

Patriarchy

The literal meaning of patriarchy is 'rule of fathers'. It is a term used for male dominance. Despite the rise of feminism and a move towards equality, the majority of the world can still be described as patriarchal. In the UK, in most institutions, power is held in the hands of men.

Patriarchy in the workplace

Patriarchy in the workplace can best be explained with reference to the 'glass ceiling'. Women also experience disadvantage in terms of pay. The Fawcett Society, which campaigns for gender equality, states that, although it is now over forty years since the 1970 Equal Pay Act, on average for every £100 men earn, women earn £85 (Fawcett Society, 2010). Research by the Chartered Management Institute (CMI, 2010) suggests that equal pay is not likely until 2067.

Patriarchy in the family

Examples of patriarchy in the family include women doing the majority of the cooking and cleaning for men, and deferring to their husbands in decision making. An extreme but not uncommon form of patriarchy is domestic violence.

Many housewives experience boredom and frustration with the monotony of housework. In *The Feminine Mystique*, Betty Friedan wrote about women's dissatisfaction with family life. Her book became a best-seller because it spoke to and for many women and lifted the lid on women's unhappiness at being subordinated to men. Friedan referred to the 'problem that had no name'. (Friedan, 1963)

In 2012, analysis by the Institute for Public Policy Research think tank shows that just one in ten married men does

the same amount of cleaning and washing as his wife.
(Darlington, 2012)

Patriarchy in the mass media

Patriarchy in the mass media includes portrayals of women in narrow and subordinated roles as a housewife, a mother or a sex object. In 1990, Guy Cumberbatch studied 500 television advertisements and found that men were twice as likely to be shown in paid employment, with 89 per cent of adverts using a male voice-over.

In more recent years, the representation of women in the media has improved. David Gauntlett carried out a content analysis of television programmes and found 'female and male characters are likely to be as intelligent – or stupid – as each other'. (Gauntlett, 2002)

However, ownership of the media is still overwhelmingly male. All of the major national tabloid and broadsheet newspapers in the UK are owned by men. Perhaps one of the clearest signs of patriarchy in the media is that the most famous feature of the most widely read newspaper in the UK is a picture of a topless woman!

Patriarchy in politics

Women are underrepresented in politics which leads to concerns that the needs and interests of women will also be underrepresented in the wider society. The chief executive of the Fawcett Society, Ceri Goddard, considers the lack of representation of women to be a blow to democracy. She states 'if we're not at the table, we're on the menu'. In 2012:

- ▶ men outnumbered women by four to one in the UK Parliament
- ▶ of 23 cabinet members, only four were women.
(Fawcett Society, 2012)

The end of men?

According to Hanna Rosin, women are now overtaking men at home and in the workplace. In her controversial book, *The End of Men and the Rise of Women*, she argues that the balance now tips in favour of women and that recession has been particularly difficult for men (Rosin, 2012). However, although there has been a trend towards gender equality, the evidence that society is patriarchal is overwhelming.



Think about ...

With reference to the representation of women in politics, what do you understand by the quote 'if we're not at the table, we're on the menu'?

See also: 'Dark side' of family life; Glass ceiling.

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Positivism

Positivism is a branch of Sociology which claims that society can be studied scientifically, that we can apply principles of objectivity and detachment from the natural sciences to social research. Positivists are interested in identifying patterns in human behaviour. They are macro-level sociologists who look for structural explanations of society.

Positivism includes the following general principles:

- The role of theory is to generate a hypothesis (prediction) which can be tested.
- The identification of cause and effect forms the basis of universal laws. Such laws are described as social facts.
- Research must remain objective.

Scientific research is based on logic and clear methodology. A scientist will observe patterns in nature and develop laws of cause and effect to explain them. For positivists, social research should aim to observe and explain patterns found in human behaviour. (Webb et al, 2009)

Durkheim on suicide

Emile Durkheim maintained that social facts cause our behaviours, and as a **structuralist** sociologist he saw these behaviours as governed by the innate structure of society. He believed the suicide rate was a social fact. He used quantitative data from official statistics to analyse the suicide rates for various European countries. This enabled him to establish theories about the suicide patterns among different social groups. He concluded that these were the result of social forces acting on individuals.

Falsification

Positivists including Karl Popper also use an approach called falsification when examining a hypothesis. They

ask: 'Can this hypothesis be falsified?' – asking whether there is any evidence to counter the theory. The data is collected and then conclusions drawn to test the theory and establish social facts. (Harvey et al, 2000)

Which methods do positivists prefer?

Positivists generally favour the collection of quantitative data as the most useful for macro-level sociology.

| Method | Reasons for preference |
|-----------------------|---|
| Questionnaires | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Can be on a large scale to gain a representative sample.• Data collected is reliable. |
| Structured interviews | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Allows the interviewer contact with the respondent, which can eliminate problems such as misunderstanding the questions.• Data collected is reliable and quantitative. |
| Official statistics | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Data collected is quantitative and reliable.• Wide range of data readily available, for example Census data. |

Although positivists tend to favour structured methods, note that it is the *aim* of the study, not the *methods*, which tells us that the research is positivist. A positivist would aim to find out *why* divorce rates are high, for example. An interpretivist would aim to find out how individuals *experience* divorce: what are their feelings about it?

Think about ...

Why are interpretivists critical of positivist research?

See also:
Functionalism;
Quantitative data; Reliability;
Representativeness;
Social facts.

References

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