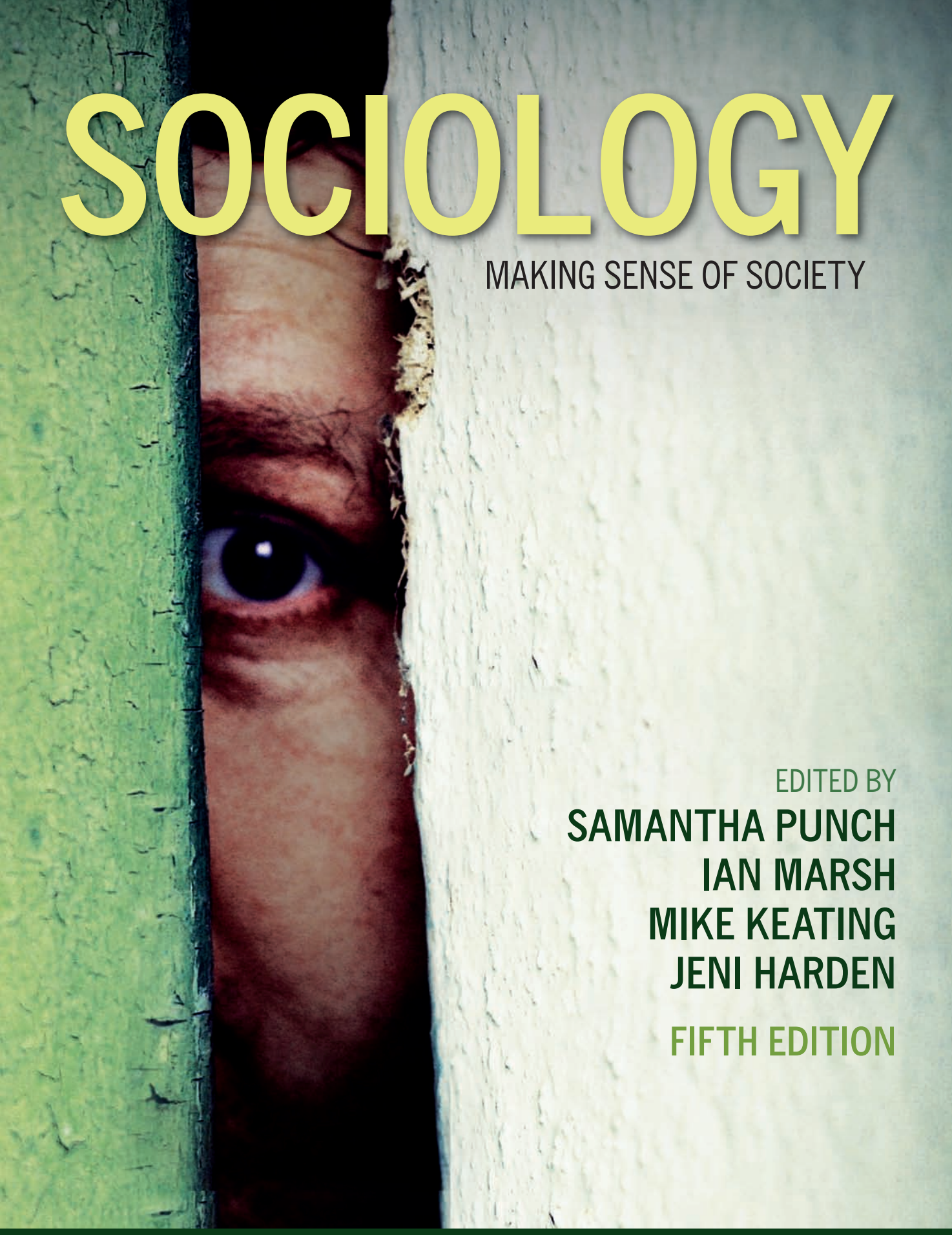
SOCIOLOGY
MAKING SENSE OF SOCIETY
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Sociology

A closer look

Eurostat's definition of gender pay gap

The gender pay gap is given as the difference between average gross hourly earnings of male paid employees and of female paid employees as a percentage of average gross hourly earnings of male paid employees. The gender pay gap is based on several data sources, including the European Community Household Panel (ECHP), the EU Survey on Income and Living Conditions (EU-SILC) and national sources.

The target population consists of all paid employees aged 16–64 that are 'at work 15+ hours per week'.

The data cover EU-Member States, EU-aggregates, Croatia, Norway, and Switzerland.

(Eurostat 2007a)

would come within the scope of the Act. Although some individual cases have been won, problems with the legislation remain. Many women are unaware of the existence of legislation or are reluctant to make claims because of the fear of victimization by colleagues and employees. More fundamentally, differential pay is related to the structure of the labour market, and the Equal Pay Act has had little impact on this structure.

Explanations for gender segregation in the labour market

A range of explanations have been put forward to explain gender segregation in the labour market and specifically why women generally undertake jobs that are relatively low paid and that are perceived as having low levels of skill. We describe some of the most famous theories below.

Economic theories

Perhaps the most common economic explanation of the gender pay gap is human capital theory (Becker 1993), which attempts to explain wage differences based on the education and experience of individual workers. This theory argues that men and women make choices about training and work and recognizes that women's work as carers of children prevents their acquisition of qualifications and labour market experience. Human capital theory attempts to explain occupational segregation as well as low pay: women choose those occupations for which their lesser skills will give the best reward and in which they will be least penalized for their intermittent work patterns. This theory assumes that women believe that they will spend fewer years in the labour market than men and so invest less in their own human capital.

This theory has its weaknesses. First, 'it ignores sex discrimination for it does not explain why women who have equal human capital to men . . . face limitations . . . and do not get promoted posts at the same rate as equivalent men' (Marchbank and Letherby 2007: 242). Second, it assumes that skill is an objective category, that there is consensus about what is skilled work and that all skills are recognized as such. In fact, as the economist Steven Pressman (2002: 31) concluded after studying cross-national data on gender poverty gaps, 'educational levels matter very little' and do not explain gender differences in pay. Across virtually every European Community country, young women have now surpassed young men in attaining formal qualifications and yet gender differences remain in the subjects studied, as women remain predominant in the 'soft' areas of arts, social sciences and welfare (Table 5.2). It appears that it is not the educational level that is achieved that matters but the areas deemed to denote valuable skills.

Marxist feminist approaches

Economic analyses such as that of Karl Marx examine the ways in which men sell their labour and employers benefit from the surplus value of that labour (see Chapter 12). Despite a virtual absence of women from Marx's analysis, many feminist Marxists have attempted to adapt Marxist theory to include the position of women. Various Marxist theorists acknowledge that women's labour is exploited, and some suggest that this can be understood by considering how the labour market is itself split into two key sectors that provide

Table 5.2 Women and men with high educational level, by study field and age, EU25, 2005 (%)

	Women		Men	
Field of study/age group (years)	**25–39**	**40–64**	**25–39**	**40–64**
Arts, humanities, languages	28.0	36.4	12.7	16.2
Social sciences, business, law	36.3	23.7	30.5	24.0
Mathematics, science, engineering	13.6	12.6	43.8	43.6
Health and welfare	17.1	23.3	6.0	9.1
Services, agriculture, other	5.1	3.9	7.9	7.1

(Source: Eurostat 2007b: 6)

very different experiences and opportunities. In the 1970s two segments in the labour market were identified:

- *Primary sector* – Skilled secure work, good pay and working conditions, promotion prospects.
- *Secondary sector* – Unskilled, poor working conditions, insecure pay, few prospects (Barron and Norris 1976).

This approach argues that employers segment the labour market as part of a divide-and-rule strategy to control the workforce. They utilize pre-existing social divisions based, for example, on gender or ethnicity. Women are concentrated predominantly in the secondary sector, fitting into this sector easily because they will work for less money as they are not so committed to paid work because of their domestic roles. Women frequently leave work of their own accord and are less likely to join trade unions, making them easier to dispense with; the social distinction between the sexes means that women are demarcated from men, and this becomes a useful way of dividing the labour force (Barron and Norris 1976).

Marxist feminists also explain the experience of women in the labour market as the outcome of the capitalist economic system, and yet they identify the exploitation of women's labour as central to the functioning of capitalism and hence to the subordination of women. In much Marxist feminism, the sexual division of labour in the family and family ideology have been seen as crucial in placing women at a disadvantage when they enter the labour market. A range of explanations are proposed by Marxist feminism.

Marx noted that capital accumulation required a reserve of labour in order to prevent workers from being able to bargain up their wages and conditions in times of increased demand for labour. Veronica Beechey (1978) applied this theory to women, arguing that they constitute a flexible reserve of labour that can be brought into the labour market when boom conditions increase the need for labour and let go to return to the home in times of recession. This type of approach has been applied to Western women's employment during the two world wars, when, due to the shortage of male labour, women were required and encouraged to enter the labour market, particularly in munitions factories, and to engage in trades that had once been a male preserve. Images such as 'Rosie the Riveter' (in the USA) were part of the wartime strategy to encourage women to enter the labour market. Women were 'let go' at the end of the war to make way for the returning men (in some cases, the women were forced out by law), and governments were able to utilize ideologies about domesticity and motherhood, women's suitability as wives and mothers, the need for mothers to rear their children, and men's right to work.

The Marxist feminist approach pays little attention to the role of men in excluding women from work and the role of trade unions in maintaining the segmented labour market (Cockburn 1991). A further weakness of this theoretical position is that:

> **it does not take into account the fact that there are women in the primary sector and men in the secondary sector, nor is it able to explain the differential experiences amongst women, for example the fact that ethnicity is related also to pay rates.**
>
> (Marchbank and Letherby 2007: 242)

In fact, one of the most fundamental critiques of this approach is that there is too much focus on the role of capitalism and not enough on gender relations.

Capitalism and patriarchy: the dastardly duo

Some feminists have tried to understand women's position in the labour market as a product of both the economic relations of capitalism and patriarchal gender relations; this reflects a broad change of direction in socialist feminism. A key thinker in this area is Heidi Hartmann (1981), who argued that segregation by sex and women's low pay can be explained only by exploring the way in which patriarchy and capitalism work together to form a system that she referred to as 'patriarchal capitalism'. The basis of male power in this social system is men's control over female labour, in both the family and the labour market. Segregation by sex in the labour market has secured male dominance, and men's demand for a family wage ensures that men have higher wages and economic power in the household. Hartmann argues that men have organized via trade unions to exclude women from certain areas of work. Capitalist employers have benefited from this arrangement chiefly by obtaining women's labour cheaply in many areas of the labour market.

Walby (1986) also took a dual-systems approach, but she stressed that patriarchy and capitalism are two separate systems that interact together in a variety of ways, and not always harmoniously as Hartmann proposed. Walby suggested that these two systems have conflicting interests over women's labour. Men dominate in the labour market but this is in tension with capitalist relations, as employers are keen to exploit all forms of labour, particularly women's labour. Women's access to paid work on an equal basis to men would give women greater power and hence undermine patriarchy and male privilege. Walby identifies a pattern of struggles and compromises between employers and male workers and examines a range of historical and contemporary events to illustrate her theory. For example, she considered the Factory Acts passed in the late nineteenth century. Women were entering factory employment in large numbers and capitalists were happy to use their labour, but this threatened the patriarchal family. In excluding women, male workers and trade unions had not only the health and safety of women workers at heart but also the dominance of male workers. Eventually a compromise was reached: women were excluded from certain sectors of the labour market, for example from mining in the UK. Although groups of women opposed this exclusion, their voice was not heeded.

One criticism of this dual-systems approach is that it still does not consider gender enough, in particular the ways in which the sexual division of labour reflects gender-specific roles and functions. This is not just about who does which job but also about the gendered expectations of how that job should be done.

Preference theory

Catherine Hakim (2000, 2002) argues that in modern societies it is possible for women to make real choices about family and work that are unconstrained by factors which existed in the past or in other places. She lists several significant changes including the availability of contraception, equal opportunities policies, the growth in white-collar jobs and those for secondary earners and changes in social values and attitudes. She argues that only a small number of women actually hold their career as centrally important with most preferring to balance family and work life. She classifies women into three groups:

1. Work-centred women, committed to career who invest time and money in gaining training and qualifications and whose main focus is paid work, this is a small minority of women.
2. The home makers with a focus on motherhood. This group is also a minority.
3. The majority are adaptive women who adapt work around family, likely to be the second earner in the family.

Hakim claims that Lifestyle Preference Theory applies to all women living in modern, industrialized societies and this claim has given rise to considerable debate (McRae 2003; Crompton and Lyonette 2006; Johnstone and Lee 2009) with Susan McRae concluding from her own longitudinal study that, although her findings broadly support Hakim's thesis, the fact remains that '*All* women face constraints in making decisions about their lives' (McRae 2003: 328) such as their partner's attitude towards their work, job availability, level of education and even living in a rural area. The debate around constraints goes on but many to some extent agree with Hakim's conclusion that 'lifestyle preferences have a powerful impact on women's employment decisions and on the type of job chosen' (Hakim 2002: 454).

Summary

- The sociology of gender has been developed by feminist women and pro-feminist men concerned with how gender differentiation has meant the subordination of one sex, women, who have been assigned certain gender characteristics and roles. Gender is socially constructed. We are all gendered beings, and more than two possibilities for gender expression exist.
- Sexuality is also socially constructed, which has implications for the relationships between women and men and for the oppression of women and some men. Gendered bodily ideals are also socially constructed, and these ideals alongside expected roles and responsibilities are represented in the mass media.
- Some progress towards equality for women in the household and in the labour market has been achieved, but inequality persists. Gender ideologies still structure labour market choices and opportunities for women and men. The labour market is a site where meanings about femininity and masculinity are constructed and reinforced.
- Gender is a crucial social factor in producing adequate explanations of social behaviour and the organization of social institutions. Gender relations have been researched in all areas of social experience. This is reflected in the fact that many chapters in this book consider gender; perhaps one day there will not be a separate chapter such as this one in sociology textbooks, if gender distinctions and divisions are eroded and gender studies become fully integrated into sociology.

Links

Issues of gender are relevant across most areas of sociology. For instance, Chapter 9 looks at gender relations in the majority world; much of the discussion in the Families chapter (Chapter 11) has relevance to gender; issues around gender and work are picked up in Chapter 12; Chapter 15 looks at education and gender; and Chapter 17 at media and gender.

Further reading

Connell, R. (2009) *Gender: In World Perspective*, Cambridge: Polity.
A really good book to introduce new scholars to gender, covers theory, gendered relations, body and gendered society and much more.

Jackson, S. and Scott, S. (eds) (2002) *Gender: A Sociological Reader,* London: Routledge.
This informed collection includes some of the most significant sociological writings on gender from the latter part of the twentieth century.

Kimmel, M., Hearn, J. and Connell, R. (eds) (2005) *The Handbook of Studies on Men and Masculinities*, Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
This expansive collection of articles covers all aspects of masculinity cross culturally and cross issues providing a very broad overview of masculinity studies in the social sciences.

Marchbank, J. and Letherby, G. (2007) *Introduction to Gender: Social Science Perspectives*, Harlow: Pearson Education
A broad and interdisciplinary introduction to themes, debates and issues within gender studies, includes exercises and further reading.

Woodward, K. (2011) *The Short Guide to Gender*, Bristol: Policy Press.
A very accessible and up-to-date text which covers the key concepts and main debates in gender studies.

Key journal and journal articles

Key journal

Gender and Society

This journal is highly ranked both in Gender Studies and Sociology. Articles analyse gender and gendered processes and practices in organizations, communities and societies.

Journal articles

Chesley, N. (2011) 'Stay-at-home fathers and breadwinning mothers: gender, couple dynamics, and social change' *Gender and Society* 25(5): 642–64.
A report on a study that shows a shift in family arrangements can promote change towards greater gender equality even in couples that initially hold entrenched, gendered beliefs.

Sampson, H., Bloor, M. and Fincham, B. (2008) 'A price worth paying?: Considering the "Cost" of reflexive research methods and the influence of feminist ways of "Doing" ' *Sociology* 42(5): 919–33.
A critical consideration of how feminist research approaches have impacted on social research more generally.

Wedgwood, N. (2009) 'Connell's theory of masculinity – its origins and influences on the study of gender' *Journal of Gender Studies* 18(4): 329–339.
A critical review of the influence of Connell's work which also draws on interviews with Connell.

Websites

http://www.xyonline.net
A site focusing on men, masculinites and gender politics from a pro-feminist stance. It contains over 200 articles, blogs and resources and covers many topics such as fatherhood, health, race and ethnicity, violence, pornography, curricula and campaigns.

www.newser.com/tag/18210/1/gender-stereotypes.html
An online resource of news stories drawing on gender stereotypes.

Activities

Activity 1

Identifying gender

Go to the following places and observe what people are doing:

- a busy high street or shopping centre;
- a public transport vehicle, e.g. bus or train;
- a children's playground;
- a coffee shop or a public bar.

Questions

1. Can you tell who is male and who is female? How – what clues are there to sex and gender identity?
2. Make a list of the 'different' behaviour of males and females. Are gender differences more evident in some places than in others?
3. Is gender the only signifier of difference? If not, what other aspects of people's identities are significant? How do different aspects of an individual's identity interact?

Activity 2

Personalizing gender

Write your own autobiography focusing on gender relations and how they have affected your life. Among the areas and aspects of your life, you might consider (a) relations with and between family members; and (b) the importance of gender relations at significant stages of, or events in, your life – births, weddings, going to new schools, joining clubs, starting work and so on. How did gender influence your schooling, the jobs you have done or are hoping to do, your leisure pursuits – what you do and what you would like to do?

Chapter 6

‘Race’, ethnicity and nationalism

Colin Clark and Noah Canton

In the latter part of the twentieth century the vast improvements in communications and transport together with the creation of global markets have brought the peoples of the earth more together and, in some respects, have jumbled them up so that the old boundaries between groups are no longer so distinct. As the frameworks have weakened, individuals have become more interested in questions of racial and ethnic identity and the ways in which their subjective experience does not accord with the assumptions of others . . . These trends should increase interest in a bottom up approach to questions of racial and ethnic relations . . . (Banton 1998: 235)

Key issues

- How can we sociologically best explain ‘race’, ethnicity and nationalism, and what are the connections within and between them?
- In what ways do different groups of people experience racism, and how does it disadvantage them in wider society?
- What connects identity, citizenship and multiculturalism?
- What prompts people to migrate, and what are their experiences of settlement?

Introduction

This chapter explores some questions and answers to the four key issues raised here. We consider three related and connected areas of sociology: ‘race’, ethnicity and nationalism. We unpack some of the historical, conceptual and theoretical aspects of work in these fields and spend some time defining our key terms of reference. However, such work cannot be carried out in isolation from the experience and impact of such ideas, so we explore the contexts and environments in which ‘race’, ethnicity and nationalism are experienced. That is, as well as being interested in the language and theory of, for example, ‘race’ and nationalism, we are also