

Critical Theory, Feminism, Intersectionality, and Our Cultural Conception of Patriarchy

And Why It Matters

1. God created man in His own image; male and female He created them.
 - a. What are some of the constitutional differences between men and women?
 - b. What are some functional differences that flow out of these differences of nature?
2. How will our view of origins shape our understanding of these differences?
 - a. For those who deny divine creation?
 - b. For those who embrace creation by God?
3. Critical Theory: what is it?
 - a. Some Key Definitions
 - **Critical Theory:** Both a philosophy and a praxis. It is the work of finding and exposing inequities, identifying the structures of power that promote or support the inequities, and the practice of deconstructing them. [“Latina/o Critical Theory (LatCrit), feisty queer-crit interest group, and Asian American Legal Scholarship” are examples of other applications of Critical Theory.¹ It is probably most familiar as Critical *Race* Theory, but Critical *Gender* Theory preceded CRT.]
 - **Hegemony:** The structures of social conditioning that have been erected to impose and maintain the ideologies and interests of the dominant group in a society. According to Antonio Gramsci, hegemony is “a complex interlocking of political, social, and cultural forces” that function to maintain control that is almost imperceptible and even voluntarily supported by the oppressed.
 - **The Patriarchy:** A system of male domination over women in almost every sphere of society. The cultural structures, norms, and expressions that value men/masculinity over women/femininity and that serve to oppress women by keeping them dependent and powerless.
 - **Privilege:** The benefits and advantages that exist for the dominant groups of a society simply due to the hegemony, that is, due to the societal structures that have been established over time and that are often accessed without awareness. [“White privilege” is among the most common applications, but there would also be “male privilege,” “Christian privilege,” “abled privilege,” even “righthanded privilege,” etc. The multiplication of privileged groups is due to the advance of intersectionality.]
 - **Intersectionality:** addresses the multidimensionality of oppressions due to the variety of power structures that affect various social groups. Gender, race, disability, sexuality, and many other ways in which people are grouped result in “disempowerment.” Intersectionality seeks to examine how the combination of these groupings plays out in the experiences of oppressed individuals. For example, a woman may be oppressed, but a black woman will experience another dimension of oppression, and a black lesbian woman even more.
 - **Standpoint Epistemology:** the perspectives of the less powerful or oppressed offer a more objective view of the social world than those of the privileged. Those in oppressed groups have access to insights or knowledge that allows them to understand oppression and the structures that produce it in ways unavailable to privileged groups, e.g. “white ignorance.” [“As a woman of color...” “As a Latino member of the LGBTQ community...”]
 - **Equality vs. Equity:** Equality in terms of social structures deals with the distribution of resources and opportunities. Equality would mean that differing groups would have access to the same resources and would have the same opportunities. Equity deals with equality of outcome and requires intervention in systems in order to achieve equal results (e.g. affirmative action).

b. Its Foundations

¹ “What is Critical Race Theory,” UCLA School of Public Affairs.

- Karl Marx' Conflict Theory
[In reference to Feminist ideology, Friedrich Engels argued that the nuclear family was a product of capitalism and was fundamentally oppressive to women, keeping them in the home and dependent.]
- The Frankfurt School (Institute for Social Research) and the problem of inequity.

c. Its Beliefs

- Structures of power that benefit the dominant groups within a society are formed and maintained by those with power such that they become pervasive and normalized and are so embedded in the fabric of the culture that they become nearly imperceptible even to those oppressed by them.
- The dominant groups within a society use these structures of power, knowingly and unknowingly, to oppress the minority groups (e.g. Bourgeoisie vs. Proletariat, Rich vs. Poor, White vs. People of Color, Male vs. Female, etc.). In this sense, "oppression" is not something that requires malicious intent, though it is harmful nevertheless.
- These structures of power (the hegemony) are the root causes of inequities in society (e.g. poverty is a result of the oppression of the rich, disparities in social standing or achievement are due to systemic inhibitors, etc.).
- The work of the critical theorist is to identify and tear down these structures of power by disrupting social norms. Many are comfortable with the inevitable chaos believing that out of it will emerge a new society founded on true equality that will result in true equity.
- The traditional family is the foundational structure that promotes and maintains the hegemony. Cultural values and norms are learned, promoted, and maintained by the structure itself as well as by familial instruction (e.g. boys and girls learn gender expectations, sexual repression, and male domination in the nuclear family).

"Learning to wear a mask (that word already embedded in the term 'masculinity') is the first lesson in patriarchal masculinity that a boy learns. He learns that his core feelings cannot be expressed if they do not conform to the acceptable behaviors sexism defines as male. Asked to give up the true self in order to realize the patriarchal ideal, boys learn self-betrayal early and are rewarded for these acts of soul murder." (bell hooks, The Will to Change: Men, Masculinity, and Love.)

d. Its Praxis

- Quiet and loud education.
- Quiet and loud and even destructive protest.
- Civil disobedience even among civil authorities.
- Infiltration of the institutions.
- Education through the arts.
- Social pressure through shaming, cancelation, and ridicule.

"Humor is essential to a successful tactician, for the most potent weapons known to mankind are satire and ridicule" (Rules for Radicals, Saul Alinsky).

4. Feminism and the Patriarchy

- First wave feminism and women's suffrage.
[Wollstonecraft and "The Vindication of the Rights of Women" and Susan B. Anthony]
- Second wave feminism
[NOW, workplace equality, and "reproductive rights."]
- Third wave feminism
[Intersectionality, sexual liberation, and transgender rights.]

"Men cannot sit back and say, 'Well, I'm not rich and powerful; that's not me.' It is you – if you are not actively dismantling the patriarchy, you are factually benefiting from it. Are you uncomfortable? Good. You should be. Discomfort is a reminder that privilege is being questioned, and this revolutionary moment is one in which we must defy, disobey, and disrupt the patriarchy, everywhere." – Mona Eltahawy

"Patriarchy perpetuates oppressive and limiting gender roles, the gender binary, trans phobia and cissexism, sexual assault, the political and economic subordination of women, and so much more. And it is of the utmost importance that we prioritize dismantling the patriarchy in our intimate lives, as well as in a larger systemic sphere." (Everyday Feminism)