WOMEN'S SUBORDINATION THROUGH THE LENS OF SEX: CONSERVATISM

To the extent that it wishes to retain the status quo, conservatism obviously cannot be regarded as a framework that is feminist. Applied to issues of gender, conservatism typically offers an explanation for the subordination of women that works simultaneously as a rationalization for it. Secular versions of conservatism often account for women's subordination in terms of human biology and warn of the high cost, in terms of social inefficiency and human unhappiness, of any deviation from this supposedly biologically engendered norm. Despite the fact that conservatism is not feminist, two samples of biocentric conservative arguments are included here—along with a feminist rejoinder—because biological justifications of women's subordination continue to be widely circulated.

Over the past twenty years, psychoanalytic explanations of people's behavior have been superseded to a considerable extent by biopsychiatric approaches. These, as their name implies, attempt to explain many human desires, moods, and actions in terms of biological phenomena such as brain chemistry. Until about 1970, however, Freudian theory was probably the most powerful secular rationale for women's subordination, and even today it retains considerable influence. We have again reprinted extracts from Freud's famous article "Femininity," partly for its historical significance and partly as a basis for understanding recent feminist attempts to rework Freud in ways that illuminate the subordination of women without at the same time rationalizing it.

Sociobiology is the second version of conservatism presented here. Sociobiological approaches to understanding human behavior came to prominence in 1975 with the publication of entomologist Edward O. Wilson's groundbreaking work Sociobiology: The New Synthesis. Most of this massive tome was devoted to explaining insect behavior, but it was the last chapter, in which Wilson extended his theory to human action, that predictably aroused the most public interest and controversy. Wilson later elaborated his reflections on this topic in the popular paperback On Human Nature (1978), from which the present extract is taken. Like Freud, Wilson refrains from asserting that changes in traditional gender arrangements are impossible, but he argues that any fundamental changes in these arrangements are contrary to the biological predispositions of human males and females, predispositions that originally had some evolutionary advantage. Wilson claims that thwarting these predispositions will impose social and individual costs much higher than the benefits produced.

Ruth Hubbard is a Harvard biologist who, despite—or perhaps because of—her training, strongly opposes biocentric explanations of human action. Challenging both biological reductionism and biological holism, she argues that it is impossible in principle to separate biology's effect on human behavior from social and economic influences. Although Hubbard's piece is clearly feminist rather than gender-conservative, its inclusion in this section is designed to help students understand the ultimate incoherence of all biocentric explanations of human action, including but not limited to psychoanalysis and sociobiology. Looking through only the lens of sex obscures as much as it reveals about women's subordination.
family or rank. Liberal feminists contend that the ideal of gendered equality of opportunity remains desirable irrespective of the nature of biological sex differences. If social opportunities were equally available to men and women, positions would be filled by the very best people available, while individual liberty and probably individual happiness would be maximized. Liberal feminists regard these justifications for gendered equality of opportunity as valid even if it were to turn out that biological differences in fact enabled one sex or the other to take better advantage of certain opportunities.

The insistence that women's opportunities should be equal with men's is a distinguishing theme in liberal feminism. It is the central claim in John Stuart Mill's classic essay On the Subjection of Women (1869), extracted here, as well as the central moral insight of the National Organization for Women's Bill of Rights, first promulgated in 1967, a year after NOW's formation. Largely as a consequence of liberal feminist activism, the idea that women and men should enjoy equal opportunities has now become so generally accepted in North America that it is rarely disputed in public.

Intense public controversy has erupted, however, over exactly what counts as equality of opportunity. Does it require simply the repeal of legal discrimination against women, as John Stuart Mill sometimes seemed to assume, or must certain other conditions be fulfilled? Presumably, as Mary Wollstonecraft noted, it requires equal educational opportunities for men and women—but how should they be measured? Even feminist teachers often unintentionally give less attention to the girls than to the boys in their classes, and far less scholarship money is available for female than for male college athletes (Ref. AAUW report). Does equality of opportunity require that pregnancy and maternity leaves be available to women—or should they be parental leaves? Does it require that educational institutions and employers establish child care centers? Does it require so-called preferential treatment for women? Does it even require the right to abortion?

The NOW Bill of Rights, reprinted here, obviously promotes a much stronger conception of equal opportunity than that currently held by the general public—at least in the contemporary United States. Discussion of this issue constitutes a major part of liberal feminism, and much of the rest of their debate concerns the issue of privacy. Contemporary liberal feminists are committed, like other liberals, to a distinction between the public and the private spheres, and they appeal to this distinction in arguing for women's right to choose on such controversial issues as abortion, pornography, and prostitution—claims that sharply separate liberal feminists from many radical feminists. While the commitment to privacy distinguishes liberal feminism from other feminist theories, it must also be noted that liberal feminists often draw the line between public and private spheres differently from other liberals. In particular, liberal feminists are more concerned with issues such as domestic violence and the economic vulnerability of homemakers, and so they are more likely than other liberals to recommend that domestic life be subjected to a certain degree of government regulation in order to ensure women's economic security as well as their physical safety.

**WOMEN'S SUBORDINATION THROUGH THE LENS OF CLASS: CLASSICAL MARXISM**

In spite of recent world developments, which have called into question many traditional interpretations of Marxism, much contemporary feminist theory continues to be influenced by Marxist ways of thinking. For this reason, as well as because of Marxism's historical significance, it is important for present-day feminists to understand the main tenets of classical Marxist feminism.

Classical Marxism rejects even more decisively than liberal feminism the conservative notion of an essential and biologically determined human nature. Marx saw that human beings, throughout the course of history, have had recourse to many different techniques for feeding, sheltering, clothing, and reproducing themselves, and he argued that these various techniques have given rise to a variety of forms of social organization or "modes of production." The social relations that constitute these modes of production are, in Marx's view, the primary determinants of human nature which, rather than being a transhistorical constant, is shaped instead both by the general form of society and by an individual's specific place within that society. While reminiscent of liberal environmentalism, the Marxist view is distinct in asserting that people are capable of radically transforming their society and so ultimately of creating their own nature.

In addition to rejecting conservative biodeterminism, Marxists challenge the liberal assumption that genuine equality of opportunity is possible under capitalism, where a relatively small class of people, the capitalist class, controls the productive resources of the society and exploits the labor of the working class. In such circumstances, Marxists believe, equality of opportunity can be no more than a myth that rationalizes the subordination of women by enforcing their economic dependence on men. Marxists argue that keeping women subordinate is functional to the capitalist system in a wide variety of ways, from getting a large amount of socially necessary work done at very low cost to providing a reserve pool of low-paid labor which exerts a continuing downward pressure on wages in general.
pressure on wages. While capitalism may extend hitherto male privileges to a few token women, classical Marxists believe that it cannot permit most women to be the economic and social equals of men.

If the subordination of women is ultimately maintained by the capitalist system, then, according to classical Marxist thinking, that system should be the primary target of women's political activism. Working-class women's needs can be met not by allying with women of the capitalist class, who have an interest in retaining the capitalist status quo, but rather by joining with working-class men not just to "defeat bourgeois feminism" but to establish a socialist system. This position is argued in the present volume by Evelyn Reed, whose 1970 article was written to challenge radical feminist ideas then newly emerging. Reed perceives women's subordination almost exclusively through the lens of class and, like all traditional Marxists, she believes that women's economic dependence on men can be abolished only under socialism, which would return the ownership of the main productive resources to society as a whole—including women. Only socialism can provide the material basis for true gender equality and, once this basis is established, bourgeois prejudices about women, like bourgeois stereotypes of the working class, will be shown to be entirely unfounded.

WOMEN'S SUBORDINATION THROUGH THE LENS OF SEX/GENDER AND SEXUALITY: RADICAL FEMINISM

While liberal and classical Marxist feminisms each represent a long political tradition, radical feminism dates only from the late 1960s. It emerged initially in the United States as a response by women civil rights and peace activists to the sexism they encountered first in the daily practices of their male coworkers and then in the Marxist theory by which so many activists of the time were inspired. The new radical feminists objected especially to the "class reductionism" of traditional Marxism, which they saw as a rationale for diminishing the seriousness of women's concerns as well as for endlessly deferring action on them.

One distinguishing feature of radical feminism is its insistence that the subordination of women is primary, not secondary, to other forms of domination. Part of what the early radical feminists meant by this was that women's subordination was not causally dependent on other systems of domination, such as class society, rather than conservative because she does not regard sex as unchangeable. Instead, she argues that advanced technology is now able to compensate for these biological inequalities by permitting extraterrestrial reproduction or "test-tube babies," a development that will finally end women's dependence on men and permit genuine sex equality.

Other radical feminist accounts of the subordination of women are less sanguine about the emancipatory potential of advanced technology but more positive about women's biological capacities. Some assert that women are biologically superior to men not only in their capacity to give birth but in their freedom from "testosterone poisoning." More recently, radical feminists have challenged the conceptual validity of the liberal feminist distinction between sex and gender, arguing not simply that gender norms must have been influenced by biological sex differences but that they also shaped social understandings of sex and even the way sex differences have evolved. This point is expressed forcefully by Monique Wittig who goes beyond the relatively familiar claim that feminine psychology is socially imposed to assert that even women's bodies are socially constructed. Nothing about women is "natural": women are not born but made. In a similar vein, Catharine MacKinnon argues that the main concern for feminism is not the nature of sex differences but rather the social arrangements that take male biology as the social norm while devaluing female biology. For many radical feminists, sex and gender are ultimately inseparable, and women's subordination must be viewed through what we have called the sex/gender lens.

Women's bodies remain central even in those radical feminist analyses that refrain from addressing abstract theoretical questions about the relationship between human biology and human social arrangements. Many radical feminists see the subordination of women as rooted in the social practices through which men control women's bodies, especially women's procreative and sexual capacities. Some radical feminists target compulsory motherhood, including women's lack of control over conception, abortion, and the conditions of giving birth and rearing children; others emphasize male control of women's sexuality through institutions such as prostitution, pornography, and heterosexuality itself.

Although issues of procreation and sexuality were addressed to some extent by ancient and medieval political theorists, modern political theory has usually regarded them as lying beyond the scope of political concern, categorizing them instead as "private" or "personal." Radical feminists, by contrast, assert that procreation and sexuality are deeply political in being fundamentally organized by male power, and they argue that the relegation of these issues to the personal realm fulfills the ideological purpose of trivializing them and delegitimizing women's struggles to change those practices. Charlotte Bunch's 1975 article, reprinted below, is an early example of this radical feminist approach. It argues that normative heterosexuality is an institution dividing women from each other and concludes that lesbians are the vanguard of the feminist revolution. Bunch's capitalization of the word "lesbian"
reflects her conviction that lesbianism is not merely a personal preference but a political decision made within the context of political struggle. The late 1960s slogan "The Personal is Political" neatly expresses this characteristically radical feminist conviction.

**WOMEN'S SUBORDINATION THROUGH THE LENS OF SEX/GENDER, SEXUALITY, AND CLASS: SOCIALIST FEMINISM**

Socialist feminism emerged in the second half of the 1970s in response to the discomfort many feminists felt with both the gender-blindness of traditional Marxism and the class-blindness of early radical feminism. These feminists believed that, while traditional understandings of Marxism indeed often functioned to obscure the seriousness of male dominance, some approximation of Marxist method was nevertheless indispensable to developing an adequate feminist theory and practice.

They took up the theoretical project of revising Marxism in a way that would incorporate radical feminist insights and the practical project of devising strategies for political action that would challenge male dominance simultaneously with capitalism.

The statement from the Charlotte Perkins Gilman Chapter of the New American Movement (one of the organizations later merged into the Democratic Socialists of America) offers a clear summary of the fundamental tenets of socialist feminism, focusing primarily on its implications for political practice. The authors of this statement insist that feminism and socialism each need the other. While the history of feminist and socialist movements in the United States amply demonstrates both that feminism may be elitist and that socialism may be sexist, socialist feminists argue that the political goals of neither movement can be met in isolation from the other.

Socialists must attend to the needs of the female half of the working class, and feminists must recognize that genuine sex equality is possible only under socialism. Together, the two movements generate the vision of a radically transformed society that is truly free and equal.

Socialist feminism has produced a multitude of arguments designed to demonstrate how women's subordination can be understood adequately only if it is viewed simultaneously through the lenses of sex/gender, sexuality, and class. We have reprinted a brief extract from Juliet Mitchell's classic essay "Women: The Longest Revolution," one of the earliest of such arguments, a longer version of which appeared in our first edition. Refusing to give theoretical primacy to the mode of production as traditionally understood, Mitchell argues that the subordination of women must be analyzed in terms of four interlocking social structures: production, reproduction, sexuality, and child rearing. When structuralist interpretations of Marxism were generally abandoned in the 1970s, later socialist feminists abandoned Mitchell's language of "structures," but they retained her conviction that a full understanding of women's subordination required attention to ways of organizing the satisfaction not only of such human needs as food, clothing, and shelter but also of other needs that were equally essential but neglected in traditional Marxist theory. These needs were said to include sexuality, children, and emotional nurturance.

Our final example of socialist feminist theory is an extract from Heidi Hartmann's "The Unhappy Marriage of Marxism and Feminism," a longer version of which appeared in our second edition. Early drafts of this highly influential paper, coauthored originally with Amy Bridges, were circulated widely in typescript during the 1970s. In the finally published version, Hartmann criticizes prevailing formulations of both classical Marxism and radical feminism, arguing that the sex-blind categories of traditional Marxism are inadequate to comprehend the subordination of women, while the class-blind and ahistorical categories of radical feminism, especially the category of patriarchy, are too broad to understand the variety of women's experiences.

Hartmann offers a redefinition of patriarchy in terms of male control over women's labor, control that is exerted both within the home and outside it. Drawing on this definition, she examines the ways in which women's experience is shaped by the reciprocal relationship between patriarchy and capitalism, which she regards as mutually interdependent and reinforcing systems implicated equally in the subordination of women.

**WOMEN'S SUBORDINATION THROUGH THE LENS OF SEX/GENDER, SEXUALITY, CLASS, AND RACE: MULTICULTURAL FEMINISM**

The new section "Multicultural Feminism" succeeds the section "Feminism and Women of Color" introduced in our second edition. Our change in title, as well as in the readings, is intended to express how, in the time that has elapsed between the second and third editions of Feminist Frameworks, the issues raised by women of color have moved from the margin to the center of feminist concern. Women of color have moved from challenging their exclusion from (white) feminism to claiming their right, as feminists, to redefine previous understandings of feminist issues and feminist theory.

Our multicultural feminist selections are authored, respectively, by a Chicana feminist, a Chinese-American feminist, an African-American feminist, and a white Jewish feminist, the last of whom is a distinguished historian of African-American women. Writing in the first person singular, Cherrie Moraga describes her experience as the lesbian daughter of a Chicana mother and a white father. Moraga's narrative describes how class, race, gender, and sexuality operated in her life as intersecting systems of subordination and illuminates how their interaction is transformative rather than simply additive. For instance, Moraga's experience of subordination is not intelligible as the experience of a "typical," i.e., heterosexual, Chicana added to that of a "typical," i.e., white, lesbian. Within the context of Chicano culture, women's sexuality acquires meanings distinct from those it is assigned in the Anglo world, so that being a lesbian Chicana is very different not only from being a heterosexual Chicana but also from being a white lesbian.

Class, race, gender, and sexuality are equally intertwined in the lives of Asian-American women. Esther Ngan-Ling Chow describes some of their intersections, noting that many Asian-American women place a higher priority on eradicate racism than sexism. Ethnic bonds between Asian-American women are so strong that they
often feel they have more in common with Asian-American women of different class backgrounds than with women of different racial or ethnic identifications. Chow argues that, in order for Asian-American women to overcome the multitude of barriers that inhibit their full social participation, they must be involved in Asian-American activism and also unite with other feminists of color and white feminists.

Deborah King's influential article, "Multiple Jeopardy," challenges the invisibility of black women in critical theories of both race and sex, noting that the experience of racism and sexism compound each other in the lives of black women, most of whom suffer also from classism and some from homophobia. King argues that these systems of domination are interactive and interdependent, so that the situation of black women becomes one that she calls "multiple jeopardy." King demonstrates how the relative significance of each system varies according to the specific social and historical phenomenon in question, and she is severely critical of what she calls "monist" ideologies, which insist on the theoretical and political primacy of just one of these systems. Monistic politics are divisive, inevitably marginalizing certain groups, and King asserts that black feminist ideology, which melds elements from race liberation, class liberation, and women's liberation, necessarily opposes such separatist forms of political organizing. Instead, black feminism fixes its focus on the self-determination of domination are interactive and interdependent, so that the situation of black women becomes one that she calls "multiple jeopardy." King demonstrates how the relative significance of each system varies according to the specific social and historical phenomenon in question, and she is severely critical of what she calls "monist" ideologies, which insist on the theoretical and political primacy of just one of these systems. Monistic politics are divisive, inevitably marginalizing certain groups, and King asserts that black feminist ideology, which melds elements from race liberation, class liberation, and women's liberation, necessarily opposes such separatist forms of political organizing. Instead, black feminism fixes its focus on the self-determination of black women, whom it portrays as powerful, independent, political subjects.

Drawing on the work of women of color, Gerda Lerner reflects that the so-called issue of difference in feminism is better understood as the issue of hierarchy or dominance. While dominance is established originally by force, it is maintained only because the dominated group puts "a negative mark" on difference, creating a group perceived as "other" whose subordination is regarded as natural and just. Lerner asserts that sex, class, and race dominance not only are interrelated and inseparable in the present but were so "from the start." These systems of domination are not conceptually distinct but must be defined in relation to each other; for instance, class and race are both "genderic," expressed and institutionalized in terms that are always different for men and women, just as gender is always mediated by class and race. Lerner calls for feminists to construct a new conceptual framework that displays these interactions, a framework whose construction she envisions as a collective project in which men and women work together.

**WOMEN'S SITUATION WORLDWIDE: GLOBAL FEMINISM**

"Global feminism" is the second new framework introduced in this third edition of Feminist Frameworks. It reflects Western feminists' increasing awareness that our lives are inseparably connected with the lives of women in what is sometimes called the developing world. Although frequently unrecognized, these connections include shared histories, often histories of invasion and colonization, shared interests, including the interest in a habitable planet, and shared destinies, as our resources, our labor, our markets, and our cultures become increasingly integrated into a "new world order" dominated by transnational capital. In these rapidly changing circumstances, women's subordination can be understood only if yet another lens is added to the previous ones. This is the lens of imperialism or postcolonialism.

Our section opens with the classic 1981 article by Charlotte Bunch, who is credited with inventing the term "global feminism." Bunch is also, of course, the author of "Lesbians in Revolt," another classic article reprinted here in the section "Radical Feminism," and it is interesting to see the evolution of her views in the course of only a few years. In her "Prospects for Global Feminism," Bunch insists that feminism, rather than being a laundry list of so-called women's issues, instead is a transformational politics dedicated not simply to gender equality within existing systems of injustice but rather to implementing "new visions for how societies might exist without injustice at their core." A genuinely global feminism must address the social forces that divide women, forces such as race, class, sexuality, colonialism, poverty, religion, and nationality, recognizing that struggling against these is not additional to the struggle against male domination but rather an integral part of it. Global feminism must pay special attention to the difficult question of how to value cultural diversity and at the same time oppose domination rationalized by appeals to either tradition or modernization.

"Surviving Beyond Fear," by Ximena Bunster-Bunalto, describes women's experiences of torture and terror in Latin America, experiences so atrocious that we hesitated to include the piece. Our ultimate decision to do so was based partly on our political conviction that such abuses should receive the widest possible publicity, and partly on our belief that the article raises at least two important theoretical issues. First, it demonstrates that "women's issues" are not limited to such familiar and obviously gendered causes as equal pay and child care; apparently nongendered issues, like national liberation, military dictatorship, and democracy, in fact have implications that are deeply gendered. Second, Bunster's description of the Latin American ideology of machismo/Marianismo invites us to reflect on how the gender-specific forms of torture that she describes might in some sense be generated by these bipolar conceptions of men and women.

In "Bananas, Bases and Patriarchy," Cynthia Enloe explores the interrelations among several systems of domination affecting the lives of women in Central America. She suggests that European colonialism sowed the seeds of the Latin-American ideologies of machismo and Indian inferiority. These seeds were later cultivated by U.S. militarism and imperialism in order to inhibit union organizing and perpetuate the low wages which together sustain the kind of internationally dependent, militarized society we have come to call a "banana republic." The economies of these societies now depend heavily on women's cheap labor in such foreign-controlled industries as light assembly, data entry, and tourism—not to mention prostitution. The questions Enloe raises in this pioneering study became the basis of her 1989 book, Bananas, Beaches and Bases, in which she explores these and other relationships in greater depth.

Andree Nicola McLaughlin's article reflects the reality that not all black women are of African descent and that their cultural heritages are extremely diverse. This reality is often obscured by the oversimplification of race implicit in the dualistic categories and language that pervade the popular culture as well as academic discourse. Like Deborah King, McLaughlin describes black women's situation in terms of "multiple jeopardy" but, because her vision extends beyond African-American women, McLaughlin recognizes additional systems of domination, including those based on...
religion, ethnicity, region, caste, and color. Despite the diversity of their situations, black people share a common political opposition to the imperialism, colonialism, and racism by which they all are threatened, and this common threat constitutes the basis for their identification not as a racial group but rather as an intercontinental political class. Although—or perhaps because—black women are engaged in such a wide variety of specific struggles, McLaughlin asserts that their political-class activism has a universal import, embodying opposition to all forms of oppression for all people. "Multiply-identified, Black women in various regions of the world are offering a holistic conception of the struggle for social justice and human freedom.” They are creating an alternative to the "imperialist-derived secularism of Western culture that fragments the universe, . . . redefining themselves in their entirety and, hence, the men, children, Earth, and the universe.”

Global feminism is not an exhaustive collection of categories or lenses capable of completely comprehending the subordination of women. Constructing such a final or "totalizing" framework is no longer considered either possible or desirable by today's feminists. Instead, the value of global feminism lies in its recognition that women's subordinations are both diverse and interconnected, so that they can be understood only in terms of a multitude of organizing categories or what we have called lenses. Different lenses are more useful or salient on different occasions, depending on each woman's situation as well as on the purposes of particular investigations. Specific questions about which lenses are appropriate on which occasions have now replaced general concerns about primacy at the center of feminist theory. The one general claim of which we can be certain is that only by superimposing multiple lenses can feminists make women's subordination fully visible in its variety as well as its sameness, its conflicts as well as its commonality.

NOTES
1 In her Gender and History: The Limits of Social Theory in the Age of the Family (Columbia University Press, New York, 1986), Linda Nicholson argues that the search for "the" cause of women's subordination presupposes an untenable positivist conception of social explanation.
2 Denise Riley: "Am I That Name?: Feminism and the Category of 'Women' in History," University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, 1989.

Femininity
Sigmund Freud

. . . In conformity with its peculiar nature, psycho-analysis does not try to describe what a woman is—that would be a task it could scarcely perform—but sets about enquiring how she comes into being, how a woman develops out of a child with a bisexual disposition. . . .

. . . A little girl is as a rule less aggressive, defiant and self-sufficient; she seems to have a greater need for being shown affection and on that account to be more dependent and pliant. It is probably only as a result of this pliancy that she can be taught more easily and quicker to control her excretions: urine and faeces are the first gifts that children make to those who look after them, and controlling them is the first concession to which the instinctual life of children can be induced. One gets an impression, too, that little girls are more intelligent and livelier than boys of the same age; they go out more to meet the external world and at the same time form stronger object-cathexes. I cannot say whether this lead in development has been confirmed by exact observations, but in any case there is no question that girls cannot be described as intellectually backward. These sexual differences are not, however, of great consequence: they can be outweighed by individual variations. For our immediate purposes they can be disregarded.

Both sexes seem to pass through the early phases of libidinal development in the same manner. It might have been expected that in girls there would already have been some lag in aggressiveness in the sadistic-anal phase, but such is not the case. Analysis of children's play has shown our women analysts that the aggressive impuls-
must be abandoned. It does entail that, in developing future theories, we must be sensitive not only to difference but also to dominance, self-reflective about the ways in which our perceptions are influenced by our own situations and, above all, that each of us must listen respectfully to women whose situations and perceptions are very different from our own.

In Part 3 of this volume, we present a number of feminist attempts to conceptualize and reconceptualize women's subordination. Some of them rely on "old" frameworks, uninfluenced by the kinds of criticisms mentioned above; other, more recent, frameworks are designed to counter earlier omissions and distortions by beginning from the perspectives of women marginalized by previous theories. All of them are contemporary in the sense that at least some feminists presently adhere to each, but they also follow a certain progression insofar as the later theories respond to perceived shortcomings in the earlier ones. Although they are rivals to each other in the sense of offering alternative understandings of women's subordination, they are not competitors in the simple sense of providing different answers to precisely the same questions. Instead, and like most theoretical developments, as old issues begin to appear uninteresting or unfruitful and new ones become more urgent or salient, the central questions of feminist theory have been reframed. One example of such a reframing is the contemporary feminist shift away from a concern with issues of primacy.

THE ROOTS OF WOMEN'S SUBORDINATION

In previous editions of Feminist Frameworks, the editors' introduction to the theories or frameworks began with a section entitled "The Roots of Women's Oppression." This section reflected the fact that feminist theory throughout the 1970s was preoccupied with issues of "primacy," one aspect of which was a search for the "root" of women's subordination. Some theorists wrote as though the root was the original historic (or prehistoric) cause; others interpreted the metaphor of root to mean the primary or most important cause maintaining the subordination of women today. Regardless of what they meant by "root" or what they took it to be, feminists of the 1970s generally agreed that discovering the root cause of women's subordination was one of the primary tasks confronting feminist theory. Their reasoning is implicit in their choice of metaphor: Weeds that are cut down often regrow and can be eradicated only by being uprooted. Similarly, most feminist theorists reasoned, the subordination of women could be eradicated only by abolishing or transforming the deep structures that supposedly nourished it. Determining the root of women's subordination was seen as a prerequisite for identifying political strategies to end it.

Between the late 1960s and the early 1980s, feminist theorists gave a variety of answers to the question of the root of women's subordination. Some theories identified the root as biological, residing in women's supposedly lesser physical strength (Mill), or in the dependence supposedly resulting from female incapacities related to childbearing (Firestone), or in men's supposed propensity to rape and women's to be raped (Brownmiller). Others argued that biological differences were salient only in certain social contexts and located the root of women's subordination in certain social structures or institutions: in class society (Engels), in male control of women's sexuality (Bunch and MacKinnon), or in female child rearing (Chodorow and Dinnerstein). In addition to being highly speculative, these theories were also extremely general: Not only were most of them "class-blind," but all of them were "race-blind." Inevitably they were charged with ignoring differences between women—a charge that some authors addressed with varying degrees of plausibility.

Simultaneously with debating the root cause of the subordination of women, feminists in this period also disputed "primacy" in another sense. This emerged as the question whether subordination on the basis of sex was the most urgent problem currently facing women. Marxist feminists contended that economic class constituted the most significant division in capitalist societies, arguing that the deepest interests of working-class women were those they shared with working-class men. Reviving a dispute from the turn of the century, they alleged that the reforms sought by women of the capitalist class would fail to benefit and might even injure the interests of working-class women who should therefore unite, as one slogan had it, to "Defeat Bourgeois Feminism!" A parallel disagreement divided white feminists from many feminists of color, especially black feminists. Some black women felt that their deepest interests were shared with black men rather than with white women and asserted that their primary political task was challenging racism rather than male domination. Imperialism was seen as creating yet another division between women, since metropolitan women obviously benefited from the labors of women on the periphery.

Some colonized women, such as Australian aboriginals and some Native Americans, claimed that local forms of male domination were a direct consequence of colonization; others, such as Vietnamese, Palestinian, and South African women, argued that struggles against indigenous forms of male domination should be deferred until national autonomy was achieved.

Throughout the decade of the 1970s, discussion of these questions was intense and often confused, partly because of the ambiguity of the word "primary" which is open to a variety of interpretations, including "first," "most significant," and "most urgent." This ambiguity helped to obscure the conceptual distinction between the original and the maintaining cause of women's subordination—what we might call its production and its reproduction. The same ambiguity may also have encouraged some feminist theorists to confuse the earliest form of domination with the form that was causally deepest, the one that had the greatest impact on women's lives, and the one that should be attacked first. Thus some feminists inferred, for instance, that the original cause of the subordination of women must be the deepest as well as causally the most significant—and therefore also the most politically urgent.

Crucial as these debates appeared twenty or even ten years ago, today they seem not only dated but often incoherent. Feminists over the past decade have learned to conceptualize sex, gender, race, and class in more sophisticated and nuanced ways, ways that no longer permit the simple oppositions generating the earlier debates. Feminist theory today, as we shall see, addresses questions quite different from those surrounding primacy.