationship between men and women in which men have fundamental and concrete interests in controlling, using, subjugating, and oppressing women: that is, in the practice of domination. By **domination**, oppression theorists mean any relationship in which one party (individual or collective), the dominant, succeeds in making the other party (individual or collective) the subordinate, an instrument of the dominant's will, and refuses to recognize the subordinate's independent subjectivity. Conversely, from the subordinate's viewpoint, it is a relationship in which the subordinate's assigned significance is solely as an instrument of the will of the dominant. Women's situation, then, for theorists of gender oppression, is centrally that of being used, controlled, subjugated, and oppressed by men.

This pattern of gender oppression is incorporated in the deepest and most pervasive ways into society's organization, a basic structure of domination most commonly called patriarchy. Patriarchy is not the unintended and secondary consequence of some other set of factors, whether it be biology or socialization or sex roles or the class system. It is a primary power structure sustained by strong and deliberate intention. Indeed, to theorists of gender oppression, gender differences and gender inequality are by-products of patriarchy.

Whereas most earlier feminist theorists focused on issues of gender inequality, one hallmark of contemporary feminist theory is the breadth and intensity of its concern with oppression. A majority of contemporary feminist theorists in some measure subscribe to oppression theory, and many of the richest and most innovative theoretical developments within contemporary feminism have been the work of this cluster of theorists. Two major variants of oppression theory are psychoanalytic feminism and radical feminism.

**Psychoanalytic Feminism** Psychoanalytic feminism attempts to explain patriarchy by reformulating the theories of Freud and his intellectual heirs. These theories, broadly speaking, map and emphasize the emotional dynamics

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**domination** To oppression theorists, any relationship in which one party (individual or collective), the *dominant*, succeeds in making the other party (individual or collective) the *subordinate*, an instrument of the dominant's will, and refuses to recognize the subordinate's independent subjectivity.

**psychoanalytic feminism** An effort to explain patriarchy through the use of reformulated theories of Freud and his successors in psychoanalytic theory.

of personality, emotions often deeply buried in the subconscious or unconscious areas of the psyche; they also highlight the importance of infancy and early childhood in the patterning of these emotions. In attempting to use Freud's theories, however, feminists have to undertake a fundamental reworking of his conclusions to follow through on directions implicit in Freud's theories while rejecting his gender-specific conclusions, which are sexist and patriarchal.

Psychoanalytical feminists operate with a particular model of patriarchy. Like all oppression theorists, they view **patriarchy** as a system in which men subjugate women, a universal system, pervasive in its social organization, durable over time and space, and triumphantly maintained in the face of occasional challenge. Distinctive to psychoanalytic feminism, however, is the view that this system is one that all men, in their individual daily actions, work continuously and energetically to create and sustain. Women resist only occasionally but are to be discovered far more often either acquiescing in or actively working for their own subordination. The puzzle that psychoanalytical feminists set out to solve is why men bring everywhere enormous, unremitting energy to the task of sustaining patriarchy and why there is an absence of countervailing energy on the part of women.

In searching for an explanation to this puzzle, these theorists give short shrift to the argument that a cognitive calculus of practical benefits is sufficient for male support for patriarchy. Cognitive mobilization does not seem a sufficient source for the intense energy that men invest in patriarchy, especially because, in light of the human capacity to debate and second-guess, men may not always and everywhere be certain that patriarchy is of unqualified value to them. Moreover, an argument anchored in the cognitive pursuit of self-interest suggests that women would as energetically mobilize against patriarchy. Instead, these theorists look to those aspects of the psyche so effectively mapped by the Freudians: the zone of human emotions, of half-recognized or unrecognized desires and fears, and of neurosis and pathology. Here they find a clinically proven source of extraordinary energy and debilitation, one springing from psychic structures too deep to be recognized or monitored by individual consciousness. In searching for the emotional underpinnings of patriarchy, psychoanalytical feminists have identified as one possible explanation for male domination of women the socioemotional environment in which the personality of the young child takes form.

Psychoanalytic feminism centers on two facets of early childhood development: (1) the assumption that human beings grow into mature people by learning to balance a never-resolved tension between the desire for freedom of action—individuation—and the desire for confirmation by another—recognition; and (2) the observable fact that in all societies infants and children experience their earliest and most crucial development in a close, uninterrupted, intimate relationship with a woman, their mother or mother substitute.

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**patriarchy** A system in which men subjugate women. It is universal, pervasive in its social organization, durable over time and space, and triumphantly maintained in the face of occasional challenge.

As infants and young children, for considerable periods lacking even language as a tool for understanding experience, individuals experience their earliest phases of personality development as an ongoing turbulence of primitive emotions: fear, love, hate, pleasure, rage, loss, desire. The emotional consequences of these early experiences stay with people always as potent but often unconscious feeling memories. Central to that experiential residue is a cluster of deeply ambivalent feelings for the woman/mother/caregiver: need, dependence, love, possessiveness, but also fear and rage over her ability to thwart one's will. Children's relationship to the father/man is much more occasional, secondary, and emotionally uncluttered.

From this beginning, the male child, growing up in a culture that positively values maleness and devalues femaleness and increasingly aware of his own male identity, attempts to achieve an awkwardly rapid separation of identity from the woman/mother. This culturally induced separation is not only partial but also destructive in its consequences. In adulthood the emotional carry-over from early childhood toward women—need, love, hate, possessiveness—energizes the man's quest for a woman of his own who meets his emotional needs and yet is dependent on and controlled by him: that is, he has an urge to dominate and finds mutual recognition difficult.

The female child, bearing the same feelings toward the woman/mother, discovers her own female identity in a culture that devalues women. She grows up with deeply mixed positive and negative feelings about herself and about the woman/mother and in that ambivalence dissipates much of her potential for mobilized resistance to her social subordination. She seeks to resolve her emotional carryover in adulthood by emphasizing her capacities for according recognition—often submissively with males in acts of sexual attraction and mutually with females in acts of kinship maintenance and friendship. And rather than seeking mother substitutes, she recreates the early infant-woman relationship by becoming a mother.

Psychoanalytical feminist theorists have extended the analyses beyond individual personality to Western culture. The emphases in Western science on a distinct separation between man and nature, on man as the dominator of nature, and on a scientific method derived from these attitudes and promising obtuse, and on a scientific method derived from these attitudes and promising obtuse, and on a scientific method derived from these attitudes and promising obtuse, have been challenged and reinterpreted as the projection by the overindividuated male ego of its own desire for domination and its own fear of intersubjective recognition. Motifs in popular culture, such as the repeated positioning in both plot and image of the male as dominant over the female, are interpreted by psychoanalytical theorists as a sign of a breakdown in the requisite tensions between a need for individuation and a need for recognition. When this breakdown reaches, in a culture or personality, severe enough proportions, two pathologies result: the overindividuated dominator, who recognizes the other only through acts of control, and the underindividuated subordinate, who relinquishes independent action to find identity only as a mirror of the dominator.

Psychoanalytical feminists, then, explain women's oppression in terms of men's deep emotional need to control women, a drive arising from near-universal

male neuroses centering on the fear of death and on ambivalence toward the mothers who reared them. Women either lack these neuroses or are subject to complementary neuroses, but in either case they are left psychically without an equivalent source of energy to resist domination. Much clinical psychiatric evidence supports the argument that these neuroses are in fact widespread in Western societies. But these theories, in drawing a straight line from universal human emotions to universal female oppression, fail to explore the intermediate social arrangements that link emotion to oppression and fail to suggest possible lines of variation in emotions, social arrangements, or oppression. Several theorists have discussed the unacknowledged ethnic, class, and nationality assumptions in these theories—their generalization from white, upper-middle-class, North Atlantic family experience. Moreover, and partly because of these omissions, psychoanalytic feminist theory suggests very few strategies for change, except perhaps that we restructure our childbearing practices and begin some massive psychocultural reworking of our orientation toward death. These theories thus give us some provocative insights into and deepen our understanding of the roots of gender oppression, but they require a great deal more elaboration of both sociological factors and change strategies.

**Radical Feminism** Radical feminism is based on two emotionally charged central beliefs: (1) that women are of absolute positive value as women, a belief asserted against what they claim to be the universal devaluing of women; and (2) that women are everywhere oppressed—violently oppressed—by the system of patriarchy. In this passionate mixture of love and rage, radical feminists resemble the more militant mode of racial and ethnic groups, the “black is beautiful” claims of African Americans or the detailed witnessing of Jewish survivors of the Holocaust. Building on these core beliefs, radical feminists elaborate a theory of social organization, gender oppression, and strategies for change.

Radical feminists see in every institution and in society’s most basic structures—heterosexuality, class, caste, race, ethnicity, age, and gender—systems of oppression in which some people dominate others. Of all these systems of domination and subordination, the most fundamental structure of oppression is gender, the system of patriarchy. Not only is patriarchy historically the first structure of domination and submission, but it continues as the most pervasive and enduring system of inequality, the basic societal model of domination. Through participation in patriarchy, men learn how to hold other human beings in contempt, to see them as nonhuman, and to control them. Within patriarchy, men see and women learn what subordination looks like. Patriarchy creates guilt and repression, sadism and masochism, manipulation and deception, all of which drive men and women to other forms of tyranny. Patriarchy, to radical feminists, is the least noticed and yet the most significant structure of social inequality.

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**radical feminism** A theory of social organization, gender oppression, and strategies for change that affirms the positive value of women and argues that they are everywhere oppressed by violence or the threat of violence.

Central to this analysis is the image of patriarchy as violence practiced by men and by male-dominated organizations against women. Violence may not always take the form of overt physical cruelty. It can be hidden in more complex practices of exploitation and control:

- In standards of fashion and beauty.
- In tyrannical ideals of motherhood, monogamy, chastity, and heterosexuality.
- In sexual harassment in the workplace.
- In the practices of gynecology, obstetrics, and psychotherapy.
- In unpaid household drudgery and underpaid wage work.

Violence exists whenever one group controls in its own interests the life chances, environments, actions, and perceptions of another group, as men do women.

But the theme of violence as overt physical cruelty lies at the heart of radical feminism’s linking of patriarchy to violence: rape, sexual abuse, enforced prostitution, spouse abuse, incest, sexual molestation of children, hysterectomies and other excessive surgery, the sadism in pornography, the historic and cross-cultural practices of witch burning, the stoning to death of adulteresses, the persecution of lesbians, female infanticide, Chinese foot-binding, the abuse of widows, and the practice of clitorrectomy.

Patriarchy exists as a near-universal social form because men can muster the most basic power resource, physical force, to establish control. Once patriarchy is in place, the other power resources—economic, ideological, legal, and emotional—also can be marshaled to sustain it. But physical violence always remains its base, and in both interpersonal and intergroup relations, that violence is used to protect patriarchy from women’s individual and collective resistance.

Men create and maintain patriarchy not only because they have the resources to do so but because they have real interests in making women serve as compliant tools. Women are a uniquely effective means of satisfying male sexual desire. Their bodies are essential to the production of children, who satisfy both practical and, as psychoanalysts have shown, neurotic needs for men. Women are a useful labor force. They can be ornamental signs of male status and power. As carefully controlled companions to both the child and the adult male, they are pleasant partners, sources of emotional support, and useful foils who reinforce the male’s sense of central social significance. These useful functions mean that men everywhere seek to keep women compliant. But differing social circumstances give different rank orders to these functions and therefore lead to cross-cultural variations in the patterning of patriarchy. Radical feminists give us both an explanation of universal gender oppression and a model for understanding cross-cultural variations in this oppression.

How is patriarchy to be defeated? Radicals hold that this defeat must begin with a basic reworking of women’s consciousness, so that each woman recognizes her own value and strength; rejects patriarchal pressures to see herself as weak, dependent, and second-class; and works in unity with other women, regardless of differences among them, to establish a broad-based sisterhood of trust, support, appreciation, and mutual defense. With this sisterhood in place, two strategies suggest themselves: a critical confrontation with any facet of



patriarchal domination whenever it is encountered; and a degree of separatism as women withdraw into women-run businesses, households, communities, centers of artistic creativity, and lesbian love relationships. Lesbian feminism, as a major strand in radical feminism, is the practice and belief that erotic and emotional relationships with other women are a form of resistance to patriarchal domination.

How does one evaluate radical feminism? Emotionally each of us will respond to it in light of our own degree of personal radicalism, some seeing it as excessively critical and others as entirely convincing. But in attempting a theoretical evaluation, one should note that radical feminism incorporates arguments made by both socialist and psychoanalytical feminists about the reasons for women's subordination and yet moves beyond those theories. Radical feminists, moreover, have done significant research to support their thesis that patriarchy ultimately rests on the practice of violence against women. They have a reasonable, though perhaps incomplete, program for change. They have been faulted in their exclusive focus on patriarchy. This focus seems to simplify the realities of social organization and social inequality and thus to approach the issues of ameliorative change somewhat unrealistically.

### Structural Oppression

Structural oppression theories, like gender oppression theories, recognize that oppression results from the fact that some groups of people derive direct benefits from controlling, using, subjugating, and oppressing other groups of people. These theories analyze how those interests in domination are enacted through mechanisms of social structure, that is, through recurring and routinized large-scale arrangements of social interaction. Structural oppression theorists see that these arrangements are always arrangements of power that have arisen historically, that is, over time. They focus on the structures of patriarchy, capitalism, racism, and heterosexism; and they locate enactments of domination and experiences of oppression in the interplay of these structures, that is, in the way they mutually enforce each other. Structural oppression theorists do not absolve or deny the agency of those in power, but they examine how that agency is the product of structural arrangements. This section deals with two types of structural oppression theory: socialist feminism and intersectionality theory.

**Socialist Feminism** The theoretical project of socialist feminism develops around three goals. Social feminists attempt to achieve a critique of the distinctive yet interrelated oppressions of patriarchy and capitalism from a standpoint in women's experience. To do this, socialist feminists develop methods for social analysis out of an expanded understanding of Marxist historical materialism, an expansion that incorporates an understanding of the significance of ideas on the determination of human affairs. Socialist feminists seek to bring together what they perceive as the most valuable feminist traditions: Marxian and radical feminist thought.

Radical feminism, as discussed previously, is a critique of patriarchy. Marxian feminism follows the Marxian critique of capitalism that focuses on class

oppression. When Marx (see Chapter 2) and Engels turned their attention to gender oppression, most famously in *The Origins of the Family, Private Property, and the State*, they locate the origin of patriarchy in the emergence of property relations. The problematic part of the Marxian analysis is that it makes patriarchy a function of economic relations. Socialist feminists accept the radical feminist argument and proof that patriarchy, while interacting with economic conditions, is an independent structure of oppression.

**Socialist feminism** sets out to bring together these dual knowledges—knowledge of oppression under capitalism and of oppression under patriarchy—into a unified explanation of all forms of social oppression. One term used to try to unify these two oppressions is **capitalist patriarchy**. But the term perhaps more widely used is *domination* (defined previously). Socialist feminism's explanations of oppression present domination as a large-scale structural arrangement, a power relation between groups or categories of social actors. This structure of domination both patterns and is reproduced by the agency, the willful and intentional actions, of individual actors. Women are central to socialist feminism in two ways. First, as with all feminism, the oppression of women remains a primary topic for analysis. Second, women's location and experience of the world serve as the essential vantage point on domination in all its forms. Ultimately, though, these theorists are concerned with all experiences of oppression, either by women or by men. They also explore how some women, themselves oppressed, may yet actively participate in the oppression of other women, as, for example, privileged-class women in American society who oppress poor women. Indeed, one strategy of all socialist feminists is to confront the prejudices and oppressive practices *within* the community of women itself.

Both the focus on capitalist patriarchy and that on domination are linked to a commitment, either explicit or implicit, to historical materialism as an analytical strategy. **Historical materialism**, a basic principle in Marxian social theory, refers to the claim that:

- The material conditions of human life, inclusive of the activities and relationships that produce those conditions, are the key factors that pattern human experience, personality, ideas, and social arrangements.

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**socialist feminism** An effort to develop a unified theory that focuses on the role of capitalism and patriarchy in creating a large-scale structure that oppresses women.

**capitalist patriarchy** A term that indicates that the oppression of women is traceable to a combination of capitalism and patriarchy.

**historical materialism** The Marxian idea that the material conditions of human life, inclusive of the activities and relationships that produce those conditions, are the key factors that pattern human experience, personality, ideas, and social arrangements; that those conditions change over time because of dynamics immanent within them; and that history is a record of the changes in the material conditions of a group's life and of the correlative changes in experiences, personality, ideas, and social arrangements.

- Those conditions change over time because of dynamics immanent within them.
- History is a record of the changes in the material conditions of a group's life and of the correlative changes in experiences, personality, ideas, and social arrangements.

Historical materialists hold that any effort at social analysis must trace in historically concrete detail the specifics of the group's material conditions and the links between those conditions and the experiences, personalities, events, ideas, and social arrangements characteristic of the group. In linking historical materialism to their focus on domination, socialist feminists attempt to realize their goal of a theory that probes the broadest of human social arrangements, domination, and yet remains firmly committed to precise, historically concrete analyses of the material and social arrangements that frame particular situations of domination.

But in their use of the principle of historical materialism, socialist feminists move beyond the Marxians in three crucial ways.

First, they broaden the meaning of the concept of the "material conditions of human life." Marxians typically mean by this idea the economic dynamics of society, particularly the ways in which goods of a variety of types are created for and exchanged in the market. In these various exploitative arrangements, which make some wealthy and others poor, they locate the roots of class inequality and class conflict. Socialist feminist analysis includes economic dynamics but also other conditions that create and sustain human life: the human body, its sexuality and involvement in procreation and child rearing; home maintenance, with its unpaid, invisible round of domestic tasks; emotional sustenance; and the production of knowledge. In *all* these life-sustaining activities, exploitative arrangements profit some and impoverish others. This redefinition of the concept of material conditions transforms the Marxian assumption that human beings are producers of goods into a theme of human beings as creators and sustainers of all human life.

Second, socialist feminism emphasizes the role of ideas, which some Marxians dismiss as mere byproducts of economic life. The emphasis on ideas includes consciousness, motivation, ideas, social definitions of the situation, knowledge, texts, ideology, the will to act in one's interests or acquiesce to the interests of others. To socialist feminists all these factors deeply affect human personality, human action, and the structures of domination that are realized through that action. Moreover, these ideas are produced by social structures that are inextricably intertwined with, and as elaborate and powerful as, those that produce economic goods. Within all these structures, too, exploitative arrangements enrich and empower some while impoverishing and immobilizing others.

Third, socialist feminist analysis is not primarily concerned with class inequality but with the complex intertwining of a wide range of social inequalities. Socialist feminism develops a portrait of social organization in which the public structures of economy, polity, and ideology interact with the intimate,

private processes of human reproduction, domesticity, sexuality, and subjectivity to sustain a multifaceted system of domination. The workings of this system are discernible both as enduring and impersonal social patterns and in the more varied subtleties of interpersonal relationships. To analyze this system, socialist feminists shuttle between a mapping of large-scale systems of domination and a situationally specific, detailed exploration of the mundane daily experiences of oppressed people.

A contemporary socialist feminist classic, Chrys Ingraham's *White Weddings*, explores how capitalism and patriarchy and racism play out in the institution of the wedding as an increasingly mandatory and enormously costly public ceremony marking two people's private intentions. Ingraham demonstrates the importance of the wedding for capitalism with raw financial data—this is a billion-dollar industry, part of the profits arising from the exploitation of workers around the world—diamond mine workers in Africa, honeymoon resort workers in the Caribbean, sweatshop sewers of wedding gowns in Southeast Asia. She shows capitalism's ideological practices as it sells persistently the image of the wedding fantasy through toys, films, TV shows, and women's magazines. She also demonstrates how this ideological appeal is deeply intertwined with patriarchy. The ritual of the white wedding has become the sacred ceremony of what Adrienne Rich earlier termed "compulsory heterosexuality" and Ingraham calls heteronormativity. Heteronormativity lies at the heart of patriarchy. It is the collectively enforced belief that adult needs for family, security, and intimacy must only be satisfied in a relation between a man and a woman, that is, between two people who within patriarchy's gender stratification are unequal in power, rights, status. Ingraham shows how the white wedding is passionately desired by brides and their families because it encodes the "heterosexual imaginary": the dream vision of romantic love between a man and a woman that obscures and erases from the mind all knowledge of the work required to maintain a relation between unequals, the risks of noncommunication, and ultimately divorce. To be told, as women are, that one's wedding day is "the happiest day of one's life" is to say that one's significance as a human being is not in accomplishment but in being chosen as an object of desire.

Socialist feminists' program for change calls for a global solidarity among women to combat the abuses capitalism works in their lives, the lives of their communities, and the environment. They call on the feminist community to be ever vigilant about the dangers of their own cooptation into a privileged intelligentsia that serves capitalist interests. Their project is to mobilize people to use the state as a means for the effective redistribution of societal resources through the provision of an extensive safety net of public services like publicly supported education, health care, transportation, child care, housing; a progressive tax structure that reduces the wide disparities of income between rich and poor; and the guarantee of a living wage to all members of the community. They believe that this mobilization will be effective only if people become aware of and care about the life conditions of others as well as their own. The feminist social scientist's duty is to make visible and experientially real the material inequalities that shape people's lives.

### Patricia Hill Collins

#### A Biographical Vignette



Collins writes that her experiences of educational success were permeated by the counterexperience of being the first, or only, African-American (or woman, working-class person, etc.) in various social settings. In these situations, she found herself judged as being less than others who came from different backgrounds and learned that educational success seemed to demand that she distance herself from her black working-class background. This created in her a tension that produced a loss of voice.

Her response to these tensions has been to formulate an alternative understanding of social theory and an alternative way of doing theory. This project led her to discover the theoretical voice of her community and to reclaim her own voice by situating it in that community. It culminated in *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and Empowerment* (1990), a landmark text in feminist and social theory that has been widely anthologized and for which Collins was honored with the Jessie Bernard Award and the C. Wright Mills Award. *Black Feminist Thought* presents social theory as the understandings of a specific group, black women; to this end, Collins draws on a wide range of voices—some famous; others obscure. What she presents is a community-based social theory that articulates that group's understanding of its oppression by intersections of race, gender, and class—and its historic struggle against that oppression. In this work, Collins uncovers the distinctive epistemology by which black women assess truth and validity; she also argues convincingly for a feminist standpoint epistemology.

**Intersectionality Theory** Intersectionality theory begins with the understanding that women experience oppression in varying configurations and in varying degrees of intensity. The explanation for that variation (and this explanation is the central subject of intersectionality theory) is that while all women potentially experience oppression on the basis of gender, women are, nevertheless, differentially oppressed by the varied intersections of other arrangements of social inequality. We may describe these arrangements of inequality as **vectors of oppression and privilege** (or in Patricia Hill Collins's phrase, "the matrix of domination" [1990]), which include not only gender but also class, race, global

**intersectionality theory** The view that women experience oppression in varying configurations and in varying degrees of intensity.

**vectors of oppression and privilege** The varied intersections of a number of arrangements of social inequality (gender, class, race, global location, sexual preference, and age) that serve to oppress women differentially. Variation in these intersections qualitatively alters the experience of being a woman.

location, sexual preference, and age. The variation of these intersections qualitatively alters the experience of being a woman; and this alteration, this diversity, must be taken into account in theorizing the experiences of women. The argument in intersectionality theory is that the pattern of intersection itself produces a particular experience of oppression—not merely the salience of any one variable, the working out of one vector. Crenshaw, for example, shows that black women frequently experience discrimination in employment because they are black women, but courts routinely refuse to recognize this discrimination—unless it can be shown to be a case of what is considered general discrimination, sex discrimination (read "white women") or race discrimination (read "black men"). In characterizing these as vectors of oppression and privilege, we wish to suggest a fundamental insight of intersectionality theories—that the privilege exercised by some women and men turns on the oppression of other women and men. Theories of intersectionality at their core understand these arrangements of inequality as hierarchical structures based in unjust power relations. The theme of injustice signals the consistent critical focus of this analysis.

Intersectionality theory recognizes the fundamental link between ideology and power that allows dominants to control subordinates by creating a politics in which difference becomes a conceptual tool for justifying arrangements of oppression. In social practice, dominants use differences among people to justify oppressive practices by translating difference into models of inferiority/superiority; people are socialized to relate to difference not as a source of diversity, interest, and cultural wealth but evaluatively in terms of better or worse. These ideologies operate in part by creating what Audre Lorde calls a mythical norm (in the United States, examples include white, thin, male, and heterosexual) against which people evaluate others and themselves. This norm not only allows dominants to control social production (both paid and unpaid), but it also becomes part of individual subjectivity—an internalized rejection of difference that can operate to make people devalue themselves; reject people from different groups; and create criteria within their own group for excluding, punishing, or marginalizing group members. Gloria Anzaldúa describes this last practice as **othering**, an act of definition done within a subordinated group to establish that a group member is unacceptable, an "other," by some criterion. This definitional activity, she points out, erodes the potential for coalition and resistance.

The intersection of vectors of oppression and privilege creates variations both in the forms and the intensity of people's experience of oppression. Much of the writing and research done out of an intersectionality perspective presents the concrete reality of people's lives as those lives are shaped by the intersections of these vectors. The most studied intersections by feminists are of gender

**othering** An act of definition within a subordinated group to establish that a group member is unacceptable, an "other," by some criterion; this erodes the potential for coalition and resistance.

and race, gender and class, and race, gender, class. Other analyses include gender and age, gender and global location, and gender and sexual preference.

In response to their material circumstances, women create interpretations and strategies for surviving and resisting the persistent exercise of unjust power. One part of the project of intersectionality theory is to give voice to the group knowledges worked out in specific life experiences created by historic intersections of inequality and to develop various feminist expressions of these knowledges, for example, black feminist thought or chicana feminism.

Intersectionality theory develops a critique of earlier feminist writings in which it sees that work reflecting the experience and concerns of white privileged-class feminists in North Atlantic societies. Some of this work of critique is paralleled by work done in postmodernism, but this parallelism should not be overstated. Intersectionality theory is one of the oldest traditions in feminism. This critique has produced questions about what we mean by categories such as woman, gender, race, and sisterhood. It has focused on the diversity of experience in such seeming universals as mothering and family and has reinterpreted theoretical works like the sociological-psychoanalytic studies of Chodorow. This critique has prompted a repositioning of the understandings of whiteness by white feminists who seek to understand whiteness as a construction, the ways that whiteness results in privilege, what they can actively do to reduce racism, and how they can contribute to producing a more inclusive feminist analysis.

This process of theory-building, research, and critique has brought intersectionality theory to one of its central themes and one of the central issues confronting feminism today: how to allow for the analytic principle and empirical fact of diversity among women, while at the same time holding to the valuational and political position that specific groups of women share a distinctive standpoint. Explaining **standpoint** (see the Key Concept box titled Standpoint), Patricia Hill Collins proposes that it is the view of the world shared by a group characterized by a heterogeneous commonality. Thus, Collins concludes that a group's standpoint is constituted not out of some essentialism but out of a recognition that everyone is in the same boat. Although vectors of oppression and privilege—race, class, gender, age, global location, sexual preference—intersect in all people's lives, these theorists argue that the way they intersect markedly affects the degree to which a common standpoint is affirmed. Among factors facilitating this affirmation are the group's existence over time, its sense of its own history as a group, its location in relatively segregated identifiable spaces, and its development of an intragroup system of social organizations and knowledges for coping with oppression. But a group standpoint is never monolithic or impermeable; the very fact that the group is constituted out of intersections of vectors means that group members can pivot between varying senses of self. Group members frequently move from the home group into the larger society

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**standpoint** The perspective of embodied actors within groups that are differentially located in social structure.

where their experience is that of **the outsider within**. Moreover, the home group is subject to permeation by outside ideas and is not undifferentiated; it has its own internal dynamics of difference and may even be constituted by its existence at what Anzaldúa names a cultural borderland. Intersectionality theorists warn that, although it is easy to locate the experience of intersection and of standpoint in individuals, this reductionism is theoretically and politically dangerous, erasing the historic structures of unequal power that have produced the individual experience and obscuring the need for political change.

In developing an agenda for change, intersectionality theory turns to the knowledge of oppressed people and their long-held evaluative principles of faith and justice. The theory argues for the need to bear witness, to protest, and to organize for change within the context of the oppressed community; for only within community can one keep faith in the eventual triumph of justice—a justice understood not in the narrow framing of legal rationality but as the working out within social institutions and social relations of the principles of fairness to, and concern for, others and oneself.

## TOWARDS A FEMINIST SOCIOLOGICAL THEORY

Drawing on all the lines of feminist argument reviewed above, feminist sociologists have begun to create a general theory that addresses the key concerns of all sociological theories: the relation between social structure and individual action (or agency), the relation between macrosocial and microsocial, the nature of power, the causes of inequality, and the origins of change.

This emergent feminist theory views human agents as living and acting within a complex field of power that they are determined by and that in their agency they both reproduce and contest. Social life is presented as an ongoing series of enactments of oppression by agents who cannot be absolved from their responsibility for the reproduction of domination even when we can explain the social structures framing those enactments. Social life can also be understood as an ongoing series of individual and group responses to oppression, responses like coping, challenging, witnessing, subverting, rebelling, resisting—a politics of resistance in which individual and collective agency oppose structures and agents of domination. Significant to oppositional politics are the existence and persistence of group *standpoints* (see Key Concept box); these group standpoints are ways of understanding society that develop out of social structural arrangements and that serve as motivations for individual and group reproduction of or resistance to domination. Even though the structural determinist may argue that standpoints are the product of social structures, feminist analysis points to the human capacity to hope and act for better things even in

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**the outsider within** The frequent experience of group members when they move from the home group into the larger society.

### Key Concept Standpoint

Much of feminist theory is premised on the idea that people operate from a particular **standpoint** in the social world, from the perspective of the positions of embodied actors with groups that are differentially located in social structure. As a result, what everyone sees and knows is always partial and interested, never total and objective. Knowledge is produced in and varies among groups and, to some degree, among actors within groups. That knowledge is always affected by power relations—whether it is formulated from the standpoint of dominant or subordinate groups.

A feminist sociological theory begins here because feminists attempt to describe, analyze, and change the world from the standpoint of women, and because, working from women's subordinated position in social relations, feminist sociological theorists see that knowledge is part of the system of power governing the production of knowledge, as it governs all production in society. Feminist sociological theory attempts to alter the balance of power within sociological discourse—and within social theory—by establishing the standpoint of women as one of the standpoints from which social knowledge is constructed.

In attempting to do sociology from the standpoint of women, feminist sociological theorists have to consider what constitutes a standpoint of women. A standpoint is the product of a social collectivity with a sufficient history and commonality of circumstance to develop a shared knowledge of social relations. All women under patriarchy have been assigned to the tasks of social reproduction (childbearing, childrearing, housekeeping, food preparation, care of the ill and dependent, emotional and sexual service); hence, this work, which is done without material compensation, is exploitative. This shared and historic relation to social reproduction in circumstances of subordination is the basis for the feminist claim of the standpoint of women, but the intersection of gender inequality with race inequality, class inequality, geo-social inequality, and inequalities based on sexuality and age produces a complex system of unequally empowered standpoint groups relating through shifting arrangements of coalition and opposition. These intersectionalities are now an integral part of the feminist description and analysis of women's standpoint.

circumstances of the most brutal oppression. Feminist analysis emphasizes the emotional responsiveness of embodied human subjects to structures, their capacity to respond in anger and to turn anger to constructive uses. The emotional response of anger—and the willingness to turn that anger into a stand against injustice or a demand for justice—cannot be accounted for by the structures of oppression that produce it. In this affirmation, feminism bases its hope for liberationist politics and offers a solution to the theoretical problematic of the structure versus agency debate.

**standpoint** The perspective of embodied actors within groups that are differentially located in social structure.

Feminist theorists have also been developing a vocabulary for talking about the various and simultaneous realities of macro- and micro-relations. Dorothy Smith has introduced the concepts of relations of ruling; generalized, anonymous, impersonal texts; and local actualities of lived experience.

1. **Relations of ruling** refers to the complex, nonmonolithic but intricately connected social activities that attempt to control human social production.
2. Human social production must by its material nature occur at some moment in the **local actualities of lived experience**: that is, the places where some actual person sits while writing or reading a book (or plants food or produces clothing).
3. The relations of ruling in late capitalist patriarchy manifest themselves through **texts** that are characterized by their essential anonymity, generality, and authority. These texts are designed to pattern and translate real-life, specific, individualized experience into a language form acceptable to the relations of ruling. This criterion of acceptability is met when the text imposes the dominants' definition on the situation. The texts may range from contracts to police reports to official boards-of-inquiry statements to school certificates to medical records. Everywhere they alter the material reality—reinterpreting what has occurred, determining what will be possible. Thus, in seeking to interact with the relations of ruling, even at a fairly local level, a given individual (such as a student applying for a summer job in a restaurant owned by a family friend) finds that she or he must fill out some texts (e.g., tax forms) that have been established not by the employer face-to-face but by part of the apparatus of ruling. These texts continuously create intersections between the relations of ruling and the local actualities of lived experience. It is important to observe that this intersection works both ways: At some series of moments in historic time, embodied actors, situated in absolutely individual locations, sit at desks or computer workstations or conference tables generating the forms that will become part of the apparatus of ruling.

All three aspects of social life—relations of ruling, local actualities of lived experience, and texts—are widespread, enduring, constant features of the organization of social life and of domination. All three features at the same time can

**relations of ruling** The complex, nonmonolithic but intricately connected social activities that attempt to control human social production.

**local actualities of lived experience** The places where actual people act and live their lives.

**texts** "Written documents issued out of the relations of ruling, having the power to organize relations of production in the everyday life world and having the quality of generality and anonymity so that they may be seen as applicable in various everyday life circumstances; texts include licenses, diplomas, contracts, purchasing orders, laws, college catalogues, etc."

### Dorothy E. Smith A Biographical Vignette



Dorothy E. Smith explained that her sociological theory derived from her life experiences as a woman, particularly as a woman moving between two worlds—the male-dominated academic sphere and the essentially female-centered life of the single parent. Remembering herself at Berkeley in the early 1960s studying for a doctorate in sociology while single parenting, Smith reflected that her life seemed to have been framed by what she saw as “not so much . . . a career as a series of contingencies, of accidents.” This theme of contingency is one of many personal experiences that led Smith to challenge sociological orthodoxy such as the image

of the voluntary actor working through role conflicts.

Whether they occurred by accident or design, the following events appear to the outsider as significant stages in Smith’s development. She was born in 1926 in Great Britain. She earned her bachelor’s degree in sociology from the University of London in 1955 and her Ph.D. in sociology from the University of California at Berkeley in 1963. During this same period, she had “the experience of marriage, of immigration [to Canada] closely following marriage, of the arrival of children, of the departure of a husband rather early one morning, of the jobs that became available.” Of these events, Smith stresses, they “were moments in which I had in fact little choice and certainly little foreknowledge.” The jobs that became available included research sociologist at Berkeley; lecturer in sociology at Berkeley; lecturer in sociology at the University of Essex, Colchester, England; associate professor and then professor in the department of sociology at the University of British Columbia; and since 1977, professor of sociology in education at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, Toronto.

Smith’s ideas are also foundational to feminist macro-theory, integrated feminist theory, and socialist feminism.

and must be studied as the actions, relationships, and work of embodied human subjects. Each dimension has its distinctive internal dynamic: the drive for control in the relations of ruling, the drive for production and communication in the local actualities, and the drive toward objectification and facticity in the generalized texts. This world is both gendered and coded by race. Thus, although no one can totally escape life in the local actuality—everyone has to be physically somewhere in time and space—women are much more deeply implicated in the never-ending maintaining of the local actualities, and men are much freer to participate as dominants in the relations of ruling; these same divisions are repeated for economic and racial subordinates and dominants. The texts that strive for objectification and facticity are drawn in ways that make it impossible for all to share equally in the activity the text organizes. Those inequalities are created along lines of race, gender, class, age, global

location; that is, difference is an organizational principle of the texts of the relations of ruling. Through this lens the elements of structure and interaction are fused. Domination and production become the problematic, and their manifestations involve and thus absorb the age-old sociological distinctions of micro-macro and agency-structure.

Feminist sociological theorists describe a micro-social order in which there is a radical difference in the world of everyday life experienced by society’s dominants and society’s subordinates, of whom women compose the overwhelming majority worldwide. In other words, micro-social life experience is shaped and pervaded by relations of power and inequality in macro-social structures. This vision of micro-social life is at odds with that of traditional mainstream sociology that tends to see the micro-social world as operating in a kind of democratic ethos of equals trying to work things out together or at least of situations in which any individual could emerge as the “winner” or “definer.” But feminist sociological theory argues that the ongoing social experiences of action, interaction, self, and consciousness are radically different for women and other subordinates from those same experiences for dominants.

*Action*, for someone with some configuration of the various forms of privilege—conferred by patriarchy, capitalism, and racism in the macro-social order—involves the purposive setting of goals, and the pursuit of those goals through linear courses of action in which one can compartmentalize and focus on the project at hand. In contrast, women’s lives have a quality of incidentalism, as women find themselves caught up in agendas that shift and change with the vagaries of marriage, husbands’ courses of action, children’s unpredictable impact on life plans, divorce, widowhood, and the precariousness of most women’s wage-sector occupations. In their daily activities, women find themselves not so much pursuing goals in linear sequences as responding continuously to the needs and demands of others, oriented not so much to their own goals as to the task of monitoring, coordinating, facilitating, and moderating the wishes, actions, and demands of others.

For society’s dominants the experience of *interaction* with others may involve a mutuality of orientation, a pressure to arrive at command understandings, and the freedom to move in and out of interactional settings. Any interpersonal equality or dominance that women as individuals may achieve is effectively offset, with the interactive process itself, by the macrostructural patterning of gender inequality that affects not only the broad division of labor, that is, who sets and who implements projects, but also its processual details, the enactment of authority and deference in seating and seating-standing arrangements, forms of address and conversation, eye contact, and the control of space and time. This assumption of inequality as a feature in interactive situations is intensified and complicated when factors of race and class are included in the feminist analytic frame.

Persons with power arrive at a knowledge of *self* by learning to see themselves as others like them see them. Women are socialized to see themselves through the eyes of men—the genuine other. Feminist theory calls into question the existence for the socially disempowered of a unified generalized other. The

*Contemporary Applications*  
**Terri Schiavo**

On March 31, 2005, a 41-year-old woman named Terri Schiavo died in Florida when a feeding tube was removed after some 14 years in what doctors term "a persistent vegetative state." Her case gained national prominence because of ongoing fights over her fate between her husband and court-appointed guardian Michael Schiavo, who, claiming to act on Terri's own statement prior to 1990, wanted the feeding tube removed, and her parents Bob and Mary Schindler, who did not. Their fights became public, drew supporters on both sides, and involved the institutions of politics, law, media, medicine, religion. Interestingly, the vast majority of the American public felt that she should be allowed to die.

The Schiavo case shows us, again, that public and private are far from being separate spheres. The most obvious evidence of this is that when Michael Schiavo and the Schindlers have a private irreconcilable disagreement, both sides turn to the public sphere for remediation. But the fact that Terri Schiavo was kept alive so long is due to her being moved out of the private sphere to hospitals and hospices where her care was being covered by Medicaid, at an estimated \$80,000 per year.

The case also shows us the complex ways the relations of ruling pattern life in the local actualities of lived experience. Any money needed for her care—ranging from hair cuts to attorneys' fees—had to be approved by a judge. All the battles—over who was at fault for her original collapse, who would be her guardian, whether the feeding tube should be removed—were mediated by texts issued out of the relations of ruling. The feeding tube was absolutely in the local actuality of lived experience and yet its placement depended finally on action by judges and legislators.

The case also shows how the relations of ruling relate to each other, a relationship also mediated—through texts. At one juncture Senator Bill Frist listed Terri Schiavo as a potential witness before The U.S. Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor and Pensions, making her eligible for witness protection programs and causing her feeding tube to be re-inserted; this effectively countermanded the removal ordered by a Florida court. We also see how the relations of ruling reinforce each other: Media coverage worked with government and capitalism to focus attention on the human interest aspects of this story and away from the overall issue of the emerging health care crisis in the United States.

Finally, we see the role that patriarchy, compulsory heterosexuality, and the heterosexual imaginary played in Terri Schiavo's life and fate. We see a woman's body to which both her husband and her parents claimed ownership. And we discover that her life was fatefully shaped by her desire to conform to the patriarchally inspired heterosexual imaginary of the beautiful—read "thin"—woman who marries and lives happily ever after. The pursuit of this goal led to her fatal eating disorder. She had understood that what she as a woman had to offer was a thin body—even if it killed her.

subordinate has to pivot between a world governed by a dominant generalized other, or meaning system, and locations in home groups that offer alternative understandings and generalized others.

For women, the most pervasive feature of the cognitive style of everyday life is what Dorothy Smith calls a **bifurcated consciousness**, developing along a line of fault between their own personal, lived, and reflected-on experience and the established types available in the social stock of knowledge to describe that experience. A feminist sociology of subjectivity asks, how do people survive when their own experience does not fit the established typifications of that experience? We know already that some do so by avoiding acts of sustained reflection, some by cultivating their own series of personal types to make sense of their experience, some by seeking community with others who share this bifurcated reality, and some by denying the validity of their own experience. But it is out of this line of fault, this division between what one knows from living and what a world organized by capitalist racist patriarchy says, that the possibility of change emerges, that one learns to see through and question the taken-for-granted and to believe that things can be different because one knows from living that they are different.

### Summary

1. Feminist theory is a generalized, wide-ranging system of ideas about social life and human experience developed from a woman-centered perspective.
2. Feminist theory raises several basic questions: What about the women? Why is all this as it is? How can we change and improve the social world to make it a more just place for women and all people? What about the differences among women?
3. One type of feminist theory focuses on gender difference.
4. Cultural feminism extols the positive aspects of being female.
5. Explanatory theories locate the source of gender differences in biology, institutional roles, socialization, and social interaction.
6. The second type of feminist theory focuses on gender inequality.
7. Liberal feminism argues that women may claim equality with men on the basis of an essential human capacity for reasoned moral agency, that gender inequality is the result of a patriarchal and sexist patterning of the division of labor, and that gender equality can be produced by transforming the division of labor through the repatterning of key institutions: law, work, family, education, and media.
8. Theories of gender oppression describe women's situation as the consequence of a direct power relationship between men and women in which men have fundamental and concrete interests in controlling, using, subjugating, and oppressing women: that is, in the practice of domination.
9. Psychoanalytic feminism maps and emphasizes the emotional dynamics of personality, emotions often deeply buried in the subconscious or unconscious areas of

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**bifurcated consciousness** A type of consciousness characteristic of women that reflects the fact that, for them, everyday life is divided into two realities: the reality of their actual, lived, reflected-on experience and the reality of social typifications.

the psyche; it also highlights the importance of infancy and early childhood in the patterning of these emotions.

10. Radical feminism is based on the belief that women are of absolute positive value as women, a belief asserted against what they claim to be the universal devaluing of women, and that women are everywhere oppressed—violently oppressed—by the system of patriarchy.
11. Structural oppression theories recognize that oppression results from the fact that some groups of people derive direct benefits from controlling, using, subjugating, and oppressing other groups of people. These theories analyze how those interests in domination are enacted through mechanisms of social structure: that is, through recurring and routinized large-scale arrangements of social interaction.
12. Socialist feminists seek to bring together Marxian and radical feminist thought.
13. Intersectionality theory begins with the understanding that women experience oppression in varying configurations and in varying degrees of intensity. The explanation for that variation is that, although all women potentially experience oppression on the basis of gender, women are, nevertheless, differentially oppressed by the varied intersections of other arrangements of social inequality.
14. Feminist sociological theory links structure and agency, micro-social and macro-social, through the concepts of standpoint, extra-local relations of ruling, local actualities of lived experience, texts, incidentalism, responsive action, and bifurcated consciousness.

### Suggested Readings

- PATRICIA MADDO LENGERMANN and JILL NIEBRUGGE-BRANTLEY *The Women Founders: Sociology and Social Theory 1830–1930*. New York: McGraw-Hill, 1998. Excellent treatment of the theories of the long-neglected early female contributors to sociology. Includes very useful selections from these thinkers.
- MARY ROGERS, ed. *Contemporary Feminist Theory: A Text/Reader*. New York: McGraw-Hill, 1998. An interesting and unusual set of readings that cover various aspects of feminist theory, including the feminist perspective on the macro-order.
- PATRICIA HILL COLLINS *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and Empowerment*. Boston: Unwin Hyman, 1990. Fast becoming a contemporary classic on the black feminist perspective and standpoint theory.
- PATRICIA HILL COLLINS *Fighting Words: Black Women and the Search for Justice*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1998. Later theorizing by the author of *Black Feminist Thought*.
- BETTY FRIEDAN *The Feminine Mystique*. New York: Dell, 1963. A modern classic within the tradition of liberal feminism.
- NANCY CHODOROW *The Reproduction of Mothering: Psychoanalysis and the Sociology of Gender*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978. A book that gave great impetus to psychoanalytic feminism.
- CHRYS INGRAHAM *White Weddings*. New York: Routledge, 1999. A classic of socialistic materialist feminism.
- JOAN WILLIAMS *Unbending Gender*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2000. Explores problems of balancing work and family.
- DOROTHY E. SMITH *The Everyday World as Problematic*. Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1987. Smith's major theoretical statement.

## Postmodern Grand Theories

- The Transition from Industrial to Postindustrial Society
- Increasing Governmentality (and Other Grand Theories)
- Postmodernity as Modernity's Coming of Age
- The Rise of Consumer Society, Loss of Symbolic Exchange, and Increase in Simulations
- The Consumer Society and the New Means of Consumption
- Dromology
- Feminism and Postmodern Social Theory
- Summary
- Suggested Readings

Chapters 4 and 5 dealt with a variety of modern grand theories. Most grand theories that deal with the contemporary world have been created by theorists who consider themselves to be modernists. This chapter discusses a series of grand theories (postmodern theorists have done comparatively little work on everyday life) that either deal with the postmodern world and/or were created by thinkers associated with postmodern social theory. The irony is that postmodern theorists are often critical of modern grand theories, although they themselves have created such perspectives.

### THE TRANSITION FROM INDUSTRIAL TO POSTINDUSTRIAL SOCIETY

The work of Daniel Bell (1919– ) on the coming of the postindustrial society represents something of a transition from Chapters 4 and 5 on modern grand theories to this one on postmodern grand theories. Even though he is decidedly a modernist, many commonalities exist between what he has to say on industrial/postindustrial societies and what the postmodernists argue about modern/postmodern societies. However, although grand theories seem to emerge unintentionally in the work of postmodernists, as a modernist, Bell has no hesitation



about consciously offering a theory of the great sweep of recent history. Bell is also eager to criticize at least some aspects of postindustrial society; most postmodernists are inclined to depict that society in more positive terms, at least in comparison to modern society.

What Bell has to say on the industrial-postindustrial relationship is embedded in a broader scheme of social change that also includes preindustrial society. He sees a transition from preindustrial (most of Asia and Africa), industrial (some of Western Europe, Russia), to postindustrial (the United States was considered the sole postindustrial society at the time Bell wrote [the early 1970s]). Of course, much has happened in the nearly three decades since Bell wrote. The United States is a far more pronounced postindustrial society and other nations have moved further in that direction (e.g., several Western European nations and Japan).

**Postindustrial Society** Bell's primary concern is postindustrial society and to analyze it he divides society into three realms: social structure, polity, and culture. The coming of the postindustrial society primarily affects social structure and several of its major components: the economy, the work world, science, and technology. However, changes in social structure do have implications for the political system (polity) and culture.

The following is an enumeration of the major changes in social structure associated with the transition to **postindustrial society**:

1. Within the economy, there is a transition from goods production to the provision of services. Production of such goods as clothing and steel declines and services such as selling hamburgers and offering advice on investments increase. Although services predominate in a wide range of sectors, health, education, research, and government services are the most decisive for a postindustrial society.
2. The importance of blue-collar, manual work (e.g., assembly line workers) declines and professional (lawyers) and technical work (computer programmers) come to predominate. Of special importance is the rise of scientists (e.g., medical and genetic) and engineers.
3. Instead of practical know-how, theoretical knowledge is increasingly essential in a postindustrial society. Such knowledge is seen as the basic source of innovations (e.g., the knowledge created by those scientists involved in the human genome project is leading to new ways of treating many diseases). Advances in knowledge also lead to the need for other innovations such as ways of dealing with ethical questions raised by advances in cloning technology. All of this involves an emphasis on

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**postindustrial society** A society characterized by the provision of services rather than goods; professional and technical work rather than blue-collar, manual work; theoretical knowledge rather than practical know-how; the creation and monitoring of new technologies; and new intellectual technologies to handle such assessment and control.

theoretical rather than empirical knowledge and on the codification of knowledge. The exponential growth of theoretical and codified knowledge, in all its varieties, is central to the emergence of the postindustrial society.

4. Postindustrial society seeks to assess the impacts of new technologies and, where necessary, to exercise control over them. The hope is, for example, to better monitor things like nuclear power plants and to improve them so that accidents like that at Three-Mile Island or Chernobyl can be prevented in the future. The goal is a surer and more secure technological world.
5. To handle such assessment and control, and more generally the sheer complexity of postindustrial society, new intellectual technologies are developed and implemented. They include cybernetics, game theory, and information theory.
6. A new relationship is forged in postindustrial society between scientists and the new technologies they create. Scientific research has come to be institutionalized, and new science-based industries have come into existence. The fusion of science and innovation, as well as systematic technological growth, lies at the base of postindustrial society. This leads to the need for more universities and university-based students. In fact, the university is crucial to postindustrial society. The university produces the experts who can create, guide, and control the new and dramatically changing technologies.

**Differences between Types of Societies** Given this depiction of postindustrial society, Bell outlines a number of differences between it and preindustrial and industrial societies:

1. Occupationally, preindustrial society is dominated by farmers, miners, fishermen, and unskilled workers; industrial society, by semiskilled workers and engineers; and postindustrial society, by professional and technical scientists.
2. The three types of society involve different types of challenges. The challenge to preindustrial society is to be able to extract things from nature in the realms of mining, fishing, forestry, and agriculture. The challenge in industrial society is to deal with machines through more sophisticated coordination, scheduling, programming, and organization. Finally, the main challenge in postindustrial society is other people. Some people are providing services to other people and those that provide the services generally have more information and knowledge (they are the experts) than those to whom the service is being provided. This gives them a great advantage in dealing with their clients.
3. In preindustrial societies, the landowners and the military hold the power, and they exercise it through the direct use of force. In industrial society, and they exercise it through the direct use of force. In industrial society, businesspeople have the lion's share of power, although they exercise it indirectly by influencing politicians. Scientists and researchers come to the fore as the dominant figures in postindustrial society, and they seek to balance technical and political forces.

**Culture** All of these factors focus on changes in social structure in postindustrial society, but Bell, as we've seen, is also interested in the polity and, especially, the culture. Of great interest to Bell is the fact that fundamentally different principles lie at the base of social structure and culture in postindustrial society. Although social structure, with its focal concern with economic issues, is dominated by a concern for rationality and efficiency, culture is dominated by notions of irrationality, self-realization, and self-gratification. Thus, in postindustrial society the old-fashioned ideas of self-discipline, restraint, and delayed gratification predominate in social structure and conflict with the hedonism that characterizes the cultural domain.

In this context Bell explicitly attacks postmodernism, which he associates with such irrational and hedonistic ideas as impulse, pleasure, liberation, and eroticism. Clearly, a culture characterized in this way is at odds with a social structure dominated by efficiency and rationality. In Bell's terms, this leads to a disjuncture between social structure and culture, and this situation can create the conditions needed for a social revolution.

Although he is at odds with the postmodernists on this and other grounds, Bell, like the postmodernists, does accord central importance to the rise of consumer society. Hedonism has replaced frugality and asceticism, at least in part, because of the mass production and sale of all sorts of goods. Traditional values are being eroded and being replaced by a focal interest in things like pleasure, play, fun, and public display. As a modernist, and a conservative at that, Bell is alarmed by these postmodern developments and the threat they pose to society.

### INCREASING GOVERNMENTALITY (AND OTHER GRAND THEORIES)

To some, Michel Foucault (1926–1984) is a forerunner of postmodern social theory, while to others he is one of its foremost practitioners. In either case, he created an important grand theory that needs to be considered by every serious student of social theory.

One thing that especially distinguishes Foucault's grand theories from modern grand theories is that he does not see, or at least does not emphasize, the continuities over time that are integral to most modern grand narratives. Foucault does not view history unfolding in a unilinear and unidirectional fashion as Weber, among others, does in his theory of rationalization. The following are several differences between Foucault's grand theories and those of modernists:

1. Modernists often search for the source or the origin of social developments, while Foucault seeks to describe and analyze social realities at various points in time. Finding the origin is akin to finding the answer, but postmodernists reject the idea of finding an answer. They are more interested in raising questions than in finding answers; they are more interested in keeping the intellectual dialogue alive than they are in the modernist

searching for answers (or origins). After all, once a theorist purports to have found the answer or origin, the issue is presumably closed.

2. While modernists emphasize coherence, Foucault focuses on incoherence. To put it another way, while modernists focus on what holds things together over time, Foucault is interested in the internal contradictions that exist at any given point in time.
3. In contrast to the modernists who emphasize continuity in developments over time, Foucault emphasizes the discontinuities, the ruptures, the sudden reversals that characterize social history. Historical developments do not occur uniformly, consistently, unidirectionally, and without ebbs and flows; there are movements backward, sideward, and sometimes even forward.

### Increasing Governmentality

Within the context of such general views on change, Foucault was interested in the changing nature of what he called **governmentalities**, or the practices and techniques by which control is exercised over people. The most obvious form of governmentality is that exercised by the state over its citizens. Although Foucault is interested in this, what distinguishes his approach is his interest in the way governmentality is practiced by agencies and agents unrelated to the state (including the social sciences and social scientists). Also distinctive in his work is a concern for the way people govern themselves. No directionality is implied in this conceptualization, but it is found in some of Foucault's specific works.

**Discipline and Punish** The best example of Foucault's interest in non-state-related governmentality is in his book, *Discipline and Punish*. His main concern in this work is the period between 1757 and the 1830s, specifically within the prison system, where he sees a historical process by which the torture of prisoners is replaced by control by prison rules. Characteristically, he views this change as developing in fits and starts, not unidirectionally. Nonetheless, there is general trend from one form of punishment to the other. Not only was there such a change, but it was viewed (by modernists) as a progressive development. The transition from torture to rule-based control was seen by most observers as involving a progressive humanization of the treatment of criminals. In general, punishment was viewed as growing more kind, less painful, and less cruel. However, the reality from Foucault's perspective was that the system had greatly enhanced its ability to punish criminals.

For one thing, the new ability to punish had fewer negative side-effects. Earlier, prisoners had been subjected to public torture, but the problem was that this treatment tended to incite the masses viewing the spectacle to criminal acts, riots, and perhaps even rebellion. Excited by the scenes of public torture, people were prone to all sorts of behavior that those in power viewed as antisocial and

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**governmentalities** The practices and techniques by which control is exercised over people.

threatening to them and their position. In contrast, the imposition of rules on prisoners generally occurred behind prison walls and, even if it didn't, it was unlikely to incite a crowd.

Imposing rules carried with it many more advantages over torture. First, the ability to impose rules can occur much earlier in the deviance process than torture; people can be taught the rules before they even think of engaging in a deviant act, or they can have those rules reinforced at the first sign of a tendency toward deviance. In contrast, torture is only likely to be undertaken when an act, and more likely a series of acts, of deviance has occurred.

In addition, the imposition of rules can take place far more often than torture; rules can be taught and retaught. However, torture cannot be practiced repeatedly on the same deviant because it is likely to badly injure, maim, or even kill the deviant. Furthermore, the more often acts of torture are practiced, the more likely it is that those who witness them will engage in deviant acts of their own.

Third, rule imposition is closely associated with rationalization and bureaucratization. Among other things, that means it is more efficient, more impersonal, more sober, and more invariable than torture. In other words, torture is likely to be inefficient (it may anger the prisoner rather than bringing him under greater control); it could get very personal (the person using a whip could take out personal animosity on the victim); it could become very emotional for the torturer, the tortured, and those who witness the whole thing; and it could be highly variable with one user of the whip being far more aggressive than another.

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, imposition of rules has much broader ramifications. It is almost impossible to torture an entire population, but rule-based control can be exercised over a population. This ability to control an entire population is based on the ability to exercise surveillance over it on a regular basis. However, power and surveillance are not, in Foucault's view, part of a single overarching power system, but are exercised in a number of seemingly independent local settings. Thus, there are innumerable points in which power and surveillance are exercised over people, and there is always the possibility within Foucault's theoretical perspective for opposition to this to occur at every one of those points. Three basic instruments are available to those who seek to exercise control and observe a population.

**Instruments of Observation and Control** The first is **hierarchical observation** or the ability of officials at or near the top of an organization to oversee all that they control with a single gaze. In this context is found Foucault's famous discussion of a panopticon. A **panopticon** is a structure that allows someone in power (e.g., a prison officer) the possibility of complete observation of a group

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**hierarchical observation** The ability of officials at or near the top of an organization to oversee all that they control with a single gaze.

**panopticon** A structure that allows someone in power (e.g., a prison officer) the possibility of complete observation of a group of people (e.g., prisoners).

of people (e.g., prisoners). In fact, the official need not necessarily be present in the structure; the mere possibility that the official might be there constrains people and forces them to behave as they are expected to behave. For example, a panopticon might take the form of a tower surrounded by a circular prison. Guards in the tower, who may or may not be visible to the prisoners, can see into all of the cells that are open to view from the tower. The tower gives guards the possibility of total surveillance if the guards are on duty and observing what is transpiring around them. More importantly, it gives the guards enormous power even if they are not present in the tower or observing what is transpiring in the cells. The reason is that the inmates cannot see into the tower and therefore cannot tell whether they are being watched. However, because of an ever-present possibility that they are being watched, they are likely to behave as expected even though guards may be absent or inattentive for long periods of time. Guards need not do anything; prisoners will control themselves because they fear they *might* be observed by the guards. The panopticon, and variations on it, are the base of what Foucault calls the **disciplinary society**.

His point is that there are many places from which, and many ways in which, we can be observed, with the result that we exert control over ourselves and prevent ourselves from engaging in acts that might cause us trouble if they are seen. Take the case of the computer. There are various ways in which our behavior on the Internet can be monitored, with the result that we monitor ourselves and prevent ourselves from, for example, visiting certain Web sites (e.g., those that allow access to pornography). In the workplace, we might be tempted to log on to an e-tail site and do some shopping, but we do not do so because we think there is a possibility that our boss may be monitoring our use of the computer and the Web sites we visit.

The panopticon is a specific example of hierarchical power, involving those in official, high-ranking positions who are in a position to have constructed the panopticon and to occupy, or to have subordinates occupy, the lookout positions in it. They are also the ones who initiate and control newer technologies, like those associated with the Internet, that monitor what subordinates are doing. Most generally, hierarchical observation involves the ability of superiors to oversee all they control with a single gaze.

A second instrument of disciplinary power is the ability to make **normalizing judgments** and to punish those who violate the norms. Those in power can decide what is normal and what is abnormal on a variety of dimensions. Those who violate the norms, who are judged abnormal, can then be punished by officials or their agents. For example, officials may focus on time and make normalizing judgments about those who are late. Or they may concentrate on

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**disciplinary society** A society in which control over people is pervasive.

**normalizing judgments** Those in power can decide what is normal and what is abnormal on a variety of dimensions. Those who violate the norms, who are judged abnormal, can then be punished by officials or their agents.

behavior and penalize those who do not behave as expected. For example, students are supposed to be attentive in class; those who are inattentive may be punished.

Finally, officials can use **examinations** as a way of observing subordinates and judging what they are doing. This involves the other two methods (hierarchical observation and normalizing judgments). An examination is a way of checking up on subordinates and assessing what they have done. It is employed by those in authority in a given setting and involves normalizing judgments about what is and is not an adequate score. We usually associate examinations with schools, but we also find examinations of the kind being discussed by Foucault in psychiatrist's offices and psychiatric hospitals, in physician's offices and in hospitals, and in various work settings.

**Increasing Disciplinary Power** Foucault's most general point is that because of the creation of new and better methods of disciplinary power, our ability to punish people has increased, not decreased. Torture may have been cruel, but it was limited to the moment of torture. The disciplinary power previously discussed affects us all the time and in all settings. We are constantly watched and judged. If we misbehave in the eyes of those in power, we will be punished. Thus, there has not been a liberalization and humanization of punishment. Rather, it has become more pervasive and more insidious.

However, in rejecting one grand theory Foucault seems to be replacing it with another. This is true to some degree. Here and elsewhere in his work Foucault does offer grand theories, but he is also wary of them and tempers them in ways that would not be found in the grand theories of modernists. For example, although a modernist would tend to see various changes affecting parts of society in a rather uniform way, Foucault writes about discipline "swarming" through society. This is meant to imply that the process affects some parts of society and not others, or it may affect some parts at one time and other parts at another time. Thus, instead of creating something like Weber's iron cage, it creates more of a patchwork of centers of discipline amidst a world in which other settings are less affected or unaffected by the spread of the disciplinary society. One term that gets at this is the notion of a **carceral archipelago**. Foucault views various islands of discipline amidst a sea in which discipline is more or less absent.

**examination** A way of observing subordinates and judging what they are doing. It involves checking up on subordinates and assessing what they have done; it is employed in a given setting by those in authority who make normalizing judgments about what is and is not an adequate score.

**carceral archipelago** An image of society that results from the idea that discipline is swarming through society. This means that the process affects some parts of society and not others, or it may affect some parts at one time and other parts at another time. Thus, it creates a patchwork of centers of discipline amidst a world in which other settings are less affected or unaffected by the spread of the disciplinary society.

### Michel Foucault A Biographical Vignette



Among Foucault's last works was a trilogy devoted to sex: *The History of Sexuality* (1976), *The Care of the Self* (1984), and *The Use of Pleasure* (1984). These works reflected Foucault's lifelong obsession with sex. A good deal of Foucault's life seems to have been defined by this obsession, in particular his homosexuality and his sadomasochism. During a trip to San Francisco in 1975, Foucault visited and was deeply attracted to the city's flourishing gay community. Foucault appears to have been drawn to the impersonal sex that flourished in the infamous bathhouses of that time and place. His interest and participation in these settings and activities were part of a lifelong interest in "the overwhelming, the unspeakable, the creepy, the stupefying, the ecstatic" (cited in J. Miller, 1993:27). In other words, in his life (and his work) Foucault was deeply interested in "limit experiences" (where people, including himself, purposely push their minds and bodies to the breaking point) like the impersonal sadomasochistic activities that took place in and around those bathhouses. It was Foucault's belief that it was during such limit experiences that great personal and intellectual breakthroughs and revelations became possible.

Sex was related to limit experiences, and both, in turn, were related in his view of death: "I think the kind of pleasure I would consider as *the* real pleasure would be so deep, so intense, so overwhelming that I couldn't survive it . . . Complete total pleasure . . . for me, it's related to death" (Foucault, cited in J. Miller, 1993:27). Even in the fall of 1983, when he was well aware of AIDS and the fact that homosexuals were disproportionately likely to contract the disease, he plunged back into the impersonal sex of the bathhouses of San Francisco: "He took AIDS very seriously . . . When he went to San Francisco for the last time, he took it as a 'limit-experience'" (cited in J. Miller, 1993:380).

Foucault also had a limit experience at Zabriskie Point in Death Valley in the spring of 1975. There Foucault tried LSD for the first time, and the drug pushed his mind to the limit: "The sky has exploded . . . and the stars are raining down upon me. I know this is not true, but it is the Truth" (cited in J. Miller, 1993:250). With tears streaming down his face, Foucault said, "I am very happy . . . Tonight I have achieved a fresh perspective on myself . . . I now understand my sexuality . . . We must go home again" (cited in J. Miller, 1993:251).

The roots of the disciplinary society lie in the prison, but the theories, practices, and technologies developed there are seen by Foucault as swarming into many other sectors of society—schools, hospitals, and military barracks, for example. The result is that he sees more and more settings coming to resemble prisons. This is the creation of the carceral archipelago and carceral society that are central to Foucault's grand theory of the changing nature of, and increase in, governmentality.

**Microphysics of Power** Another aspect of Foucault's grand theory differentiates it from that of the modernists: Foucault is ever attuned to oppositional forces within each of these settings as well as those that operate against the process in general. There are innumerable points of opposition, confrontation, and resistance. These settings and the overall process are always being contested and being reshaped by that constant testing. This is another reason why we cannot view these settings as iron cages. Constant contestation is altering these structures on a continuing basis. His interest in these processes is part of his interest in what he calls the **microphysics of power**.

### Other Grand Theories

**Madness and Civilization** In spite of these and other refinements, one senses a grand theory not only in *Discipline and Punish* but in other works of Foucault. For example, in *Madness and Civilization*, Foucault studies the history of the relationship between madness and the psychiatry. Similar to his critique of the increasingly humane treatment of criminals, Foucault takes on the modern grand theory that because of the rise of psychiatry and psychiatric facilities, we have witnessed, over the last several centuries, the growth of scientific, medical, and humanitarian treatment of those who are mad. Instead, he sees an increase in the ability of the sane and their agents to separate out the insane from the rest of the population and to oppress and repress them (and this implies a serious questioning of the whole idea of mental illness). Writing in the 1960s, Foucault was certainly thinking of the then widespread mental hospitals and institutions to which the mentally ill were sent and in which they were often treated abysmally. He was also thinking of the control psychiatrists, psychologists, and other mental health workers exercised over those with psychological problems.

Since the 1960s we have witnessed a **deinstitutionalization** of the mentally ill. Many psychiatric institutions have closed and much of the type of oppression that existed in the 1960s has disappeared. However, it has been replaced by other forms. For example, many mentally ill people have been left free to roam the streets, becoming what we think of today as homeless or streetpeople. Second, many of those freed from mental hospitals, or who were never sent to such hospitals in recent years as a result of deinstitutionalization, have been put on heavy-duty psychotropic drugs that exert great control over their mental and, often, physical functioning. Finally, as Foucault anticipated, many of the mentally ill (and many others) have been forced to judge themselves and their

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**microphysics of power** The idea that power exists at the micro-level and involves efforts to exercise it as well as efforts to contest its exercise.

**deinstitutionalization** The process, begun in the 1960s and made possible by new drug treatments, involving the closing of many psychiatric institutions and the release of the vast majority of patients who were left to their own devices to survive in the larger society.

own mental condition. In many senses, such internalized control is the most repressive form of control. For example, people have far more access to their innermost thoughts than do outside agents like psychiatrists. And, while psychiatrists may make occasional negative judgments, individuals are able to judge themselves ceaselessly. Overall, we find in *Madness and Civilization* the same pattern as in *Discipline and Punish*—a critique of a modern grand theory and its replacement, perhaps unintentionally, by another more critical and postmodern form of that type of theory.

**A Grand Theory of Sexuality** A somewhat different pattern appeared in Foucault's later work on sexuality. *The History of Sexuality* critiques the modern grand theory that Victorianism had led to the repression of sexuality, especially discourse about sexuality. Although he continued to view sex as repressed, he took the opposite position on discourse, arguing that Victorianism had led to an explosion of discourse on sexuality. As a result of Victorianism, there was more analysis, stocktaking, classification, specification, and causal and quantitative study of sexuality. Once again, Foucault was criticizing one grand narrative and seemingly putting another in its place. However, although in previous cases the modern position emphasized greater freedom, and Foucault's position greater constraint, in this case the modern position focuses on increased repression and Foucault sees greater freedom (of discourse on sexuality).

In addition to arguing that we are experiencing more discourses on sexuality, we are also witnessing increased efforts to exercise power over sexuality, as well as resistance to that power in a number of specific settings. Beginning in the 18th century an effort was made by society to shift from control over death to control over life, especially sex. This took two forms. The first, focusing on the individual, involved an effort to exert great discipline over the human body, especially the sexual practices associated with it. The second, focusing on the population as a whole, involved efforts to control and regulate population growth, health, life expectancy, and so forth. By controlling sex society was able to control both the individual and the species. Although Foucault was concerned about this oppression, he also saw hope in bodies, sexuality, and pleasure. He believed that through them people can overcome efforts to control not only their sexuality, but their lives.

Thus, in spite of his rejection of the modern grand theory about the increasing repression of sexuality, the outlines of several grand theories appear in Foucault's work.

## POSTMODERNITY AS MODERNITY'S COMING OF AGE

Zygmunt Bauman has been a perceptive analyst of the modern world, and he has offered many insights into the advent of the postmodern world. Relatedly, he has dealt with the issue of modern sociology as well as what a postmodern sociology and a sociology of postmodernity might look like (see the Key

## Key Concepts

**Postmodern Sociology; Sociology of Postmodernity**

Despite some sympathy for it, Bauman is generally opposed to the development of what he calls **postmodern sociology**. One reason for his opposition is the fear that a radically different postmodern sociology would give up on the formative questions that lay at the foundation of the discipline. Bauman also opposes a postmodern sociology because it would, by its very nature, be in tune with the culture of postmodernity. Since postmodern culture is very different from modern culture, postmodern sociology would have to be very different from modern sociology. For example, the difference between rational modern culture and nonrational postmodern culture would be reflected in the respective sociologies. Bauman is not ready for a nonrational sociology; he wants a sociology that is, to a large extent, continuous with its origins.

Bauman feels that what we really need to develop is a **sociology of postmodernity**. Although postmodern sociology breaks sharply with modern sociology, a sociology of postmodernity is continuous with modern sociology by, for example, being characterized by rational and systematic discourse and by an effort to develop a model of postmodern society. Even though it is continuous with modern sociology, the sociology of postmodernity accepts postmodern society as a distinctive and unique type and not as an aberrant form of modern society.

Bauman offers a number of major tenets of a sociological theory of postmodernity, including:

1. The postmodern world is complex and unpredictable.
2. The postmodern world is complex because it lacks a central goal-setting organization and it contains a great many large and small, mainly single-purpose agencies. No one of these agencies is large enough to subsume or control the others, and each is resistant to centralized control. Although the agencies may be partially dependent on one another, the nature of that dependence cannot be fixed, with the result that each of these agencies is largely autonomous. Thus, agencies are largely free to pursue their own institutionalized purposes.

Concepts box: Postmodern Sociology; Sociology of Postmodernity). Depending on which aspects of his work one wishes to emphasize, he can be thought of as *either* a modern or a postmodern social theorist. Bauman's works on postmodernism occupy our attention here.

**postmodern sociology** A type of sociology that is heavily influenced by postmodern ideas and that would adopt a non-rational approach to the study of society.

**sociology of postmodernity** A type of sociology that is continuous with modern sociology by being characterized by rational and systematic discourse and by an effort to develop a model of postmodern society. However, the sociology of postmodernity accepts postmodern society as a distinctive and unique type and does not see it as an aberrant form of modern society.

## Key Concepts—Continued

3. Even though they are likely to be well ordered internally, when they operate in the larger world, agencies face an arena that appears as a space of chaos and chronic indeterminacy and ambivalence, a territory subjected to rival and contradictory meanings. The various states of the postmodern world appear equally contingent. That is, any given state has no overwhelming reason to be what it is, and it could be very different if other agencies operated differently. Agencies need to be cognizant of the fact that what they do affects the world in which they are operating.
4. The existential situation of agents is quite fluid. The identity of agents needs to be self-constituted continually, largely on the basis of trial and error. Identity is permanently changing but not developing in any clear direction. At any given time, the constitution of identity involves the disassembly of some existing elements and the assembly of new elements.
5. The only constant in all of this is the body, but even here agents devote continual attention to the cultivation of the body. People engage in a series of self-controlling and self-enhancing activities (jogging, dieting) that they would have resented were they imposed on them by some external organization. Thus, these activities are seen as the product of free human agents and not resented as externally imposed regimens. More generally, we can say that agents are no longer coerced; rather, they are seduced.
6. Lacking a predesigned life-project, agents need a series of orientation points to guide their moves throughout their lifespans. These are provided by other agencies (real or imagined). Agents are free to approach or abandon these other agencies.
7. Accessibility to resources varies among agents depending on their personal assets, especially knowledge. Those with more knowledge can choose among a wider range of assembly patterns. Variations in freedom to choose among resources is the main basis of social standing and social inequality in postmodern society. Knowledge is also the main stake in any kind of conflict aimed at the redistribution of resources. This emphasis on knowledge and the fact that information is a key resource tends to further enhance the status of experts.

**Learning to Live with Ambivalence?**

Ambivalence is a distinctive product of modernity, but postmodernism offers at least the possibility of overcoming that problem by simply accepting and learning to live with ambivalence. In fact, Bauman defines postmodernity in opposition to modernity and its need to eliminate ambivalence. However, even if it is successful in learning to live with ambivalence, and thereby eliminating it as a source of problems (and that is by no means assured), postmodernism is fully capable of producing a range of other problems. Thus, Bauman concludes that postmodernity is both worrying and exhilarating; it opens both new possibilities and new dangers. It should be noted that most postmodernists have a far more pessimistic view of postmodern society. For example, barbarism (e.g., ethnic cleansing in the former Yugoslavia) is associated with postmodernism.



that is being dismantled. As a result, we are destined to a life of irresolvable moral dilemmas. Without an overarching ethical code, people are left with their own individual moralities. Given the innumerable moral voices in today's world, the only ultimate ethical authority lies in the subjectivities of individuals. The challenge of the postmodern world is how to live morally in the absence of an ethical code and in the presence of a bewildering array of seemingly equal moralities. Without such an overarching code, life in the postmodern world is not likely to grow any easier, although it is at least possible that life will become more moral with the dismantling of the oppressive and coercive ethical code associated with modernity. After all, Bauman associates the most heinous of crimes (e.g., the Holocaust) with the modern ethical code. At the minimum, we will be able to face moral issues directly without the disguises and deformities that came with the modern ethical code.

Instead of the coercive and deforming ethical codes of modernity, there is hope in the conscience of the moral self, especially its need to be *for* the Other. The Other is the responsibility of the moral self. Being for the Other does not determine goodness and evil. That will be worked out in the course of the relationship. It will be worked out in a world devoid of certainty, where there will never be a clear dividing line between good and evil. Thus, it does matter what we do and do not do, but that must be worked out in individual conscience and not in some collective moral code. In this way, Bauman adopts a postmodern position *without* surrendering to relativism and nihilism. Nonetheless, there is a fundamental tension between the unconditional need to be for the Other and the discontinuity and fragmentariness that Bauman associates with postmodernity.

The postmodern world is simultaneously one of great moral hope and great personal discomfort: People have full moral choice, but they have it without the guidance of an overarching moral code once promised by modernity. To put it another way, morality, like much else in the postmodern world, has been privatized. Without a larger ethical system to guide people, ethics for individuals become matters of individual decision, involve risks, and involve chronic uncertainty. Postmodernity may be either our bane or our chance. Which it will be is far from determined at this juncture in history.

### THE RISE OF CONSUMER SOCIETY, LOSS OF SYMBOLIC EXCHANGE, AND INCREASE IN SIMULATIONS

The social thinker Jean Baudrillard is most associated with postmodern social theory even though he dislikes being labeled in such a way. Baudrillard is radical not only in his ideas, but in his style of writing, especially in his later work. Like other postmodernists, he rejected the idea of a grand theory and the style of his later work—books that include a series of seemingly unrelated aphorisms—seem to militate against the creation of grand theory. Yet it is possible to identify several such theories in the body of his work.

### From Producer to Consumer Society

In his early work, Baudrillard was heavily influenced by the thinking of Karl Marx and various branches of neo-Marxian theory. However, although Marx and most neo-Marxists focused on issues relating to production, Baudrillard concerned himself with the emergence of consumer society. In doing so, Baudrillard was ahead of his time, since the consumer society with which we have now grown so accustomed was, at the time Baudrillard wrote his book on that society (the late 1960s), still in its infancy.

Although Baudrillard was later to break with Marxian theory, he was still heavily influenced by that theory when he analyzed the consumer society. For example, despite his focus on consumption, he took the traditional Marxian position of according ultimate importance to production; that is, the forces of production control and orchestrate the world of consumption. Thus, General Motors and Toyota can be seen as controlling the consumption of automobiles, just as Microsoft can be viewed as orchestrating the purchase of computer software. Baudrillard does not go far enough here in terms of his emphasis on consumption. The forces of consumption (e.g., advertisers, shopping malls, McDonald's, Disney World) play their own important role in consumption. Although they are not totally separable from the forces of production, these entities are crucial in their own right in the realm of consumption. Baudrillard is unable to see this at this point in his career because he has not yet made his break with a Marxian view of the world.

**Consumption as Language** Baudrillard was also influenced by linguistics, which led him (and others) to think of the consumption of objects as a kind of language. Within that language, each consumer object has a sign associated with it. For example, in today's automobile market the purchase of a Lexus is a sign of wealth, while buying a Kia indicates humble economic circumstances. Similarly, going to an Ashlee Simpson concert is a sign of youth, while attending a performance of *Madame Butterfly* is a sign of being middle-aged, if not elderly. In a real sense, when we purchase cars or tickets, we are purchasing signs as much or more than we are the ability to drive a car or attend a performance. To Baudrillard, consumption is most importantly about signs, not goods.

But how do we know what all these signs mean? Baudrillard argues that we are able to interpret these signs because we all understand the code and are controlled by it. The **code** is basically a system of rules that allows us to understand signs and, more importantly, how they relate to one another. Thus, the code allows us to understand the meaning of Lexus and Kia and, most importantly, the fact that the Lexus yields far higher status than the Kia. Because we all understand and are controlled by the code, we all are able to have similar understandings of the meaning of signs and how those meanings relate to one another.

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**code** A system of rules that allows us to understand signs and, more importantly, how they relate to one another.



another. In fact, consumption is based on the fact that others will understand the meaning of what we consume in the same way that we do. Thus, the main reason for buying a Lexus is the assumption that others will understand the meaning of that sign and will approve of it, as well of us, for buying a Lexus.

This leads to the point that in consuming objects we are, in the process, serving to define ourselves. Categories of objects define categories of people. One of the ways in which we find our place in the social order is in terms of what we consume. Thus, a Lexus helps give us a higher position in the social order than a Kia. Furthermore, we can alter our position in that order by consuming differently. For example, if we want to move up the stratification ladder, we can go into debt and buy a Honda rather than a Kia. Such purchases allow us, at least to some extent, to manipulate the trajectory of our movement through the stratification system. Of course there are limits on this. We may know that if we really wanted to alter our position, we would need to buy a Lexus, but no matter how far we stretch, many of us may never be able to afford such a car. In this way, the stratification system often acts to keep people in their place within the system. Overall, in a very real sense, people are what they consume; they define themselves, and are defined by others, on that basis.

Consequently, the motivation for consumption is not what we often assume it to be. We generally believe that the cause of consumption is human **needs**. We buy various things because we need them: food to survive, clothes to keep us warm, cars to transport us. However, Baudrillard sees grave problems with such an explanation. How can needs explain why some of us buy the much more expensive Lexus rather than the modestly priced Kia? Both vehicles get us from one point to another quite nicely. How can needs explain the extraordinarily high level of consumption—the **hyperconsumption**—that characterizes the developed world today? Many of us are clearly consuming far more than we need and in many cases far more than we could ever use.

Thus, Baudrillard rejects the theory of needs, at least in our affluent society, and argues that such a consumption pattern is better explained by **difference** than by needs. We consume in order to be different from other people, and such differences are defined by what and how we consume. Buying CDs of operas like *Madame Butterfly* differentiates us from those who buy Ashlee Simpson CDs. Since differences are infinite in number, there is no end to consumption; there are an endless number of things (in addition to those mentioned before, CDs by Frank Sinatra, The Grateful Dead, Pete Seeger, and so on, speak to additional

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**needs** Those things that people require in order to survive and to function at a minimal level in the contemporary world. Often used to explain why we consume what we do.

**hyperconsumption** An extraordinary level of consumption associated with the contemporary world.

**difference** An alternate explanation of consumption favored by postmodernists. We consume, not because of needs, but in order to be different from other people; such differences are defined by what and how we consume.

differences) that we can buy to differentiate ourselves from others. Thus, the need for difference can never be satisfied; we end up with a continuous, lifelong need to differentiate ourselves from those who occupy other positions in society. This means that consumption is a form of communication. When we consume things, we are communicating a number of things to others, including what groups we do or do not belong to. They understand what we are "saying" because they, too, know the code and therefore understand the meaning of signs.

But that brings us back to the question: How do we know what to buy in order to signify difference? The answer is that such guidelines are inscribed in the code, and because we know the code, we know what to consume. However, this means that the code does more than simply inform our choices; it controls our selections. Thus, what we think of as needs on a day-to-day basis are determined by the code. We end up needing what the code tells us we need. Individual needs exist because the code needs them to exist.

Another key point made by Baudrillard is that consumption has little or nothing to do with what we conventionally think of as reality. When we buy a Big Mac at McDonald's, we are not just, or mainly, buying something to eat, but rather we are obtaining what dining at McDonald's and eating a Big Mac say about us. We are more consuming signs—Big Mac, McDonald's—than we are consuming food to keep us alive. In consuming a Big Mac we are differentiating ourselves from those who eat not only Whoppers at Burger King, but also filet mignon at Morton's. Thus, we are not consuming the reality of the food, but the unreality of the signs associated with them and the code that defines and controls them.

Another key point is that in a society controlled by signs and the code, we are coming to relate far more to consumer objects and the settings in which they are sold, especially the consumption of those objects and settings, than we are to other human beings. Relationships with objects and settings have tended to replace human relationships. We are increasingly oriented to spending more time consuming things in these settings than we are in relationships with other people. Ironically, we do so for what it says about us and our relationship to such people, but we spend less and less time actually relating to them. This is clearest in the settings in which we consume. In those settings, we increasingly are asked to do things ourselves (pump our own gasoline, obtain money on our own from ATMs) rather than to obtain those things from other human beings. Even when we do relate to other human beings in those settings, the relationship is very likely to be an inhuman one in which employees act like automata and interact with us on the basis of scripts ("Would you like apple pie with your Big Mac?" "Have a nice day") taught to them by the employing organization. In a McDonald's restaurant, for example, we relate far more to the restaurant and the objects (including the toys that are forever being promoted in such settings) than we do to the people who work there or to the others dining there.

**From Production to Consumption** Embedded in all of this is a grand theory. Most generally it involves the argument that we are moving from a society dominated by production to one that focuses on consumption. More specifically,

Baudrillard outlines a change from a society in which capitalists focused on controlling their workers to one in which the focus shifts to control over consumers. In the early days of capitalism consumers could be left largely on their own. However, more recently capitalists came to the realization that consumers could no longer be allowed to decide for themselves whether or not to consume or how much or what to consume. Capitalism has increasingly come to need to be sure that people participate, and participate actively, in the consumer society. Specific capitalistic organizations (McDonald's, Lexus) must try to convince people to be active and regular consumers of their products.

In a way, from the perspective of capitalists, consumers, like workers, perform a kind of labor that must be controlled. Going to the mall and buying a range of goods and services is as much a form of labor as putting hubcaps on cars on an automobile assembly line. When we look at consumers in this way, it is not a stretch for capitalists to think of them as a group that must be exploited in order to enhance the capitalist's profits. This was (and is) the way capitalists think about workers; such thinking has now been extended to consumers. Consumers need to be lured into such things as buying what they do not need, what they cannot afford, and what they may well need to go into debt for in order to acquire. In addition, capitalists are interested in preventing a social revolution and, just as the proletariat were kept from revolting by being kept hard at work, consumers are less likely to become rebellious if they are busy not only consuming but also working in order to afford all those consumables.

### The Loss of Symbolic Exchange and the Increase in Simulations

A more general and historically far-reaching grand theory in Baudrillard's work involves his views on the differences between primitive and contemporary society. Basically, he argues that primitive societies characterized by symbolic exchange have tended to be superseded by contemporary societies defined by their simulations.

**Symbolic Exchange** By **symbolic exchange** Baudrillard means a reversible process of giving and receiving—a cyclical exchange of gifts and counter-gifts. He praises this type of exchange and the primitive societies in which it occurs. Take, for example, the case of death. In primitive societies, exchanges with people do not end with their death. People continue to engage in exchanges with the dead by bringing offerings to the grave site, integrating cemeteries into the life of the community, and engaging in periodic rituals involving the dead, often at their grave sites. In other words, the dead are integrated into the life of a primitive community. Baudrillard contrasts this to the contemporary situation in which the dead, their grave sites, and cemeteries are segregated from the rest

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**symbolic exchange** A reversible process of giving and receiving; a cyclical exchange of gifts and counter-gifts, associated with primitive society.

of society. Although there might be a few perfunctory offerings here or there (e.g., bringing flowers to the grave site), in the main, the living have little to do with the dead. Overall, Baudrillard argues that primitive societies are characterized by symbolic exchanges with the dead, but such exchanges have all but disappeared in the contemporary world.

This, for Baudrillard, is emblematic of what has happened throughout society. Thus, in the economic realm symbolic exchange has tended to be replaced by economic exchange. In primitive society the exchange of goods tended to be strictly limited. Gifts and counter-gifts were given, but eventually the parties were satisfied and the cycle associated with that particular exchange ended. However, in the contemporary world of economic exchange, there is no end to the exchange of goods: There is no end to purchasing goods for one's self and others. The idea is to keep the process of economic exchange through consumption going on continually and forever. This, of course, serves to increase production and, ultimately, the wealth of those who control production (today, the capitalists).

Work can also be examined from this perspective. In primitive societies work involved a symbolic exchange between workers and other workers, raw materials, tools, and so forth. For example, workers took from nature (e.g., raw materials), but they also returned to nature (e.g., by replanting that which they had taken). In contemporary societies, work is dominated by economic exchange. Raw materials derived from nature may be purchased, but there is little sense (unless it is coerced by outside forces) that the buyer needs to renew what has been taken from nature. In addition, in contemporary society a worker gives the owner labor time and in exchange the worker is paid. There is *no* symbolic exchange between worker and owner. Moreover, in primitive society there were no owners in the contemporary sense of the term; there was simply continual symbolic exchange between people involved in the work process.

**Simulations** Relatedly, Baudrillard views a transformation from primitive societies characterized by genuine cultural worlds, such as symbolic exchange, to contemporary worlds characterized by their lack of genuineness—by simulations. **Simulations** are fakes and Baudrillard envisions a world increasingly dominated by them. He also views genuine cultural worlds such as those characterized by symbolic exchange as being enchanted, magical. However, over time the social world has lost its enchantment (its magic). The simulations that characterize the contemporary world do not have the capacity for magic and enchantment, at least in the sense that Baudrillard uses the term. Thus, this simulated world is totally disenchanting and is almost shameful in comparison to the primitive, genuine world.

Baudrillard offers several examples of what he means. The Indian tribe, the Tasaday, was real, or genuine, during its existence in primitive times. The tribe

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**simulations** Fakes; to Baudrillard the contemporary world is coming to be increasingly dominated by the inauthentic.



a simulation of the rustic Timberline Lodge (itself the model for the simulation of it in the movie, *The Shining*) on Mount Hood in Colorado.

Baudrillard describes such developments as being **hyperreal**, that is, entirely simulated and, as a result, more real than real, more beautiful than beautiful, truer than true. This is certainly true of Disney World, Las Vegas, and even the "new" Times Square in New York. For example, Disney World is cleaner than the world outside its gates and its employees are far friendlier than those we are likely to meet in our daily lives. To take another example, think of the luxury gated communities springing up throughout the United States, especially in states with hospitable climates like Arizona, Florida, and California. In those communities one finds foliage that is not necessarily indigenous to the area. In addition, even that which is indigenous has been nurtured so that it appears far more lush than that which exists in nature. The result is the production of a tropical paradise that is far more real than the surrounding environment, which may well be dry, dusty, and populated by an occasional undernourished palm tree. The tropical paradise of these luxury communities is clearly hyperreal.

Another example, in an entirely different realm, is pornography. The female pornographic film star with her implants, additional cosmetic surgery, tatoos, body makeup, and other alterations can be viewed as a simulated temptress. She is a hyperreal sex object more real than the women most men are ever likely to encounter in real life. The same can be said of the sex acts depicted in these movies; few people attempt, or are even able, to go through the gyrations and manipulations that are seen on the screen. And, if people try, they are turning their own sex lives into simulations. Since the sex acts seen on the screen are hyperreal, people do try to emulate them, with the result that their day-to-day sex lives themselves become simulations. People may also seek to live up to these hyperreal images by transforming themselves so that they look more like porn stars. Thus, women have breast implants and even surgery to beautify their vaginas, while men may undergo surgery to increase the length and breadth of their penises. In this way, they come to be simulated lovers, if not simulated people.

It could be argued that not only are these simulated realities important in themselves, but also because they are serving as the models for transformations beyond their immediate confines. Under the influence of these hyperreal models, the rest of the world is itself becoming increasingly simulated, increasingly hyperreal. Thus, Disney World's influence is not restricted behind its walls or even restricted to Times Square in New York. Many communities are being built on the Disney model in order to simulate America of the turn of the 20th century. In fact, Disney itself has built such a model community, Celebration, on its grounds in Florida. Furthermore, new communities around the country are using it and Disney World as models for their own development. Thus, according to Baudrillard, reality is increasingly contaminated by these simulations.

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**hyperreal** Entirely simulated and, as a result, more real than real, more beautiful than beautiful, truer than true, and so on.

Overall, Baudrillard offers a grand theory of the change from primitive societies characterized by real, human symbolic exchange, through the less real and fully human economic exchange, to the contemporary world increasingly characterized by unreal, inhuman technologies. The sense is that while the United States lies at the heart of all of this, the rest of the world is destined to move in the same simulated direction. Furthermore, even in the United States we are clearly just at the beginning of the process of simulation. The future will bring not only increasingly extraordinary, but increasingly pervasive, simulations.

### THE CONSUMER SOCIETY AND THE NEW MEANS OF CONSUMPTION

Strongly influenced by several of Baudrillard's postmodern ideas, as well as other ideas drawn from modernists like Marx and Weber, I have created a grand theory that involves the settings in which we consume. More generally, it depicts a world of increasing consumption leading to contemporary society, which can be seen as being characterized by hyperconsumption.

**Means of Consumption: Old and New** Following Marx, I have labeled consumption sites *means of consumption*. Marx uses this term, but he does so in a way that is inconsistent with the way he uses his far better known concept, means of production. To Marx, the **means of production** are those things (tools, machines, raw materials, etc.) that make production possible in a capitalist society. However, as he defines them, the means of consumption are simply consumer goods. To be consistent with the definition of means of production, the **means of consumption** should be defined as those things that make consumption possible. Just as the factory makes production possible, the shopping mall enables the consumer and consumption. Others who have used the concept in this way include Baudrillard, who viewed the Parisian drugstore, among other settings, as a means of consumption.

Part of my grand theory involves movement from what can be termed *old* means of consumption such as taverns, cafes, and diners to the *new* means of consumption to be discussed next. The older, more traditional means of consumption were (and are) all quite material, involving physical structures, face-to-face interaction among customers and employees, consumption of things like food and drink, and payment almost exclusively in cash. Although they were material structures, these sites had, or produced, a number of immaterial

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**means of production** Those things that are needed for production to take place (including tools, machinery, raw materials, and factories).

**means of consumption** To Marx, these are simply consumer goods, but to Ritzer, paralleling Marx's sense of the means of production, these are the things that make consumption possible. Just as the factory makes production possible, the shopping mall enables the consumer and consumption.

effects such as feelings of *gemeinschaft*, or community, among those who frequented them. Of course, there are even older means of consumption such as the bazaar, arcade, department store (see the box, Phantasmagoria and Dream Worlds), general store, and county fair.

What I am calling the **new means of consumption** are a set of sites that came into existence largely after 1950 in the United States and have served to revolutionize consumption. The following are the major new means of consumption with notable examples and the year in which they began operations:

- Franchises (McDonald's, 1955).
- Shopping malls (the first indoor mall, Edina, Minnesota, 1956).
- Megamalls (West Edmonton Mall, 1981; Mall of America, 1992).
- Superstores (Toys 'R' Us, 1957).
- Discounters (Target, 1962).
- Theme parks (Disneyland, 1955).
- Cruise ships (Sunward, 1966).
- Casino-hotels (Flamingo, 1946).
- Eatertainment (Hard Rock Cafe, 1971).

These, too, are material structures, but they also can be seen as phantasmagoria or dream worlds. In fact, over the last half century these have become increasingly fantastic and spectacular in order to enchant consumers and to lure them in greater numbers and with increasing frequency into their lairs in order to heighten progressively the level of consumption—to produce hyperconsumption. They have all been enormously successful in their efforts, and, through what Joseph Schumpeter called the process of **creative destruction** (older structures destroyed to make way for newer ones that function more effectively), have largely replaced the older means of consumption such as diners, arcades, and expositions.

Yet the pace of change is so rapid that many of these new means of consumption are already being threatened by other, even newer, dematerialized means of consumption such as home shopping television (born in 1985) and especially cybercommerce of all types (made possible by the coming of the Internet in 1988, but exploding as I write these words). These combine a dematerialized form with the capacity to produce, and to a far greater extent, phantasmagoria and dream worlds. Their greater immateriality (both perceptual and real) gives them enormous advantages over the material means of consumption in terms of both what they are able to do and the effect they are able to create. As a result, they pose a profound threat to several of the more material new means of consumption, especially shopping malls, megamalls, and superstores.

Why venture out of the house, into one's car, onto the thruways, into those cavernous parking lots and those enormous and tiring consumption sites when

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**new means of consumption** The set of consumption sites that came into existence largely after 1950 in the United States and that served to revolutionize consumption.

**creative destruction** The idea that older structures are destroyed to make way for newer ones that function more effectively.

one can obtain as much, and in many cases even more, from the comfort of one's sofa or seat in front of the computer? For example, amazon.com's million-plus list of books is far larger than the stock in the largest of Borders's and Barnes and Noble's book superstores. Instead of all of those physical acts required to get to and from the superstore, consumption can be accomplished with a few keystrokes. Many other new (and old) material means of consumption face a similar struggle in the future in luring customers out of their homes. Why fly to a Las Vegas casino-hotel when one can play the slots and other games of chance online? Why go to the racetrack when one can bet on the races over the Internet? Why go to a men's club when one can view a private lap dance on one's own computer screen?

More importantly, these new dematerialized sites of consumption, especially those associated with the Internet, have a far greater potential to produce phantasmagoria or dream worlds than their more material predecessors. I focus on various processes that serve to make the new means of consumption more spectacular, enchanting, dream-like, phantasmagoric. The fact is that, at least potentially, the dematerialized means of consumption have a far greater capacity to use these processes to create an alluring fantasy world to consumers. In other words, greater immateriality is not only an advantage in itself, but also one that can be used to create still further advantages for dematerialized means of consumption.

**Spectacle and Implosion** One of the ways that the new means of consumption create spectacles is through the **implosion** (this concept, like others, is borrowed from Baudrillard and involves the decline of boundaries and the collapse of various things into each other) of once separate means of consumption into one setting: the Mall of America, which is both a mall and an amusement park; the cruise ship encompassing a mall, a casino, and so on. Yet because these are material structures, there are limits to what can be imploded into a mall or a cruise ship. People need to be able to physically navigate a mall or the deck of a cruise ship. If, in order to encompass more means of consumption, malls, amusement parks, and so on, grow too big, people will not be able to work their way through them. For example, it was found that if hypermarkets grew too large, customers, especially older ones, would be turned off by the need to walk so far to get a quart of milk.

There are no such limits in cyberspace. Cyberspace can be as big as the imaginations of those who create, and view, its various components. Of course, as cybersites and cyberspace grow larger, it becomes increasingly difficult getting around, but this is where search engines and other technologies come in and do the work for the consumer. A more specific example of such a technology is a shop bot; it roams through various e-tailers looking for a specific item. There is no need for consumers to switch from amazon.com to barnesandnoble.com to varsitybooks.com in search of a specific book; the shop bot will do it for them. Consumers may get irritated by delays and problems finding what they want as

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**implosion** The decline of boundaries and the collapse of various things into each other; dedifferentiation as opposed to differentiation.

*Key Concepts*  
**Phantasmagoria and Dream Worlds**

An examination of older means of consumption is found in the work of Walter Benjamin, who was concerned with both their physical structure and the immaterial feelings they were designed to evoke. Best known is Benjamin's arcades project (*Pas-sagen-Werk*), a fragmentary, unfinished undertaking focusing on the 19th-century Parisian arcades. The arcades were old means of consumption even when Benjamin wrote about them (roughly 1920–1940) since he used them as a lens to gain greater insight not only into his day but the era in which they flourished. Benjamin saw himself examining the debris or residue of the mass culture of the 1800s. The arcades were essentially privately owned covered city streets lined on both sides with shops of various sorts. The streets were closed to vehicular traffic, allowing consumers to wander from shop to shop in order to buy or merely to window shop.

Benjamin views the arcade as the original temple for the consumption of capitalist commodities. It was the immediate precursor of other temples for the consumption of commodities—expositions and the department stores. (The arcades themselves, of course, had predecessors such as the church [arcades were often shaped like a cross] and Oriental bazaars.)

What were originally confined to the arcades later burst out of those confines and flooded Paris with grander and more pretentious commodity displays. Benjamin accords an important role here to the architect Baron Georges-Eugene Haussmann, who created in Paris a series of physical structures, including railroad stations, museums, wintergardens, sport palaces, department stores, exhibition halls (as well as the boulevards to get to them) that not only dwarfed the original arcades but served to eclipse them. All of these structures related wholly or in part to consumption. However, Benjamin recognized that not only the arcades, but all of

the components of the Internet grow more numerous and diverse, but few of them will be winded by the process.

Many of the means of consumption, new and old, are collapsing into the Internet in one way or another. The incredible spectacle is that with a flick of a mouse button a person can switch from shopping at the cybermall to gambling at the cybercasino to a virtual tour of Disney World.

**Spectacles and Simulations** Another way in which the new means of consumption make themselves spectacular is through the creation of simulations more incredible than reality. For example, the Las Vegas Strip encompasses a series of incredible casino-hotel simulations such as New York, New York. As physical structures, casino-hotels must operate with the limitations imposed by their materiality. For example, New York, New York's attractions are not to scale and they are jumbled together indiscriminately. From the outside, the viewer never loses sight of the fact that he or she is looking at a simulation, and inside the viewer never loses the sense of being in a casino-hotel; the viewer never really feels that he or she is in New York.

*Key Concepts—Continued*

these physical structures, were more than material realities; they produced immaterial effects, most notably Benjamin's famous notion of **phantasmagoria**. In fact, his general argument was that the new urban phantasmagoria traced to Haussmann was replacing arcades and that the once magical arcades that had created such phantasmagoria were in decline.

A similar argument is made by Rosalind Williams about other earlier means of consumption: expositions and department stores. Williams argues that the Paris Expositions, especially of 1889 and 1900, were the first systematically planned mass consumption settings and that they were innovative in the way they combined imagination and goods to be sold. Imagination in concert with a planned environment creates a **dream world** for consumers. (Again, we see here the integration of ideal [imagination] and material [planned environmental] factors.) In this context, Williams discusses the founding of the French department store, especially Bon Marche in 1852. She concentrates on such things as the use of decor to lure customers to the stores and to make the store's merchandise seem glamorous, romantic, and, therefore, appealing to consumers. To Williams, the goal of such department stores was to inflame the desires and feelings of consumers for the merchandise in them. The goal was not necessarily to arouse a desire that would be immediately satisfied, but rather a free-floating desire that would sooner rather than later lead to purchases.

The key point is that the older means of consumption were decidedly physical structures, and while analysts such as Benjamin and Williams recognized that fact and acknowledged its importance, they emphasized the way those structures served to arouse various feelings associated with being in a phantasmagoric setting or a dream world.

Cybersites are by definition simulations. Because they do not have the limitations of physical sites, they are freer to create simulations that are more spectacular and even in some senses truer to reality. Thus, a to-scale model of New York could, at least theoretically, be built in cyberspace. Once we have greater bandwidth and the wedding of virtual reality and cyberspace, we will see even greater ability to place people in simulated worlds that closely approximate reality. They may even be more real than real; in other words, hyperreal (e.g., cybersites lack the crowds and the trash one sees in malls). The point is

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**phantasmagoria** The fantastic immaterial effects produced by physical structures like the arcades as well as the newer means of consumption.

**dream world** Similar to the concept of phantasmagoria; more specifically refers to the use of things like decor to lure customers to means of consumption and to make the goods and services being purveyed seem glamorous, romantic, and, therefore, appealing to consumers. The goal is to inflame the desires and feelings of consumers.

that because they are not restricted physically, cybersites have a much greater potential to use simulations in order to create far more fantastic worlds than are possible in Las Vegas or the Mall of America.

**Spectacles, Time, and Space** Time and space are also manipulated in order to create spectacles in the new means of consumption. Las Vegas hotels freely juxtapose time periods. The Luxor of ancient Egypt stands next to Excalibur [the England of King Arthur], which stands adjacent to a mid-20th century New York, New York. Furthermore, the interiors of casino-hotels are designed so that gamblers have no idea what time it is. This is accomplished by allowing no clocks or windows in casinos. Space is manipulated by, for example, creating huge spaces designed to awe consumers. The Mall of America is large enough to encompass both a shopping mall and an amusement park. The Luxor has the world's largest atrium, one that can hold nine Boeing 747 airplanes. As impressive as these are, they pale in comparison to what can potentially be created in cyberspace where literally there are no limits to what can be done with time and space. The entire universe and the entire expanse of time are at the disposal of the means of consumption that exist in cyberspace.

## DROMOLOGY

Paul Virilio is less well known than people like Michel Foucault and Jean Baudrillard. Nonetheless, he has created an innovative and intriguing body of work that is worthy of broader recognition. The best term to describe his work is **dromology** (a concept derived from the suffix *drome*, referring to running or a racecourse), or a focal concern with the crucial importance of speed.

At a broad level, Virilio is concerned with the breakdown of boundaries brought about by a series of technological changes over time in modes of transportation, communication, telecommunication, computerization, and so forth. The early forms of these changes led to changes in spatial arrangements, especially the breakdown in physical boundaries. As a result of the breakdown in spatial arrangements, distinctions between here and there are no longer meaningful. In other words, it makes little or no difference today whether one lives in the city, the suburbs, or a rural area. Similarly, it matters little whether one lives in the United States, England, or Japan.

**Time and Speed** However, Virilio is more interested in the issue of time than space largely because time is more important than space in a postmodern world. In fact, he argues that increases in speed are serving to erode spatial distinctions and to make it increasingly difficult to distinguish space from time. As a result of cathode-ray tubes, whether they are found in our television sets or attached to our computers, one can no longer separate spatial dimensions from

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**dromology** A focal concern with the crucial importance of speed.

their rate of transmission. Space and time have become progressively indistinguishable from one another. Furthermore, speed has come to overwhelm distance. Virilio creates the notion of speed distance and argues that it serves to annihilate physical and spatial dimensions. Especially important in this process today are advances in the means of communication and telecommunication.

In addition to obliterating space, speed, especially the speed of the communication of knowledge and information, has created a bewildering world of images and appearances. We are increasingly unable to tell where we are, what time it is, or what we are supposed to do. Visible markers, referents, and standards have disintegrated. As a result, we are faced with a crisis of conceptualization and representation. We have gone from a world of stable images to one in which such images are highly unstable.

Our referents are increasingly less likely to take a material form; increasingly they are little more than fleeting images. We are less and less likely to observe things directly. Rather, we sense things indirectly through mediating technologies like the mass media. Although we are able to sense many more things in this way, it is increasingly difficult to make them intelligible because we lack unmediated knowledge of them. As a result, in Virilio's view, we are faced with a crisis of intelligibility.

Advanced technologies of all types play a central role here as they mediate between us and the things we see. The cinema played a major role in this development when the movie camera came between us and the things we see. This problem also exists, and is greatly extended, with the arrival of television. Technologies like these make it far more difficult for us to truly understand what we are seeing, in part because what we are seeing is filtered through the eyes of the camera person and the camera. In addition, we become far less active interpreters of what we see and more passive telespectators. Furthermore, the spatial and temporal lines between us and these media tend to erode; there are no perceptible limits here, no clear line between where the television image ends and we begin. Furthermore, with the coming of the computer, this is increasingly a problem both at home and on the job.

**War** One of the recurrent themes in Virilio's work is the relationship between the kinds of changes discussed here and the changing nature of war. To Virilio, when one is concerned with technical issues, war is always the best model. The development of the various technologies of concern to Virilio (e.g., the computer) is closely linked to military research and technological development. The increased speed that results from these technological advances is affecting all sectors of society, including the military. As in the rest of society, speed leads to the destruction of time for reflection. The rapidity with which weapons can be launched makes it impossible for military officers to reflect on their actions. The launching of enemy missiles, for example, leads automatically to the launching of retaliatory weapons. What results is a war that is completely involuntary. Furthermore, instead of direct encounters between armies, we now have instantaneous interface mediated through computers and television screens. These and other things are associated with what Virilio calls pure war.

**Endocolonization** Technology clearly plays a central role in his work. As we have seen, the movie camera and its successor, the television camera, play a central role in mediating experiences and disseminating images. In a recent book, Virilio explores a new role for technology under the heading of **endocolonization**. Instead of a focus on colonizing the world, technology is being used to colonize the human body; the focus has shifted from the territorial body to the animal body. Endocolonization is concerned with the intrusion of technology and micromachines associated with it into the heart of the human body. The focus has shifted from the creating of megamachines to colonize the world to micromachines (e.g., pacemakers) to colonize the body. Thus, he sees a transplant revolution succeeding the communication revolution. Previously, we mentioned the sedentariness that has resulted from the substitution of teleaction for immediate action. This sedentariness is a product of the creators of postmodern technology who have, in turn, come up with a new set of technologies to counter it. Slowed down to a state of near inertia by the media, people can now be simultaneously speeded up through the implantation of various microtechnologies that can help them to think and act more quickly. The focus is shifting to doing to the human body what has been done to everything else in postmodern society. In a sense, the human body has to be brought up to speed; the speed that characterizes the rest of society now must be brought into human beings.

The implantation of various technologies also raises another familiar issue to Virilio, and other postmodernists: the elimination of the distinction between inside and outside. If there are technologies outside of us, and inside of us, and those outside stimulate those inside us, then where do we as humans end and nonhuman technologies begin?

Another of Virilio's consistent concerns is the issue of control. With endocolonization, control over people is being taken to a whole new level. In the past, control has been exercised almost exclusively from the outside. The prison, and especially Foucault's panopticon, are good examples. However, endocolonization opens up the possibility of control from the inside. Clearly, this brings with it new and frightening possibilities.

**Virtual Reality** Control is also central to Virilio's analysis of the coming explosion in virtual reality. With global frontiers being eliminated, science has turned to the conquest of internal frontiers like mental images. Virtual technology is an external technology, but its goal is internal control. Virtual reality technology seeks to channel and control mental images and dominate thought cybernetically. The level of control will, in his view, be unimaginable because people will no longer be free to construct their own mental images. Virtual reality will produce other problems, as well, such as increasing our inability to position ourselves in time and space. We will all find ourselves quite lost in a virtual universe.

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**endocolonization** Technology being used to colonize the human body.

Only a few of Virilio's ideas have been presented here, but it is clear that he is in the process of producing a very interesting variant on French postmodern social theory.

In sum, contemporary sociological theory continues to develop and change. The snapshot of that theory at a particular point in time presented in this book will rapidly become a way of remembering what was true in the past. But we cannot understand what comes next in sociological theory unless we comprehend what has occurred in its recent, and not-too-recent, past.

## FEMINISM AND POSTMODERN SOCIAL THEORY

by Patricia Madoo Lengermann and Gillian Niebrugge

Although feminist academic engagement with postmodernist ideas and vocabulary has gained ground in the early 21st century, postmodernism is used less as a theory of society than an epistemological approach by feminists. Postmodernism has been important to feminist theory primarily as an oppositional epistemology, a strategy for questioning its claims to truth or knowledge.

The question Whose knowledge? has proved to be radically transformative, opening debates not only about the relation of power to knowledge but about the basis of human claims to know. Postmodernists reject the basic principle of modernist epistemology, that humans can, by the exercise of pure reason, arrive at a complete and objective knowledge of the world, a knowledge that is a representation of reality, a mirror of nature.

Feminism and postmodernism have much else in common:

1. Both raise the question of *whose* knowledge or definitions are to count.
2. Contemporary feminist theorists find in postmodernism a reinforcement and legitimation for their own insistence on the epistemological and political necessity for moving away from traditional core concerns in the social sciences and for taking apart traditional theories and concepts.
3. Postmodernist epistemology provides some feminist scholars with an expanded possibility for naming their work and has become part of such accepted practices as the liberal feminist project of deconstructing gender. It has not involved an unthinking takeover of postmodern concepts, but a sophisticated incorporation, sometimes keeping, sometimes blending, sometimes changing the original meanings.
4. Above all, the turn pushes feminism to make reflexivity a permanent feature of theory-building, a way of ensuring that it will not become what it has set out to oppose—a hegemonic discourse that oppresses people through essentialist and universalist categories. This directive has been particularly meaningful because it coincides with the questions raised by women of color, women from societies outside the North Atlantic, lesbians, and working-class women about second-wave feminism's essentialist claims regarding sisterhood, woman, third-world women, sexuality, family, mothering, and work (see Chapter 8).



### Contemporary Applications

#### *The Explosion in the Surveillance of Our Everyday Lives*

Surveillance of people is nothing new. It goes back to ancient times and over the last several centuries churches, states, factories, and bureaucracies have watched and collected increasingly detailed personal information on us. More recently private sector agencies related to medicine, banking, insurance, and business (especially credit card companies) have joined the fray. It is the latter agencies, in conjunction with an array of new technologies—the computer, video cameras, implanted chips, electronic location monitors, satellites, voluntary testing, and so on—that have greatly increased the ability to watch over people, especially via electronic means that no longer require one person watching another (as was the case, at least potentially, in the panopticon). The new forms of surveillance have all sorts of advantages over their predecessors including being invisible (or nearly so), manipulative (rather than coercive), inexpensive (for each unit of data collected), yielding data that are easy to organize and retrieve, and so on.

There is much that is positive about the new and increased ability to engage in surveillance. Many organizations and institutions need information to do what they do and these methods allow them to obtain it cheaply and sometimes instantaneously. Even families with small children benefit when surveillance cameras oversee the actions of babysitters and in daycare centers. Certainly the police are aided in their efforts to deter crime and to catch criminals. In this post 9/11 era, the use of advanced surveillance techniques may help deter, or even prevent, other terrorist attacks. To take an even more recent example, in 2005 the medical community is alert to early signs of avian flu in Southeast Asia. Careful monitoring of cases there for early signs of human-to-human transmission may help prevent a global pandemic, or at least allow us to be better prepared to deal with it and limit its effects.

Yet, with all of this, there is every reason to be fearful of this massive increase in the ability to intrude into our everyday lives and of the collection of huge bodies of information on all of us. It all brings to mind the great fears of science fiction literature such as George Orwell's 1984 with Big Brother watching over us all, knowing all there is to know about us, and as a result able to exercise great control over what we think and do.

But the feminist relation to postmodernism is marked more strikingly by unease than embrace:

1. Many feminists see postmodernism as exclusive in aspiration and therefore antithetical to the feminist project of inclusion. Evidence for this is postmodernism's arcane vocabulary, its location in the academy rather than in political struggle, and its nonreflexive grab for hegemonic status in that academic discourse.
2. Many feminists also question the innocence of the postmodernist challenge, wondering whether it is truly liberationist or part of a politics of knowledge in which a privileged academic class responds to the challenges of marginalized persons with a technically complex argument, to the effect

that no location for speech can claim authority. Nancy Hartsock finds it very suspicious that just when women and many other groups have come to redefine themselves, theorize about themselves, and make progress on various grounds, postmodernists have come to question the nature of the subject, the idea of general theory, and the notion of progress.

3. Another source of uneasiness is that the postmodernist emphasis on an infinite regress of deconstruction and difference leads people away from collective, liberationist politics and toward a radical individualism that may conclude that because everyone is unique, everyone's problems are unique; hence, there are no problems that should concern the collectivity as a whole.
4. Above all, the postmodernist turn takes feminist scholars away from the materiality of inequality, injustice, and oppression and toward a neo-idealist posture that sees the world as discourse, representation, and text. In severing the link to material inequality, postmodernism moves feminism away from its commitment to progressive change—the foundational project of any critical social theory.

### Summary

1. Daniel Bell's grand theory focused on the emergence of postindustrial society characterized by a transition from goods-production to service-provision, the decline of blue-collar work and the rise of professional and technical work, theoretical knowledge replacing practical know-how, better assessment of and control over technology, and the development of new intellectual technologies.
2. In postindustrial society a conflict occurs between social structure (especially the economy) dominated by rationality and efficiency and culture dominated by irrationality, self-realization, and self-gratification.
3. Michel Foucault's grand theory differed from those of modernists because of his rejection of finding origins and his focus on incoherence and on discontinuity.
4. The substance of Foucault's grand theory deals with the increase in governmentality, the practices and techniques by which control is exercised over people.
5. Instead of seeing progress and increasing humanization in the treatment of prisoners, Foucault saw an increase in the ability to punish people and to punish them more deeply.
6. Three basic instruments are available to those who seek to exercise control over and observe a population. The first is hierarchical observation or the ability of officials at or near the top of an organization to oversee all that they control with a single gaze.
7. A panopticon is a structure that allows someone in power (e.g., a prison officer) the possibility of complete observation of a group of people (e.g., prisoners).
8. A second instrument of disciplinary power is the ability to make normalizing judgments and to punish those who violate the norms.
9. The third instrument is the use of examinations as a way of observing subordinates and judging what they are doing.
10. Although he focuses on control, Foucault recognizes that control is constantly contested. This is part of his interest in the microphysics of power.
11. In contrast to the accepted grand theory, Foucault sees an increase in the ability of the sane and their agents to separate out the insane from the rest of the population and to oppress and repress them.

12. In contrast to the accepted grand theory on the relationship between Victorianism and sexuality, Foucault sees more analysis, stocktaking, classification, specification, and causal and quantitative study of sexuality.
13. Zygmunt Bauman associates modernity with an inability to accept ambivalence, but postmodernity promises to be more accepting of ambivalence.
14. Bauman also associates neotribalism with postmodernity. These new tribes, or communities, are the refuge for strangers and more specifically for a wide range of ethnic, religious, and political groups. These communities, and their groups, are tolerated by the larger society.
15. The morality of the postmodern world is dominated by the need to be for the Other.
16. Jean Baudrillard sees a transformation from producer to consumer society.
17. Consumption is better explained by the consumer's search for difference than by the needs of consumers.
18. When we consume, we are really consuming signs rather than goods or services.
19. Since the code determines the meanings of signs, it also controls consumption.
20. Capitalism has shifted from a focus on control over workers to control over consumers.
21. Baudrillard also views a transformation from primitive symbolic exchange (a reversible process of giving and receiving) characterized by its genuineness to today's simulations, or fakes, that are characterized by their lack of genuineness.
22. Ritzer sees a world dominated by hyperconsumption, fostered, at least in part, by the new means of consumption.
23. The process of creative destruction continues and even some of the new material means of consumption are threatened by the even newer nonmaterial means of consumption such as cybermalls and home-shopping television.
24. In order to attract consumers, the new means of consumption use a variety of mechanisms such as implosion, simulation, and the manipulation of time and space. Nonmaterial means of consumption are better able to use these mechanisms than the new material means of consumption.
25. One of the most interesting living social theorists is Paul Virilio. Associated with postmodern theory, he has developed his own variant, dromology, as well as a number of new ideas and unique concepts.
26. An uneasy relationship exists between feminism and postmodern social theory.
27. Feminists are very suspicious of the fact that just as women and many other groups have come to redefine themselves, theorize about themselves, and make progress on various grounds, we have witnessed the rise of postmodern suspicions about the nature of the subject, general theory, and the notion of progress.

### Suggested Readings

- MALCOLM WATERS "Daniel Bell." In George Ritzer, ed., *The Blackwell Companion to Major Social Theorists*. Malden, MA, and Oxford, England: Blackwell, 2000, pp. 577-600. Brief overview of the contributions of Daniel Bell to social theory.
- MALCOLM WATERS *Daniel Bell*. London: Routledge, 1996. Much fuller, book-length treatment of Bell and his work.
- BARRY SMART "Michel Foucault." In George Ritzer, ed., *The Blackwell Companion to Major Social Theorists*. Malden, MA, and Oxford, England: Blackwell, 2000, pp. 630-650. Brief overview of the contributions of Michel Foucault.
- JAMES MILLER *The Passion of Michel Foucault*. New York: Anchor Books, 1993. Fascinating biography of this most provocative of social theorists.

- ZYGMUNT BAUMAN *Modernity and the Holocaust*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1989. A provocative modernist work by a theorist who has become one of the best-known postmodernists. Demonstrates why, despite his own ambivalence about it, he prefers postmodernity to modernity.
- DENNIS SMITH *Zygmunt Bauman: Prophet of Postmodernity*. Oxford: Blackwell, 2000. A short book-length introduction to the ideas of Zygmunt Bauman.
- PETER BEILHARZ *Zygmunt Bauman: Dialectic of Modernity*. London: Sage, 2000. Study of Bauman's work from a strong theorist and a great admirer of Bauman's work.
- KEITH TESTER *The Social Thought of Zygmunt Bauman*. London: Palgrave, 2004. Recent, but certainly not the last, overview of Bauman's contributions to social theory.
- DOUGLAS KELLNER "Jean Baudrillard." In George Ritzer, ed., *The Blackwell Companion to Major Social Theorists*. Malden, MA, and Oxford, England: Blackwell, 2000, pp. 731-753. Brief introduction to this most provocative and controversial of postmodern theorists.
- MIKE GANE, ed. *Baudrillard Live: Selected Interviews*. London: Routledge, 1993. Revealing and fascinating set of interviews with this leading postmodern thinker.
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