# Topic Exploration Pack

# Feminism

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## Instructions and answers for teachers

These instructions cover the student activity section which can be found on [page](#_Student_Activity) 14. This Topic Exploration Pack supports OCR AS and A Level Sociology.

**When distributing the activity section to the students either as a printed copy or as a Word file you will need to remove the teacher instructions section.**

### Introduction

In this Topic Exploration Pack we will explore a conflict theory - feminism.

This pack introduces students to critical social theory and allows them to apply their knowledge to a range of topics within component 1. Whilst theory isn’t directly on the AS or A Level specification for Section A of Component 1, most teachers will want to introduce theory as a defining feature of sociology and considering theory in relation to culture, identity and socialisation can be a good way to do this. It can also offer students a more developed understanding of an aspect of culture, identity or socialisation.The aim of this Topic Exploration Pack is to encourage students to feel confident in applying theories to any of the topics that they will study and works well in conjunction with the other OCR packs that focus on sociological theory.

This pack begins by exploring the key differences between conflict and consensus theories, or different perspectives on a range of issues, or ways of explaining social change and the world around them, which can be broadly divided into structural or action perspectives. Students need to be aware that the structure versus action dichotomy has been a central tension within the discipline. It is possible to introduce theories using this pack, although functionalism is the usual starting point for most teachers of social theory.

This Topic Exploration Pack is excellent in demonstrating the range of ideas within one particular theoretical perspective and begins from the view that sociology is not a united perspective. The pack describes the key phases in the development of feminist thought and the tensions within the discipline. It also begins to consider how feminist ideas arose as a response to the ‘malestream’ nature of sociology as a discipline. Unlike some other theories, feminism is first and foremost a social movement and therefore has played a leading role in changing attitudes and laws.

Finally, some consideration needs to be given to the fact that the theories explored within the A Level mainly represent western social theories which are not necessarily easily applicable to phenomena beyond Western society. Western forms of feminism, for example, explore notions of what it means for women to be oppressed in the West. It becomes problematic when Western ideas of oppression are applied to non-Western societies. This can be an issue worth picking up.

Students should be encouraged to consider their own personal reaction to each theory and decide which they identify most readily with, but also be aware that their task is to discuss the views in a balanced way, considering the contribution that each theory makes as well as the problems with each. In order to teach social theory effectively, students need some basic knowledge of the political spectrum and understand it is another dimension of the debate. This becomes important throughout the course when considering the relationship between sociology and social policy.

Students may also want to consider the feminist approach to understanding society and carrying out research, so this pack also considers the feminist approach to methodology in an introductory way.

The pack finishes with a series of application activities, focusing on feminism in the context of the topics in component 1, in order to consolidate knowledge and develop higher level skills. These activities also encourage students to consider the relevance of social theories to a range of contemporary issues that are relevant to the course.

Aims and objectives

* To understand what perspectives and different types of social theories are.
* To understand the difference between consensus and conflict theories.
* To understand the context in which feminism developed.
* To be able to apply feminism to a range of topics within component 1: socialisation, culture and identity.

Formative assessment

A range of tasks throughout the document to check knowledge and understanding.

Summative assessment

Examine the usefulness of feminism in understanding the concepts of socialisation, culture and identity within contemporary society.

### Section 1: What are critical sociological theories?

There are different types of sociological sets of ideas or theories which fall into the following categories.

### Task 1: Different perspectives (with answers)

Name the theory - see if you can fill in the following boxes.

This is a set of political ideas rather than a traditional social theory believing that society is beneficial for society. This group of thinkers argue that society needs to return to more conservative values or else risk breakdown of society.

***New Right***

This macro conflict theory is also part of a wider social movement which seeks greater gender equality in society. This structural theory is not united but has several subgroups who all share the view that society is dominated by a set of ideas which are oppressive to women.

***Feminism***

This micro scale theory argues that society should be understood through meanings given to particular issues. They claim that the individual has agency and that interactions shape society.

***Interpretivism***

This macro theory argues that society is beneficial for the individual and society, claiming that as social changes occur, society responds and improves all the time. This theory also argues that society shapes the individual who is passive, into the norms and values of society which is a positive process

***Functionalism***

This theory developed relatively recently and argues that traditional theories are no longer relevant for understanding society today. They claim that we now live in a global society which is characterised by choice, fluidity, change and diversity.

***Postmodernism***

This macro, structural theory claims that society is shaped by social economic inequalities which are based on capitalism. This theory argues that social forces shape the individual.

***Marxism***

This macro, structural theory claims that society is shaped by social economic inequalities which are based on capitalism. This theory argues that social forces shape the individual.

***Marxism***

### Section 2: A brief history of feminism and types of feminism

**Task 2: A brief history of feminism**

**In your own words summarise the key characteristics of each era of feminist thought and how the aims of feminism have changed over time.**

*<Student writes own answer>*

**Task 3: Types of feminism (with answers)**

1. In your own words briefly describe each type of feminism.

*<Student writes own answer>*

1. What is the difference between liberal and radical feminism?

*Liberal feminists believe that gender equality is possible through gradual changes in the law and in attitudes, while radical feminists argue that massive transformational changes are needed for gender equality to occur.*

1. What makes difference feminism unlike the other types of feminism?

*It avoids the essentialising of women which suggests that all women share the same experiences of being a woman. Rather it sees women as having very different experiences*

1. Marxist feminists argue that women are ‘dually oppressed’, what do you think this means?

*Women are oppressed by capitalism and patriarchy.*

1. Which solution do you think is the best way to overcome patriarchy and why?

*<Student writes own answer>*

### Section 3: Evaluation of feminism

**Task 4: Evaluation of Feminism (with answers)**

Statements in colours have been put into the strengths/weaknesses table below.

**Sort these statements out into strengths or weaknesses.**

Marxist and radical feminists argue that broader changes need to be made if women are to gain true equality.

Made huge improvements in laws and to attitudes in society.

Liberal feminists have been criticised for being overly optimistic, regarding laws as having the potential to ‘fix’ prejudices and change attitudes.

Make sure that women’s perspectives and views are taken into account in sociology

Their work has emphasised the socially constructed nature of gender differences.

They have played an important role in highlighting the inequalities between men and women, in employment, the family, the media, and so on.

Feminism ignores masculinity and that the masculine role is also socially constructed. Masculinity is complex and yet feminism largely ignores this, or the way women may also uphold patriarchy

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Strengths** | **Weaknesses** |
| Make sure that women’s perspectives and views are taken into account in sociology. | Liberal feminists have been criticised for being overly optimistic, regarding laws as having the potential to ‘fix’ prejudices and change attitudes. |
| Made huge improvements in laws and attitudes in society. | Marxist and radical feminists argue that broader changes need to be made if women are to gain true equality. |
| They have played an important role in highlighting the inequalities between men and women, in employment, the family, the media and so on. | Feminism ignores masculinity and that the masculine role is also socially constructed. Masculinity is complex and yet feminism largely ignores this, or the way women may also uphold patriarchy. |
| Their work has emphasised the socially constructed nature of gender differences. |  |

### Section 4: A feminist view of culture

**Task 5: Applying feminist ideas to understanding culture (with answers)**

Look at the images below and explain how the norms and values make assumptions about gender and gender roles.

Gender roles in the family with women being the carer.





Men take on gender stereotypical roles in the household being the provider/doing masculine roles.

1. 

It is considered the norm for boys to be involved with sport and competitive contact games.

Girls are assumed to want to do ‘feminine’ activities such as ballet.

1. 
2. 

Men are portrayed as strong and brave while women are seen as young and attractive.



What do these images reveal about cultural views of gender in the UK?

*That there are very clear cultural ideas about what it means to be male or female.*

Look at the images below. How might these suggest that traditional views of gender are changing?



*Cultural ideas about what it means to be male and female are becoming less fixed, greater tolerance of alternative gender, homosexuality and women taking male roles at work.*

### Section 5: A feminist view of socialisation

**Task 6: Applying feminist ideas to the concept of socialisation (with answers)**

**‘One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman’ Simone De Beauvoir (1973). What do you think this quote means?**

That women are not born into the role of being a caregiver/housewife, rather she becomes a woman over time, learning what it means to be a woman, therefore gender is created by society (culturally constructed).

**Look at the following list of views and decide if you feel that these reflect the ‘nature’ or ‘nurture’ argument. Be ready to explain your answer.**

* Women want to have children
* Men cannot care for children alone
* Women worry about looking good more than men
* Men are better at practical jobs
* Women are just as competitive as men
* Men are more aggressive than women.

The discussion should clearly show that gender is very much socially constructed. If we look further afield, beyond the UK there are many examples of gender being constructed in different ways.

**Task 7: How agencies of socialisation reinforce gender socialisation**

**Identify each of the following agencies of socialisation and give examples of how each reinforces gender socialisation. In other words, what messages are sent to men and women, girls and boys, about what it means to be masculine or feminine?**



***Family****: encourages girls to be conformist and obedient, with girls taking caregiving roles, doing the housework and women taking care of the children. Boys are socialised into being sporty and competitive, while men do the DIY and are generally seen to be bringing in the main income and having most power and control in the family.*



***Education****: girls wear different uniform and often opt for ‘female subjects’ such as health and social care while boys tend to take ‘male subjects’ such as science and maths. Separate sports for girls (netball) and boys (rugby), and pressure on boys to act ‘cool’ and not work too hard.*



*The media generally portray women as being conformist, glamorous and sexualised, while men are portrayed as stereotypically masculine and tough, strong and powerful. This reinforces ideas about what men and women do and do not do.*



***Religious ideas*** *are traditionally patriarchal with women being unable to enter the positions at the top of the church and for example, women saying that they will obey their husbands in marriage. Although things are changing many women still see religion as being oppressive for them.*

### Section 6: A feminist view of identity

**Task 8: Applying feminist ideas to understanding identity (with answers)**

Oakley (1981) argues that gendered identity is powerfully developed through several key processes within the family including those listed below. **For each process, add examples.**

***Differential activities***

Parents encourage children to do different activities in the home and outside the home which reinforce ideas about gender identity

*For example, boys helping with DIY, gardening and playing football in the garden, playing computer games, while girls are encouraged to cook, clean and read.*

***Canalisation***

Parents literally channel their child’s interests into particularly gendered toys and games

*Examples include soldiers for boys or trains, while girls are encouraged to play with dolls and makeup.*

***Verbal appellation***

*Using language in ways which reinforces gender identity. For example, informal names of ‘my little angel’ for a girl and ‘little monkey’ for boys. This reinforces the stereotypical ideas about what it means to be a girl or boy.*

***Manipulation***

Encouraging particular gendered behaviour.

Examples include being brave and climbing to the top of a tree if it is a boy and encouraging neatness and looking pretty if it is a girl.

### Section 7: Consolidation activity

**Task 9: Key concept grid (with answers)**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Concept** | **Definition** |
| *Malestream* | Sociological research which is male dominated, mainstream research based on sexist and patriarchal values. Research undertaken by men, for men, about men. |
| *Sex* | The biological differences between men and women. |
| *Oppression* | An individual or social group are treated unjustly and forced to endure inequality. This may be justified by a dominant ideology. |
| *Gender* | The socially constructed expectations of dress, demeanour, interests, attitudes and behaviour placed on men and women. |
| *Patriarchy* | A social system in which men oppress women. |
| *Inequality* | A situation in which rewards, opportunities, activities or power are not distributed equally. |
| *Patriarchal ideology* | A set of ideas and beliefs which justify and legitimate a woman’s subordination. |
| *Masculinity* | The norms, values and expectations associated with being male – a social construct. |
| *Domestic division of labour* | The separation of household tasks into masculine and feminine. |

**Key terms and concepts**

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# Topic Exploration Pack

## Themes and Perspectives: A focus on functionalism

## Student Activity

### Introduction

Sociology emerged in response to huge social changes that were occurring. These included **urbanisation** (people moving from the countryside into towns) and **social mobility** (the fact that people were beginning to find it possible to change their social class position, if they worked hard).

Sociologists were interested in discussing the causes of these changes as well as debating if these changes were positive or negative for individuals and society.

### Section 1: What are critical sociological theories?

There are different types of sociological sets of ideas or theories which fall into the following categories.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Structure versus Action  This represents a key tension in sociology, although increasingly today people believe that structural and action forces need to be understood together. | Structural theories claim that it is society that shapes the individual and that social forces are necessary for a smoothly functioning society. Structural theories assume that the individual is passive and needs to be moulded into the norms and values of society through socialisation.  Example: Functionalism, Marxism, feminism  Action theories argue that individuals have free will and that people decide how they want to behave based on the meanings that they attach to particular actions. Action theories argue that society is simply made up of many small interactions.  Example: Interpretivism |
| Macro versus Micro  The scale on which sociologists understand society also affects their views on how to carry out research. | Macro theories focus on large scale understanding of society, looking at the ways in which institutions work together for example.  Example: Functionalism, Marxism, feminism.  Micro theories focus on small scale interpersonal relations and meanings arguing that this is how to understand society as a whole.  Example: Interpretivism. |
| Consensus versus Conflict  The view a sociologist takes on the role of society, can mean that they have already made assumptions before they have any empirical evidence. | Consensus theories argue that society is generally beneficial for the individual and the social group, arguing that actually society improves over time.  Example: Functionalism  Conflict theories argue that society is based on inequalities between groups, for example for Marxists conflict is based on social class, while feminists argue that gender inequalities define society.  Example: Marxism, feminism. |

### Task 1: Different perspectives worksheet

**Name the theory - see if you can fill in the following boxes.**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| This macro theory argues that society is beneficial for the individual and society, claiming that as social changes occur, society responds and improves all the time. This theory also argues that society shapes the individual who is passive, into the norms and values of society which is a positive process. | This is a set of political ideas rather than a traditional social theory which are based on the functionalist view that society is beneficial for society. This group of thinkers argue that society needs to return to more conservative values or else risk breakdown of society. |
| This theory developed relatively recently and argues that traditional theories are no longer relevant for understanding society today. They claim that we now live in a global society which is characterised by choice, fluidity, change and diversity. | This macro conflict theory is also part of a wider social movement which seeks greater gender equality in society. This structural theory is not united but has several subgroups who all share the view that society is dominated by a set of ideas which are oppressive to women. |
| This macro, structural theory claims that society is shaped by social economic inequalities which are based on capitalism. This theory argues that social forces shape the individual. | This micro scale theory argues that society should be understood through meanings given to particular issues. They claim that the individual has agency and that interactions shape society. |

### Section 2: A brief history of feminism and types of feminism

### First wave

* Emerging in the mid 1800’s.
* Focussed on social and legal reform (especially to allow women to vote).
* Fought to allow women to be better educated.
* Led mainly by middle class women called suffragettes.
* Successful in the vote, education, access to professional jobs, women’s rights to property.

### Second wave

* Emerged in the 1960’s and 1970’s.
* Linked to several other key movements such as civil rights, gay rights, anti-war.
* Argued that personal and public life is inherently patriarchal (male dominated).
* Focussed on women raising awareness of their oppression and offering each other support.
* Focussed on equal pay, access to contraception, equal rights in jobs and education, free childcare, freedom from domestic violence, reducing discrimination against lesbianism.
* Different types of feminism emerged including; liberal, radical, Marxist.

### Third Wave

* Emerged in the mid 1990’s.
* Focus on individual desires and wishes, rather than seeing all women as sharing the same experiences.
* Focus on being able to express your identity in unique and personal ways.
* Focus on challenging traditional ideas about sexuality and gender as well as abolishing gender roles and stereotypes in the media for example.

### Fourth Wave

* Emerged 2010 onwards.
* Some debate about if there is a fourth wave.
* Tackling sexism globally using new forms of technology that are available.
* Creating online networks of support, giving voice to women who were previously unable to speak.
* Everyday Sexism Project was highly successful in highlighting day to day examples of engrained sexism.
* Mumsnet – support network for women online now very popular and influential.

### Task 2: A brief history of feminism

**In your own words summarise the key characteristics of each era of feminist thought and how the aims of feminism have changed over time.**

**Types of feminism**

**Liberal Feminism**

Liberal feminists are concerned with the human and civil rights and freedoms of the individual. They believe that all humans should be equal; so it follows that all men and women should be equal. They believe that social change should be gradual and careful, not dramatic or revolutionary therefore changes towards greater equality for women should be gradual. They believe that equality legislation, for example can secure equal opportunities for women.

As well as changes in the law, liberal feminists seek cultural changes. In their view traditional attitudes towards women prevent equality. For example, women seen as less rational and more emotional prevents their involvement in decision making roles, and encourages their confinement to domestic labour and childbearing. Liberal feminists reject the idea that biological differences make women different (less capable) than men. They equally reject the idea that men are less caring or emotional than women.

Liberal feminists have used the ideas of the famous feminist Ann Oakley. **Oakley (1981)** makes a key distinction between sex and gender:

* Sex refers to the biological difference between men and women which is largely fixed
* Gender refers to culturally constructed differences between the ‘masculine’ and ‘feminism’, transmitted across the generations via gender role socialisation

Oakley points out gender roles vary according to the time and place; comparative studies reveal great differences in expectations and attitudes towards men and women in different countries and in different times.

**How to improve women’s position?**

* Gendered socialisation and education are key areas to change according to liberal feminists, so they focus on men contributing more to domestic labour and also encourage more male role models within education. They believe that over time, this will encourage cultural change and that gender equality will become the norm.
* Liberal feminism is therefore an **optimistic theory**, believing that change is occurring, reducing sexist/traditional attitudes, and that political changes are leading to progress towards a fairer society.

**Radical Feminism**

Emerging in the 1970’s, this group of feminists believe that patriarchy is universal;

* **Firestone (1970)** argues that the roots of women’s oppression lie in the biological ability of women to have children. This makes women dependant on men.
* They argue that patriarchy is the most fundamental form of inequality and conflict.
* All men oppress all women, all men benefit from patriarchy – especially women’s unpaid domestic labour and from their sexual services.
* For radical feminists patriarchy is direct and personal. Oppression takes place in the public sphere of the workplace, media and politics as well as the private sphere of the family. They claim that all relationships involve power and they are political when one person uses this power to dominate another.
* Radical feminists therefore focus on the ways in which patriarchal power is exercised through personal relationships, often through sexual or physical violence or the threat of it. This has the effect of controlling all women, for example, not necessarily directly, but women for example, being scared of going out alone in the dark.
* **Brownmiller (1976)** notes that the fear of rape is a powerful control over women’s behaviour2.

**How to improve society?**

* Radical feminists argue that for change to occur to benefit women, relationships and therefore sexual politics must be transformed.
* Separatism – men and women living apart.
* Consciousness raising – when women share experiences in groups, they see that they are not alone. This may lead to collective action, such as marches.
* Political lesbianism - is the only non-oppressive sexuality, therefore they recommend lesbianism.

**Marxist Feminism**

Marxist feminists reject liberal and radical feminists’ explanations for the causes of women’s oppression. Instead, they see women’s subordination as a result of capitalism. Although men benefit from women’s subordination, the main beneficiary is capitalism. Women’s subordination results from their role as an unpaid domestic housewife as it places them in an economically dependent position in the family.

Their subordination forms a number of important functions for capitalism:

* Women are the source of **cheap exploitable labour** – they can be paid less because it can be assumed that they are dependent on their husbands.
* Women are a **reserve army of labour** – during boom and recession women can be called upon to work.
* Women **reproduce the labour force** through their unpaid domestic work, nurturing and socialising children to become the next generation of workers.
* **Women absorb anger** – women are the ‘takers of shit’ (Ansley) from their husbands who feel frustrated with the system. By absorbing the anger, there is no threat to the system and prevents realisation as to the true cause of their frustration (i.e. capitalism).
* **Barrett (1980): The Ideology of Familism.**

Barrett argues women’s roles also support the capitalist ideology, to maintain positive feelings and motivation for the capitalist system to continue. The nuclear family is perceived as ideal, and is a place where women can achieve fulfilment through motherhood and the housewife role. For Barrett, the revolution must also remove expectations about the role that women play in the family to ensure that domestic labour is shared equally.

**How to improve society?**

Marxist feminists argue that women’s interests lie in the overthrow of capitalism.

**Difference Feminism**

All the types of feminism we have looked at so far assume that women share a similar situation and a similar experience of oppression. By contrast **‘difference feminists’** argue that we cannot see women as sharing the same experiences of patriarchy.

Difference feminists argue that the other types of feminism focus on a very white, Westernised notion of gender. Difference feminists therefore disagree with essentialism (seeing all women as essentially sharing the same experiences), for example women in developing countries faced by famine and poverty have very different concerns to Western women.

### Task 3: Types of feminism

1. In your own words briefly describe each type of feminism.
2. What is the difference between liberal and radical feminism?
3. What makes difference feminism unlike the other types of feminism?
4. Marxist feminists argue that women are ‘dually oppressed’, what do you think this means?
5. Which solution do you think is the best way to overcome patriarchy and why?

### Task 4: Evaluation of feminism worksheet

Marxist and radical feminists argue that broader changes need to be made if women are to gain true equality.

Made huge improvements in laws and to attitudes in society.

Make sure that women’s perspectives and views are taken into account in sociology

Their work has emphasised the socially constructed nature of gender differences.

Liberal feminists have been criticised for being overly optimistic, regarding laws as having the potential to ‘fix’ prejudices and change attitudes.

They have played an important role in highlighting the inequalities between men and women, in employment, the family, the media, and so on.

Feminism ignores masculinity and that the masculine role is also socially constructed. Masculinity is complex and yet feminism largely ignores this, or the way women may also uphold patriarchy

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Strengths** | **Weaknesses** |
|  |  |
|  |  |
|  |  |
|  |  |

### Task 5: Applying feminist ideas to understanding culture worksheet

Look at the images below and explain how the norms and values make assumptions about gender and gender roles

1.



2.



3.

4.

5.



What do these images reveal about cultural views of gender in the UK?

Look at the images below. How might these suggest that traditional views of gender are changing?



### Section 5: A feminist view of socialisation

### Task 6: Applying feminist ideas to the concept of socialisation worksheet

‘One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman’ **Simone De Beauvoir (1973)**

**What do you think this quote means?**

**The nature/nurture debate**

There has been considerable debate about whether we are born the way we are, or if we learn to become the way we are. The idea that we are somehow born to be the way we are, innately is known as the ‘nature’ view, while the view that our environment shapes us is known as the ‘nurture’ view.

Sociologists argue that we are nurtured to become who we are, which is part of a long term process, showing how important social forces are on us as individuals. This process of internalising the norms and values of society is known as socialisation.

**This debate becomes interesting when we consider gender. Look at the following list of views and decide if you feel that these reflect the ‘nature’ or ‘nurture’ argument. Be ready to explain your answer.**

* Women want to have children
* Men cannot care for children alone
* Women worry about looking good more than men
* Men are better at practical jobs
* Women are just as competitive as men
* Men are more aggressive than women.

**Gendered socialisation** refers to the process of internalisation of norms and values which reflect socially constructed ideas about what it means to be male or female

### Task 7: How agencies of socialisation reinforce gender socialisation

**Identify each of the following agencies of socialisation and give examples of how each reinforces gender socialisation. In other words, what messages are sent to men and women, girls and boys, about what it means to be masculine or feminine?**









### Section 6: Feminist views of identity

### Task 8: Applying feminist ideas to understanding identity worksheet

Identity, the way we see ourselves and are seen by others, is heavily influenced by gender. In this section we explore the work of Oakley who explores how the family plays a major role in gendered socialisation.

Oakley (1981) argues that gendered identity is powerfully developed through several key processes within the family, including those listed below. **For each process, add examples:**

**Differential activities**

Parents encourage children to do different activities in the home and outside the home which reinforce ideas about gender identity

**Canalisation**

Parents literally channel their child’s interests into particularly gendered toys and games.

**Verbal appellation**

**Manipulation**

Encouraging particular gendered behaviour.

### Section 7: Consolidation activity

### Task 9: Key concept grid worksheet

|  |  |
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| **Concept** | **Definition** |
|  | Sociological research which is male dominated, mainstream research based on sexist and patriarchal values. Research undertaken by men, for men, about men. |
|  | The biological differences between men and women. |
|  | An individual or social group are treated unjustly and forced to endure inequality. This may be justified by a dominant ideology. |
|  | The socially constructed expectations of dress, demeanour, interests, attitudes and behaviour placed on men and women. |
|  | A social system in which men oppress women. |
|  | A situation in which rewards, opportunities, activities or power are not distributed equally. |
|  | A set of ideas and beliefs which justify and legitimate a woman’s subordination. |
|  | The norms, values and expectations associated with being male – a social construct. |
|  | The separation of household tasks into masculine and feminine. |

**Key terms and concepts**

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