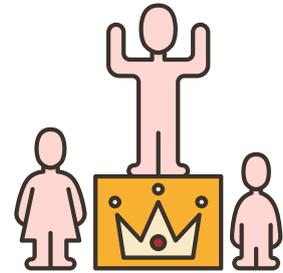


WALBY (1990) THEORIZING PATRIARCHY



Introduction to Sylvia Walby

Sylvia Walby is a leading sociologist and feminist theorist known for her influential work on understanding gender inequalities. Her concept of patriarchy as a system of social structures and practices has significantly shaped the study of family life. Walby's work identifies how various domains of society, including the family, perpetuate patriarchal norms and practices.

Key Concept: Patriarchy

Walby defines patriarchy as a system where men dominate, oppress, and exploit women. She outlines six key structures of patriarchy:

1. Paid Work – Gendered divisions in employment.
2. Household Production – The unequal distribution of domestic labor.
3. The State – Policies that often reinforce male dominance.
4. Male Violence – Physical control over women as an extension of patriarchal norms.
5. Sexuality – The regulation of women's sexuality to benefit men.
6. Cultural Institutions – Media and cultural practices that uphold patriarchal ideals.

Within this framework, the family is a central site for the reproduction and maintenance of patriarchy.

Methodology

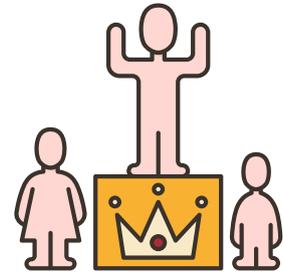
Walby employed an interdisciplinary approach, drawing on sociology, economics, and feminist theory. By combining empirical data with theoretical insights, she developed a holistic model to explain how patriarchy operates across multiple societal structures. She focused on the family as a key institution where patriarchal norms are reinforced through economic dependence, domestic labor divisions, and the socialisation of children into gendered roles.



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Applications to Family Life

Walby's framework highlights the following areas in family life:

1. Domestic Labor and Gender Roles
 - Women often take on a disproportionate share of unpaid domestic tasks, reinforcing their subservience within the family.
2. Economic Dependence
 - Traditional family structures frequently position women as financially dependent on male partners, creating power imbalances.
3. Reproduction of Gender Norms
 - Families play a key role in socialising children into traditional gender roles, perpetuating patriarchal expectations.
4. Male Violence
 - The family can be a site where male dominance is exerted through control and violence, reflecting wider societal trends.

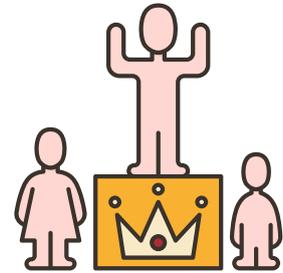
Implications for Contemporary Society

Walby's analysis remains relevant for understanding persistent gender inequalities within families:

- Persistent Inequalities
 - While there has been progress in gender equality, many families still reflect traditional norms, with women shouldering the "second shift" of unpaid domestic work after paid employment.
- Intersectionality
 - Her framework encourages the examination of how patriarchy interacts with class, race, and other systems of oppression within family dynamics.
- Policy and Activism
 - Walby's insights support advocacy for policies that challenge gender inequalities, such as shared parental leave, improved childcare, and measures addressing domestic violence.



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Criticisms of Walby's Approach

Although widely influential, Walby's work has faced some criticisms:

- Structural Focus
 - By concentrating on structures, her approach may underestimate individual agency and the potential for resistance within families.
- Universality of Patriarchy
 - Critics question whether her framework applies universally across diverse cultural contexts.
- Limited Emphasis on Change
 - While her work identifies the persistence of patriarchy, some argue it could offer more detailed strategies for dismantling it.

Relevance Today

The rise of dual-income households, shared parenting, and diverse family forms shows the potential to challenge patriarchal norms. However, Walby's framework is still crucial for analysing how gender inequalities persist in family life globally. Her work provides a foundation for policies and activism aimed at creating more equitable family arrangements.

Discussion Questions

How does Walby's theory of patriarchy explain gender inequalities in the family?

Can you think of examples of families or societies that challenge Walby's structures of patriarchy?

What specific policies or societal changes could address the inequalities highlighted by Walby's work?

