



5. a feminist critique of Gene Sharp's approach

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At a meeting on 10 February in the Department of Peace Studies, the group considered an article by Kate McGuinness entitled *Gene Sharp's Theory of Power: A Feminist Critique of Consent*. The article - reviewing Sharp's *Social Power and Political Freedom* (Porter Sargent, 1980) - appeared in *The Journal of Peace Research*, Vol 30, 1993, pp.101-115. Kate was present to discuss her article. Others attending the meeting were: Christina Arber, Howard Clark, Bob Overy, Michael Randle, Andrew Rigby, Walter Stein.

Text of Article by [Kate McGuinness](#) [2]*

Gene Sharp's theory of power: a feminist critique

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Gene Sharp's theory of consensual power is analyzed in terms of the claims it makes about power and the potential for effectively altering social oppressions by applying it to a particular set of power relations: gender relations. Gender relations constitute a deeply rooted and pervasive system of oppression? patriarchy. It is argued that power in gender relations is not based on consent in several significant ways, thus challenging the relevance of Sharp's theory of power in this set of power relations. The analysis is in three parts: (1) it draws on Pateman's argument that women are not fully constituted individuals in civil society to illustrate some limitations to the role of consent; (2) it makes a schematic link between Lipsitz & Kritzer's criticism of Sharp based on their consideration of power in terms of the aims of a ruler and two feminist perspectives: Guillaumin's discussion of the appropriation of women's bodies in patriarchy and Kelly's feminist theory of sexual violence; both theorists offer evidence that power in gender relations is not consensual; and (3) the possibility of shared political culture, upon which consent is predicated, is questioned by contrasting it with the work of Gilligan and Margolis (1989) who describe the very different worlds that are shaped by women's and men's experiences. The author concludes that Gene Sharp's theory of power has little value either in terms of adequately characterizing power in gender relations or in terms of offering a way to alter the system of social oppression known as patriarchy. Sharp's is a male?biased theory of power that fails seriously to consider women's experiences.

1. Introduction

Relations of domination and subordination define and give rise to a host of critical problems in our world. These relations are clearly power?related and provide a concrete basis for the study of power as it unfolds in actual interactions. Gene Sharp, one theorist concerned with addressing the critical problems of our world, identifies these as dictatorship, genocide, war and, social oppression. I would further specify some of these social oppressions as sexism, racism, and classism. We must understand how power works if we are going to confront these oppressions and struggle to change the world for the better. In this regard, a usable theory of power is essential.

By 'usable theory of power' I refer to the potential for changing relations of domination and subordination such that this change benefits those who are dominated. 'Usable' is selective in this sense. A usable theory of power seeks to empower those who are traditionally regarded as powerless in an oppressive relationship, thus enabling them to alter their condition. In this way, power is redefined in relational terms that constitute a dynamic. It is not simply a possession or characteristic of those who dominate. Neither is power merely an abstract concept. Rather, it is



based on actual experiences of power. But where is a usable theory of power to be found?

In his book, *Social Power and Political Freedom* (1980), Gene Sharp has proposed such a theory of power. It is also the basis for his theory of nonviolent change, making it all the more relevant in a world too accustomed to the recorded accounts of dealing with conflict by violent means. Should Sharp's theory be considered relevant for addressing even some of the serious problems cited above, his theory must have currency in various types of power relations that define these problems. In this regard, I intend to examine Sharp's theory of power by applying it to a particular set of power relations: gender relations. Gender relations constitute a deeply rooted and pervasive system of oppression ? patriarchy. This form of oppression remains intact, despite changes over time and differences that are, for example, related to race, class, culture, or sexual preferences.¹ For this reason mine may be viewed a feminist critique of Sharp's theory of power.² To date, there have been no such particular analyses of Sharp's work, though there are many discussions of the relationship between feminism and nonviolence.³

The structure of my analysis is the following. To begin, I briefly describe Sharp's theory of power and the role of consent in this theory. Next, I apply Sharp's theory to specific aspects of gender relations, focusing on the relevance of consent. It is Sharp's assumption about power as consensual that provides the framework for my analysis. Finally, I contend that Sharp's theory of power is inadequate for explaining power within gender relations, which has negative implications for his theory of nonviolent action in general.

2. Gene Sharp's Theory of Power

Sharp's theory of power stems from his desire to create a framework for understanding and implementing nonviolent action. At present, Sharp is one of the most important theorists writing about the tactical and strategic value of nonviolence. Sharp's main role has been to systematize the study of nonviolence in two ways: first, he has categorized various types of nonviolent action; and second, he has elaborated a theory of power upon which his form of nonviolent action is based (Martin, 1989, p. 213). Sharp (1973) has classified nearly two hundred types of nonviolent direct action, rendering an invisible history visible. This is a valuable contribution to the development of the theory and practice of nonviolence. Further, Sharp has argued for an alternative to traditionally accepted views of power by proposing one that is pluralist in nature.

Sharp asserts that there are two views of political power: one monolithic, the other pluralist (Sharp, 1973; p. 8).⁴ According to the monolithic view of power, people are dependent on the government and the goodwill of those in control of the state structure (Sharp, 1980, p. 22). Their power is a possession that stems from the ability to enforce sanctions and/or the use of violence against those who oppose their regime.

Sharp rejects this view. It is, in his assessment, empirically incorrect because it does not account for the many instances of nonviolent change throughout history (Sharp, 1973, p. 9). Instead, Sharp elaborates an alternative and contrasting view of power that is pluralist and relational in nature. He writes:

Social power may be briefly defined as the capacity to control the behaviour of others, directly or indirectly, through action by groups of people, which action impinges on other groups of people. Political power is that kind of social power which is wielded for political objectives, especially by governmental institutions or by people in opposition to or in support of such institutions. Political power thus refers to the total authority, influence, pressure and coercion which may be applied to achieve or prevent the implementation of the wishes of the power holder (pp. 7-8).

Because power is not an inherent quality of leaders, Sharp reasons that it must have external sources that can be located in society (Sharp, 1980, p. 23). He refers to these as 'loci of power', identifying six (1973, pp. 11-12; 1980, p. 211). Their value varies according to the aims, needs, and access of those in power. These loci are also the mechanism by which those without power may control or limit the power available to those in authority. As a consequence of Sharp's relational and pluralist view of power, this control depends on the obedience and cooperation of others. Sharp asserts: 'The most important single quality of any government, without which it would not exist, must be obedience and submission of its subjects. Obedience is the heart of political power' (Sharp, 1973, p. 16). In his view, people obey for a variety of complicated and interrelated reasons (see pp. 19-23), though this obedience is not inevitable. Rather, it is essentially voluntary in nature (p. 25). That is, those who obey have made a decision or choice to do so. They have consented to be governed by those in power. In fact, Sharp argues



that all government is a matter of 'consent'. This is so even in the case of totalitarian regimes, where submission may be the result of terror (Sharp, 1980, p. 98).⁵

According to Sharp, if consent is given, it may also be withdrawn (1973, pp. 30-31). This is the dynamic behind his theory of nonviolent action. The withdrawal of consent offers a way for those on the receiving end to challenge power abuses: dictatorship, genocide, war, and systems of oppression (Martin, 1989, p. 213). Those who withhold their consent are, in part, asserting their control over the loci of power. This is the tangible form in which they withdraw their consent, thus working against power abuses.

There are a few implications to Sharp's view of power as consensual that I wish to mention. First, he maintains a strong degree of human agency in his theory. In fact, Sharp's may be considered an 'actor' model of social and political interaction, rather than one with either a more systemic or structural perspective. Sharp assumes that the actors involved make a choice about their behaviour: in his words, subjects agree to obey rulers, or they agree to disobey them.⁶ A second implication is the presumption of some form of shared political culture, or homogeneity of values. Consent is only possible if there is some common view of what is being agreed upon. Further, widespread withdrawal of consent also depends on some sort of common experience of power. Third, Sharp assumes that power may be redefined to achieve instrumental success without a radical restructuring of society (Summy, 1983, p. 30).

3. A Feminist Critique of Consent

There are many levels at which Sharp's theory of power may be criticized. For example, some critics (Summy, 1983; Martin, 1989) discuss the lack of structural analysis in Sharp's theory. Others (Lipsitz and Kritzer, 1975) doubt the empirical base of Sharp's theory, citing examples of power that are not based on cooperation. In my view, an important and overlooked basis for criticizing Sharp is that his theory does not account for women's experiences of power, despite the many examples of women's nonviolent action that he documents. Feminist analyses of patriarchy indicate that consent is a limited concept in terms of the power relations between genders.⁷

My analysis of the role of consent in Sharp's theory of power is the following. First, I locate Sharp's idea in the tradition of social contract theory. Drawing on Carole Pateman's *The Sexual Contract* (1988), I discuss the limitations of consent developed within this tradition. Second, I consider consent and 'the aims of the ruler', adapting Lipsitz and Kritzer's (1975) critique of Sharp's theory of power in a manner relevant to gender relations. To this end, I bring in Colette Guillaumin's (1981) discussion of the appropriation of women's bodies in patriarchy and Liz Kelly's (1988) feminist theory of sexual violence.

Finally, I look at consent as predicated on the notion of shared political culture, contrasting this with feminist work that gives shape to the different worlds of women and men. To illustrate this difference I include discussions of the divergent moral perspectives and different social positions of women and men, looking at the work of Carol Gilligan (1982) and Diane Rothbard Margolis (1989).

3.1 Consent and the Social Contract

It may be argued that the historical and political tradition to which Sharp's view of power belongs is social contract theory. Sharp cites the work of Rousseau, Hobbes, Machiavelli, and Montesquieu to develop and support his own view of power. Moreover, he is concerned with the very questions that social contractarians sought to answer. The central issues of social contract theory may be described in this manner:

In the natural condition 'all men are born free' and are equal to each other; they are 'individuals'. This presupposition of contract doctrine generates a profound problem: how in such a condition can the government of one man by another ever be legitimate; how can political rights exist? Only one answer is possible without denying the initial assumption of freedom and equality. The relationship must arise through agreement ... (Pateman, 1988, P. 6).

Sharp asks the same question: how is it rulers have power? And he offers the same answer: by the consent of their



subjects. As Pateman demonstrates in her book *The Sexual Contract* (1988), the social contract is only half the story of political rights and freedom. The other, untold half of the story is about the sexual contract. Pateman writes: 'To tell the story of the sexual contract is to show how sexual difference, what it is to be a 'man' or 'woman', and the construction of sexual difference as political difference, is central to civil society' (1988, p. 16). Her argument uncovers some important constraints to consent as it pertains to the experiences of women. For my purposes, the salient issue in Pateman's argument is that women are not fully constituted individuals in civil society. Hence, consent is not their privilege.

In Pateman's view, the civil society constructed by social contractarians is merely a modern form of patriarchy in which women continue to be dominated by men (1988, p. 1), though their experiences of domination vary according to their status in society. She explains that this is so because the political rights originating with the social contract depend on a prior contract: the sexual contract. According to Pateman, the sexual contract is submerged in modern (patriarchal) civil society through the marriage contract (implicitly defined by many states as heterosexual and monogamous). She points out that traditional social contract theorists see marriage and family as part of the 'natural' condition because of the male sex right. Pateman identifies this as the original dimension of patriarchy (1988, p. 3). That is, paternal rights presuppose male sex rights: there are no children without sexual intercourse first.

In the move from natural to civil society, this 'state of nature' remains intact, and with it women's oppression. The marriage contract constitutes the private sphere of civil society (1988, p. 113). Conjugal rights are natural and hence regarded as private. Marriage is separate from the public sphere, and so are women. Unlike other social contracts, the marriage contract affirms, rather than replaces, the state of nature. It replicates the original patriarchal construction of sexual difference as mastery and domination, with men as masters and women as dominated (1988, p.187). In this regard, women are not permitted the status or rights of individuals.

If women are not fully constituted individuals in civil society, then the notion of consent does not apply to them. According to Pateman's argument, a theory of power based on consent would have no meaning for the particular set of power relations in question. It follows, then, that change cannot be based on the withdrawal of consent. This is not to say women are incapable of resisting or changing their situation for the better. Clearly, those who are not fully constituted individuals in a particular construction of reality may take action for change. In fact, Sharp and others (e.g. Carroll, 1989) document many examples of women's nonviolent resistance and successful action for change. This suggests that there may be a basis for nonviolent action and empowerment other than the withdrawal of consent (for example, for feminist process of consciousness-raising).

In developing his theory of consensual power, Sharp fails to ask about and appreciate as significant the differences among those individuals to whom he ascribes the privilege of choice. In the case of gender, these differences are fundamental because they are located within particular patriarchal constructions of reality. Even within the context of a political tradition to which he is sympathetic, Sharp's theory of consensual power does not universally apply. It is biased by a construction of reality that differentiates the constitution of individuals by their gender. Consequently, the role of consent must also be seen as differentiated.

3.2 Consent and the Aims of the Ruler

Sharp's consensual view of power may also be criticized from another angle. In their review of Sharp's work, Lipsitz and Kritzer (1975) ask if there are forms of power that do not require consent or obedience, identifying two instances in which this is the case. They base both on a consideration of a ruler's aims. First, they note that a ruler may only wish to control resources or territory, not people (Lipsitz and Kritzer, 1975, p. 726). In a sparsely populated country, the territory and/or resources there may be appropriated by a ruler (the few people there displaced or killed). Second, in the case of densely populated areas, an occupier merely needs sufficient 'manpower' (sic) to outnumber the occupied. This would enable them to control a country without the cooperation of the indigenous population. Lipsitz and Kritzer conclude that, contrary to Sharp's assertion, power does not always require deference (1975, p. 727).⁸

Clearly, in both cases the invading ruler requires the cooperation of his or her own subjects, or others. The role of consent in this power relationship, however, is not at issue. In considering the aims of the ruler, Lipsitz and Kritzer have re-oriented the discussion. Their focus is on whether consent functions in the power relation between a potential invader or occupier and an indigenous population. Lipsitz and Kritzer suggest that the aims of a ruler may



effectively eliminate the role of consent in that relationship. It is important to note here that their consideration of the aims of a ruler does not necessarily mean that they have adopted the more traditional view of rulers as monolithic or unified. Though they are not explicit about this, their focus on a ruler's aims may also include the help that ruler requires from supporters to carry out those aims. This does not undermine their criticism of Sharp. For example, even if an indigenous group identifies and successfully manages to organize a withdrawal of consent among a ruler's supporters to their advantage, this does not mean that consent underpins power in their relationship with the occupier or invader. It is not the consent of the indigenous population that has been withdrawn. Rather, it is the consent of a ruler's subjects and others that has been withdrawn.

These criticisms have meaning for Sharp's theory of power relative to gender relations. That is, there are similar aspects of the power relations between women and men that do not require consent. A parallel may be drawn between Colette Guillaumin's discussion of the appropriation of women in patriarchy in 'The Practice of Power and the Belief in Nature, Part 1: The Appropriation of Women' (1981) and the first aim above. Liz Kelly's feminist theory of sexual violence against women bears resemblance to the second aim. In both cases, however, these links are somewhat schematic.

3.2.1 *The Appropriation of Women*

Guillaumin offers a unique perspective on the origin of women's oppression. She argues that it is through the appropriation of women's bodies that they are exploited in patriarchy, or as she terms it 'sexage'.⁹ The appropriation of women by men is complete. It takes place on four concrete levels: the appropriation of their time; appropriation of the products of their bodies (e.g., children and labor power); sexual obligation or physical use by men; and the physical charge of disabled members of society, as well as the care of healthy male members of the group (Guillaumin, 1981, pp. 7-14).

Guillaumin identifies five means by which men appropriate women: in the labour market; through spacial confinement; show of force; sexual constraint; and law and customary right (1981, pp. 19-22). Not only are women appropriated as a group by men, but individual men appropriate individual women – as in marriage, prostitution, etc. According to Guillaumin, his total physical appropriation of women by men is a power relationship in which men define women as objects. Moreover, she asserts that women are 'natural' objects in the system of sexage. They belong to the state of nature and its discourses. This obscures that act of the social construction of their oppression (1981, p. 25).

If, as Guillaumin suggests, the 'aim' of patriarchy is the appropriation rather than the control of women, there is an analogy between her view of gender relations and Lipsitz and Kritzer's first criticism. Women's bodies are like the territory and resources that men (i.e. rulers) simply appropriate for their own purposes without the need of consent from individual women or the class of women (i.e. the indigenous population). In this way, men may be seen as having power, but without the cooperation of women whom they appropriate – just a ruler still has power without the consent of people in a territory, if all a ruler wants is the territory itself, or the resources there. Like Pateman, Guillaumin's view indicates that particular social constructions of reality have a critical impact on consent. This is contrary to Sharp's consideration of consent.

3.2.2 *Sufficient Manpower*

In the case of gender relations, there is clearly enough manpower to control women without their consent. In fact, there is very nearly a one-to-one ratio of women and men throughout the world. One basis for the non-consensual power men have in relation to women is sexual violence (Kelly, 1988, p. 25). Discussing Sharp's notion of consent as it relates to power in the context of sexual violence is not polemic. Sexual violence is part of the everyday experience of women. In this manner, it offers a way to contextualize power in gender relations.

Male violence, collectively and individually, has a critical role in maintaining women's oppression. Feminist analyses of sexual violence have defined its purpose in terms of social control of women by men (Kelly, 1988, p. 33). That is, much sexual violence is used to get, demonstrate, or reinforce, male power. This is in contrast to other views of sexual violence which see it as a use of power to get sex. In formulating her feminist analysis of sexual violence, Kelly develops the idea of a 'continuum of sexual violence', only including non-consensual sex. Her



continuum has eleven categories ranging from the threat of violence and actual sexual harassment on the one end, to rape and incest at the other. It reflects the pervasiveness of the social control men have over women as a result of sexual violence.

Kelly argues that the reality of sexual violence (threatened or actual) in women's lives is much greater than previously believed. In fact, it appears to be present in many of the interactions women have with men (1988, p. 79). The ways in which men use sexual violence to control women are numerous. For example, in public places, such as in the work place or in the street, male violence (actual and threatened) limits women's behaviour. Additionally, men who do not know women assume the right of intimacy and/or sexual access to them (1988, p. 106). In private, sexual violence maintains male authority in the family and women are expected to live in intimate contact with those who have control over them (1988, p. 26).

It is difficult to estimate the number of men who use sexual violence to control women.¹⁰ One feminist writer, Barbara Roberts, guesses at the number of men who perpetrate violence against women, basing her estimate on sexual assault and domestic violence statistics from North America. Roberts assumes a one-to-one ratio of assailants to victims, and totals the numbers. She adds: 25% of girls under age 18 and 20-30% of women who are sexually assaulted, and 10% of wives who are battered for a total of 55-65% of males who are assailants (Roberts, 1984, p. 196).¹¹

Unfortunately, Roberts' assumption about the one-to-one correspondence between attackers and victims is unfounded. For example, it may be equally reasonable to assume that men who beat their wives also abuse their daughters, or other women. However, finding out exactly how many men commit violence against women is not Roberts' objective. Rather, she is dramatically illustrating a more general point: if so many women and girls are abused, then many men must be committing this violence. In this manner, her statistics are intentionally provocative. In contrast, Lipsitz and Kritzer note that in the experience of Norway during World War, an occupying power required only a one-to-ten ratio of its soldiers to the inhabitants of assisting country for a successful takeover without consent (1975, p. 727). Even if Roberts' assumption about the correspondence of assailants to victims is questioned, there are clearly enough men to control women without their consent. Furthermore, one of the means by which men control women is arguably commonplace.

In the above discussions I am by no means assuming that all men necessarily support patriarchy or participate in methods of controlling or appropriating women. However, men as a group benefit from these methods, just as women as a group are oppressed by them. These methods maintain men's superior social status and women's inferior status. Surely men experience these benefits differently, just as women experience oppression within patriarchy differently. Experiences of patriarchy are context-specific and diverse. For example, they vary according to the race, class, or cultural background of individual men and women, as well as change over time. Though they benefit as a group from patriarchy, men do not represent a unified entity in this regard. To consider men as such would be both empirically incorrect and base my criticism of Sharp on a misunderstanding of his perspective on power and consent.

Some men actively resist patriarchy. For example, they join campaigns against sexual discrimination or sexual harassment. They participate in anti-rape campaigns. They become full-time care givers for children. Some may construe these actions as a withdrawal of support from patriarchy, seeing them a validation of Sharp's theory of non-violent action. However, this perspective is to focus the discussion on men's experiences. If men's active resistance to patriarchy is seen as a withdrawal of consent, then it is men (not women) who have withdrawn their consent in these instances. My question is whether consent underpins women's experiences of power in gender relations, holding Sharp accountable to his claim that power is consensual. When the focus is women's experiences, it is evident that consent is not a defining characteristic of power in gender relationships.

3.3 Consent and Shared Political Culture

Shared political culture¹² bears on Sharp's theory of consensual power in two ways. First, the notion of shared political culture underpins consent. Consent would not be possible without some common understanding of what is being agreed upon. For example, in Sharp's view, subjects who give their consent to a ruler agree to guidelines of social organization, to specific terms of government. Second, withdrawal of consent also depends on a shared political culture. While withdrawal of consent is ultimately an individual change of will (Sharp, 1973, p. 31), its strength is in numbers. For a non-violent action to operate in Sharp's terms it requires a coordinated effort of



resistance, a united withdrawal of consent. This consensus on withdrawal of consent depends on shared experience. For example, people with practical experience of resistance are likely to be in a better position to challenge authority than those who have lived under a repressive dictatorship. In addition, one of the four mechanisms of change that Sharp lists for nonviolent activists, conversion, based on the development of a common outlook among those who seek change and their opponents. According to Sharp, conversion occurs when an opponent adopts the viewpoint of the activists and accepts the group's goals as good (Sharp, 1990, p. 15).

With regard to gender relations, a theory of power that requires shared political culture is problematic on several levels. It may be argued that men and women do not share the same culture because their positions within the dominant patriarchal culture are very different. In patriarchy, the gender identities 'masculine' and 'feminine' are constructed as near opposites, with far less value ascribed to feminine characteristics. These differences may be seen to give rise to a divergent understanding of what constitutes both the problems and solutions of social organization, as Carol Gilligan asserts in her discussion of the different moral voice that emerges from women's experiences. The study of women's experience also reveals patterns of social organization that are generally overlooked in social theory. These different patterns have unique sets of power relations. The work of Diane Rothbard Margolis offers support for this view. Factors such as these limit the basis for a shared political culture between women and men, raising questions about this dimension of consent in Sharp's theory of power.¹³

3.3.1 A Different Moral Voice

In her book, *In a Different Voice* (1982), Gilligan argues that women's viewpoint in moral development is untold in traditional psychological theories of life cycle development (Gilligan, 1982, p. 6). Historically, women have been described by theorists such as Freud, Piaget, and Kohlberg as stunted in their moral development because they do not ascend to the final stages of mature moral development where individuation and adherence to universal principles of justice occur. Instead, they remain trapped in the lesser stages of development, where the self and goodness are seen in relation to others (1982, p. 18). Gilligan identifies the male bias of these studies (among other things the subject in these studies is, in fact, often male) and argues that the unexamined perspective of women reveals an alternative conception of moral development.

Gilligan describes the moral viewpoints of women and men in terms of the difference between an ethic of care on the one hand and an ethic of justice on the other. Each of these ethical modes speaks to different truths and has a contrasting set of constraints and issues. She describes an ethic of care as based on an underlying construction of morality that is a problem of responsibility rather than a consideration of rights or claims which is what informs an ethic of justice (1982, p. 138). In the former, the self is defined in relation to others; in the latter, it is viewed in terms of the role of separation as it demarcates an identity and empowers the self (1982, p. 156).

Sharp's ethical mode, so to speak, is justice, not caring. His view of power as control of resources may be seen as an assertion of rights. For Sharp, power is a matter of the claims rulers and subjects have to the control of its various sources. Balancing their claims to these sources is a matter of consent. Sharp also engages in the same abstraction that arises out of this particular ethical mode. He writes, 'One must expect that if [people] resist by nonviolent but militant means, there will be suffering and deaths' (1980, p. 167). No outcome, not, even death, mitigates the role of consent in Sharp's theory of power. On the contrary, he describes this outcome as the price of freedom from a ruler to whom subjects can no longer give their consent (Sharp, 1973, p. 32).

Sharp is able to maintain his view steadfastly because the choices that confront individuals ultimately rest on abstract concepts which are removed from the circumstances, relationships, and lives involved. This is in direct contrast to the ethical concerns that Gilligan derives from the experiences of women's lives.

3.3.2 Different Social Patterns

Assuming some (albeit ambiguous) connection between moral development and the institutionalization of social relations, it follows that various patterns of moral development may be associated with various types of institutionalized social relations. One theorist, Diane Rothbard Margolis (1989), describes three different, but interrelated social systems that reflect the two moral systems identified by Gilligan. These include: exchange,



placing, and pooling (Margolis, 1989, p. 387). For Margolis, Gilligan's ethic of justice is the underlying moral legitimization of exchange; the ethic of care underpins placing and pooling (1989, p. 394). By describing these different social systems, Margolis intends to reformulate power theory such that it bears the wisdom of women's experience and feminist perspectives. Margolis briefly describes these three social systems in the following manner. She writes:

In exchange, resources are socially constructed as commodities. [Exchange] is an unstable, competitive system based on premises of scarcity and self-interest, and tending toward control of resources (and power) in one or few hands (1989, p. 389).

In placing, material resources are socially constructed as symbols of social positions, not commodities. Attached to these positions are particular obligations and claims (1989, p. 389). And in pooling, resources are valued in terms defined according to the common good. The distinguishing feature of pooling is that contributions are faceless (1989, p. 390). Though exchange theory dominates much of the western social science tradition,¹⁴ Margolis asserts that placing is an essential form of interaction in all societies (1989, p. 393); it is through women's lives that social scientists are becoming increasingly aware of placing orders. She describes the persistence of placing in terms of society's need to care for dependants – those who have nothing to exchange in a market economy (1989, p. 394) or those who have no resources to contribute to the pool, but nonetheless benefit from those resources. It is placing that invests those in a dependent position with claims for care by those who are not in a dependent position. Because of their connection to care work (as mothers, wives, service industry employees, social workers, etc.), placing is very much alive in women's lives. However, Margolis offers evidence that both women and men operate in all three social systems at the same time, though not without conflict.

In Margolis' view, these very different patterns of social relations each have their own type of power. In exchange, power is defined as the ability to create commodities and make them scarce (1989, p. 401). Those who control the commodities of exchange benefit from this power. In placing, power is attached to and limited by positions that carry with them particular responsibilities and claims. Because of this, placing satisfies the need to provide for successive generations in the manner that other systems do not. Margolis calls this 'generative' power. Those who benefit from this power are the ones brought into existence by it (1989, p. 404). In pooling, Margolis understands power in terms of solidarity or the capacity of a group to act in a unified manner (1989, p. 397). It is the collective that benefits from this power. According to Margolis, power in all three systems has a common base in legitimacy and trust, which are defined in terms of consensus on values and norms related to each social system (1989, p. 396).

Sharp defines legitimacy and social control in terms of consent that is a universal privilege of individuals. In contrast, Margolis recognizes that while power may be based on consensus of values, this does not operate uniformly. Based on this, she questions how consensus is achieved and maintained in any social system. In particular, she wonders how asymmetrical relationships are incorporated in social systems as normatively regulated behaviour, arguing that this stems from the ability to create identities (1989, p. 399). Margolis refers to a critical form of social power: the power to name or define. In her view, power sets the boundaries of a relationship because it defines the component parts of that relationship. That is, power such as this establishes the positions in a power relationship (e.g. dominant and subordinate roles), which affects the dynamic of that relationship. Unlike Sharp, who does not differentially value consent (it is universal), Margolis sees an intimate connection between the construction of identity and the construction of consensus, and thus power.¹⁵

Margolis' reformulation of power theory bears on Sharp's theory of power in two ways. First, the three social patterns that Margolis describes are so vastly different that the possibility of shared political culture between them is slim. Sharp constructs a theory of power that reflects exchange theory more than any other. Through consent, subjects exchange their control of the sources of power for acceptable government by a ruler. In turn, the ruler is vested with the legitimate authority necessary to govern. In this way, the sources of power that Sharp identifies may be viewed as commodities, with consent as the medium of exchange. In contrast, placing has a strong influence on women's lives (least of all in their position as society's care givers), which limits the relevance of Sharp's theory of power in terms of gender relations, or at least for one aspect of women's lives.

Second, Margolis presents empirical evidence of types of social power that bear no resemblance to Sharp's consensual model. For example, Sharp's theory does not fit into the placing model of social relations. This is clear when looking at the possibility of the withdrawal of consent in this particular social system. In placing, the withdrawal of consent can only be understood in terms of services. This is the only thing that could be withdrawn,



as claims and obligations. relative to the need to care for dependents define this model.

However, the threat to withhold services, such as the care of the young, is not possible in placing. Not only are these services obligatory because of the manner in which positions are defined, but their withdrawal would undermine the very power of that system (Margolis, 1989, p. 405). Generative power is created and satisfied in the life it generates and nurtures. Any threat to that life would be counterproductive.

4. Conclusion

4.1 Limitations to Analysis

As with each analysis there are several limitations to my consideration of Sharp's theory of power. To begin, it might be argued that my discussion of Sharp's theory is very narrow. That is, I analyze only one particular aspect of his theory: the role of consent in power relations. In applying Sharp's theory of consensual power to gender relations I demonstrate ways in which consent does not characterize power in these relations. But, I do not stretch my analysis to consider how consent does operate in gender relations, which might offer some way to rehabilitate Sharp's theory in this context.

Second, in using Sharp's framework (i.e. his assumptions about power) as the structure of my feminist critique, perhaps I limit the effective development of feminist perspectives on power. It may be suggested that I have made a scattered use of a variety of complex ideas originating in feminist theory with only minimal connections to a more coherent feminist alternative. This reflects my intent to critique particular aspects of Sharp's theory as they apply to gender relations, rather than to propose alternative theories of Power. Some of these are, however, implicit in my critique. Further research is necessary before these can be made more explicit.

Third, I have relied on the category 'woman' and the category 'man' as unified throughout most of my analysis. I have done this because these are the categories of the system of domination and subjugation known as patriarchy. The obvious problem with this is related to questions such as: to whom do these analyses apply (i.e. which women and which men)? However, I have acknowledged the diverse composition of these categories, in some way accounting for broad theoretical assumptions about the forms of male domination and female subordination that contrast with the specific experiences of individuals. At present, I am uncertain how to best articulate the tension between theoretical or analytic coherence and diverse individual experiences.

4.2 Summary

I began with the assertion that a usable theory of power is essential to understand and change the relations of domination and subordination that give rise to some of the critical problems in our world. I asked where such a theory could be found. I sought to answer that question by analysing Sharp's theory of consensual power in terms of gender relations. He claims to have constructed a theory_ of power that enables people to describe and eliminate some of the serious problems in our world, including social oppression. Gender relations constitute a pervasive system of social oppression, patriarchy. However, it is obvious that I do not regard Sharp's theory as offering an answer to my question.

In my view, the main value of Sharp's work is that it gives a history to non-violent action. As a social theorist attempting to develop a theory of social power and change, he is unsuccessful. Despite his intent, Sharp is unable to offer a suitable explanation of the power relations that define at least one system of oppression. In applying Sharp's theory of consensual power to gender relations, I have provided evidence of the inadequacies of his theory.

I have demonstrated in several very different but related ways that Sharp's theory of consensual power cannot be considered adequate for characterizing power in gender relations. To begin, I located Sharp's theory in the tradition of social contract theory. Drawing on Pateman's argument that civil society is merely a modern form of patriarchy, I provide one basis for undermining Sharp's view of power as it applies to gender relations. According to Pateman, women are not fully constituted individuals in civil society. Their identity is differentially constructed in order to maintain their subjugation by men. This mitigates the role of consent as it relates to women and power.

Next, I revised Lipsitz and Kritzer's criticism of Sharp (i.e. he fails to consider the aims of the ruler in his discussion



of consent), giving it meaning as well as finding support of it within gender relations. I described Guillaumin's theory of patriarchy as the complete appropriation of women by men and presented Kelly's feminist theory of sexual violence. Guillaumin argues that women's appropriation in patriarchy is so severe that they are defined as objects. Like territory or resources, they may be appropriated by men without their consent. Kelly's theoretical and empirical work on sexual violence supports the view that there is enough manpower to render consent problematic as a defining characteristic of power relations between the sexes.

Finally, I considered the possibility of shared political culture, an underlying assumption of Sharp's theory of consensual power. I presented Gilligan's work on the different voice that emerges when moral development is mapped from women's experience. Similarly, I discussed Margolis's work on the different social patterns and power relations that become apparent when women's experiences are taken into account. I briefly demonstrated how Sharp's theory fits into modes of moral and social relations that do not resemble women's experience. While neither of these authors fixes differences specifically to gender, they provide evidence of divergent worldviews that is based on the empirical experience of women's lives. These differences cannot be overlooked in a discussion of consent that is, in part, predicated on some notion of shared political culture and makes universal claims about the role of consent in people's lives.

I have looked at Sharp's theory of consensual power in roughly two ways. First, I have considered the relevance of consent in terms of power relations between the sexes. As I have demonstrated above, there are at least several fundamental ways in which power in gender relations is not based on consent. This is supported by the evidence of women's experiences of power in patriarchal gender relations. Second, I have identified the notion of consent as one that may be considerably limited by circumstances. It cannot be used, as Sharp does, to abstractly and universally define power relations. It must be contextualized. Sharp, however, offers no qualifications: power is based on consent, no matter what the context is.

The feminist theorists from whom I have drawn my analysis have a different set of criteria than Sharp for examining power. These feminists base their views on a more structural analysis of oppression. Sharp's analysis is strictly functional. For example, his view of power is relational, but only in terms of the control of sources of power that must be negotiated (via consent or its withdrawal) between rulers, subjects, and others. In contrast, feminists not only ask what the relational nature of power is, but how that relationship is constructed, and who benefits from that relation. Such questions contain within them the tools for understanding the structural limits to individual and collective choices, an idea that Sharp does not address. Moreover, some feminists conceive of the relational nature of power in terms that are very different from Sharp's (e.g. Margolis' concept of generative power or the power to name). Theories of power that are based on women's everyday experiences of power must form an important base for future theoretical work on power. It is clear that these experiences offer insight into the nature of power in systems of oppression that are vastly different from those of Sharp.

It is not my view that a structural understanding of oppression may simply be added on as an afterthought to Sharp's analysis. On the contrary. As the questions above indicate, systems of oppression contain within them forms of power embedded in the structures that create those systems. These forms of power are critical to understanding and changing oppression. Further, I would argue, as Nancy Hartsock does, that the experiences of the oppressed must be seen to constitute different worldviews, rather than represent the margins of some dominant perspective (Hartsock, 1990, p. 171). This is fundamentally removed from the suggestion that such perspectives may later be included in a theory of power which lacks an initial structural orientation.

My analysis not only demonstrates some of the limitations to Sharp's theory of consensual power as it applies to patriarchal gender relations, but also reveals a corresponding problem with his theory of nonviolent political and social change. Sharp develops his theory of consensual power in order to establish a basis for nonviolent action and change, deriving both from his analysis of actual examples of such change. By withdrawing consent, he argues, people may alter power relationships. However, if Sharp fails adequately to characterize power, his strategy for altering a set of power relations may also be seen as inadequate. Specifically, that consent is not characteristic of the power relations between women and men means that its withdrawal would be of little value in dismantling patriarchy. In the case of this social oppression, Sharp's tool for change is ineffective.

The questions feminists ask about power arise from women's experiences of power in patriarchal gender relations. Sharp, like others, has developed a theory of power that is male-biased because he fails seriously to consider women's experience. This creates problems for Sharp in terms of the accuracy and efficacy of his theory. Because of my experience as a woman, I have a strong intuition predisposing me against a theory of power based on consent. Upon more detailed analysis, I must conclude that I would not look to Sharp for a useful theory of power,



or change.

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NARP Discussion

The discussion following Kate's presentation was wide ranging. In the extract below I have focussed on issues with a more obvious bearing on the work of the group or the philosophical concepts underlying it.

Introductory comment by Kate

The paper had been inspired by her Master's Degree and written some years earlier. There were two ways in which, if she writing the piece now, she would do it differently. First, she would give Sharp more benefit of the doubt in what he was attempting to do. Second, she thought, the way she had presented sexism in gender relations was too monolithic and did not take sufficient account of women's autonomy and the capacity for resistance. Her Ph.D, a deconstruction of the relationship between power and difference, had given her a broader understanding of the topic.

Placing, Pooling and the withdrawal of consent

Christina challenged the notion that the withdrawal of cooperation was not possible in placing systems. Some women, for instance, just abandoned children if they got sufficiently fed up. Kate replied that the important point was that they did so because they were fed up, not as a strategy of resistance; if there was a collective action which involved abandoning the care of the young, society would certainly be in deep trouble.

Bob thought there were quite a few examples of the withdrawal of labour in placing relationships. In the Indian independence struggle, the very first boycott initiated by Gandhi was a boycott of the schools. Indian nationalists, who had been fighting for years to make the educational institutions genuinely serve the interests of the population, and had begun to make real progress, suddenly found that Gandhi was saying to them that they should withdraw their children from those very institutions. It was, indeed, a curious sacrifice to make and many of the young people who were withdrawn from the schools at a key period in their lives blamed Gandhi and the nationalist movement later and never recovered from that experience.

Kate questioned whether you could characterise the relationship between a citizenry and a state in terms of placing. Gandhi, arguably, was using the young people who were withdrawn from school as a kind of resource. In that case you were not dealing with placing but with an exchange relationship. Placing was not a commodity arrangement. Bob agreed that probably it was an exchange relationship, but still the initial reaction of the Indian nationalists was that they were shooting themselves in the foot. But the brilliance of the idea was that it liberated a huge workforce of activists to go out and engage in the struggle. Howard noted the parallel with the South African struggle. There the slogan 'No Education without Liberation' was deeply problematic by the late 1980s.

Relating the discussion to the situation in Kosovo, Howard said that the Albanian population there, which made up



90 per cent of the total, was following a policy of non-cooperation with the Serbian rulers. The situation there came within the category described by Lipsitz and Kritzer where the oppressor did not need the cooperation of the people suffering oppression. But the notion of generative power was relevant here. The Albanian population were looking to their parallel society, and their own social solidarity, as a way of exerting power. The downside of pooling, however, was the pressure it exerted on people to be part of the parallel system, even if personally they might be better off giving up their non-cooperation and, for example, going to university. There was an element of intimidation in the parallel society. However, he found the notions in Kate's paper of generative power, of getting away from an exchange analysis and from withdrawal of consent, highly attractive and particularly relevant for marginal people who were dispensable to the rulers.

Bob said the work on his PhD convinced him that the idea that the boycott was the key element in Gandhi's strategy during the independence struggle was mistaken. Gandhi in fact resisted all attempts, initially by the Muslims with whom he was in alliance, to develop a boycott of British goods as the fundamental basis of resistance. He argued that it was morally wrong, and certain to produce a hostile reaction from Britain. But the British couldn't object to Indians making their own cloth, so the core of the resistance should be the constructive programme in which Indians would strengthen their own sense of identity and their movement. However, because there was a quid pro quo with the politicians, Gandhi was forced into accepting a boycott, though he still insisted that it would not be a boycott of British goods but a boycott of foreign goods. The constructive programme constituted a form of resistance - you were developing your own generative power.

Kate said that this chimed with Foucault's productive concept of power. Gender-biased, racially-biased, or heterosexually-biased patterns of socialisation were, he argued, highly productive forms of power, though in these cases producing patterns of domination. In part, Foucault was reacting against a notion of power which presented it simply as prohibition or repression. Michael said that in both *The Politics of Nonviolent Action* and *Social Power and Political Freedom* Sharp insisted that power was inescapable and you couldn't just walk away from it. He did not reject power as such, and in fact insisted it was utopian to think you could operate without it. Kate said she appreciated that aspect of Sharp's work. In her own view we were never outside power; it was everywhere and it operated both oppressively and productively.

Relevance of Kate's critique to problems of ethnic conflict

Walter said he found Kate's paper fascinating, and that as a non-sociologist there was a lot of material in it that was completely new to him. One of the most valuable features of it from the point of view of our concerns in the group was summed up in the conclusion where Kate emphasised the differences between various world views, especially the differences in the world view of men and women. As she put it: 'These differences cannot be overlooked in a discussion of consent that is, in part, predicated on some notion of shared political culture and makes universal claims about the role of consent in people's lives.'

This point bore directly on some of the empirical shortcomings of Sharp's theory, because there were situations of oppression or aggression in which the withdrawal of consent in Sharp's sense was not possible. In ethnic conflicts particularly, the oppressive party didn't want your consent. During the Cold War the context was different - and Kate had quite rightly stressed the importance of context. It was different in many ways, but in one respect especially. One was able to assume that Soviet aggression would have as part of its purpose the forcible conversion of those it oppressed - the creation of communists and of communist states. Therefore if it behaved in patently abominable ways, that would be destructive of this purpose. The Soviet leadership was therefore open to a certain kind of moral appeal, symbolically present in nonviolent forms of resistance. By making yourself vulnerable in a certain sense, putting up forms of resistance that fell short of military resistance, you were addressing a moral argument across the ideological frontiers. But in conflicts like those in Bosnia or Rwanda that kind of consideration didn't apply. This was what made such conflicts so intractable, and made it exceedingly difficult for nonviolent forms of action to find a foothold.

Kate on the same page had summarised Guillamin's argument that women's appropriation in patriarchy could be so severe that they were defined as objects; like territory or resources, they might be appropriated by men without their consent. If all you were interested in was gaining territory, for example, then ethnic cleansing became a logical way of achieving your objectives, and there seemed to be no way in which the defending party could exercise leverage on the oppressor. It could not be achieved by the withdrawal of consent.



Consent and compliance

Michael said he thought Kate overstated the emphasis that Sharp put on consent as opposed to cooperation and compliance. In one of the passages which Kate had cited, Sharp identified the fear of sanctions as one of the factors leading people to obey, and, as Kate herself had noted, an action taken under the threat of sanctions, or even death, could hardly be described as consensual. But Sharp argued that the power to coerce was itself dependent upon the coherence of a collectivity which one might seek to undermine by various strategies.

Kate made two points in response. First, this was probably an instance in which she had not given Sharp as much benefit of the doubt as she should have done – though consent was fairly central to his thesis. Second, consent functioned in the relationship within the oppressive party, but not necessarily in the other relationship which was the one Sharp himself was chiefly interested in - that is the relationship between the repressive party and the people on the receiving end of repression. The latter would of course benefit from the withdrawal of consent by the military forces of the oppressor, but they were not directly in a position to bring that about

Andrew said Sharp was working with a model which assumed some kind of consent. His own view was that the potential of nonviolent action lay in people ceasing to play the role allotted to them in the scheme of things and thereby undermining it. It was not that they consciously consented to their oppression but rather that it became second nature to them to live their daily lives as victims, as oppressed. The revolutionary impact of nonviolence could come from shattering such assumptions and unmasking them as social constructs

Instrumentalism as a limiting factor in Sharp's analysis

Christina said that it had not been part of Sharp's agenda to address women's experiences of social oppression. She wondered if there was a theory of power that would include Sharp's insights and also address this issue. Kate agreed that Sharp had not had gender relations on the forefront of his mind in his writing, but she had taken his lack of gender analysis as an example of a larger problem in his work, namely that he took no account, as far as she could see, of structural relations or large-scale systematic patterns of oppression (e.g., racism, classism or sexism)]. His theory was instrumental in emphasis. The problems we faced were not instrumental but had to do with complex structural problems that interacted with a variety of other issues, such as agency. There were better theories of power, she thought, that took greater account of the experiences of people who were on the receiving end of oppressive relationships – Foucault's, for example, though it too had problems in terms of looking at the world from the perspective of people who experienced oppression. Like Sharp, Foucault had a pluralist concept of power, but he took greater account of institutionalized historical patterns of social relations.

Michael said that Sharp was focusing on the political level where exchange relationships predominated. In general, what Sharp said about non-cooperation in that context seemed to him to be valid, though there was insufficient emphasis in his later work on the moral and psychological dimension of nonviolence. Clearly, non-cooperation by itself would not be sufficient in situations where an invader or oppressor did not require such cooperation. But Sharp's insights into the various ways in which oppressive power structures could be broken down seemed to him to constitute an important contribution to the debate.

Kate said she would not underestimate Sharp's contribution. But he seemed unable to recognize that exchange relations might actually in and of themselves be oppressive. She did not think he had a way of accounting for the structural dimension of oppression or of how exchange relations had functioned oppressively for women, for people in the Third World and so on. Even if he was taking a very hard-nosed approach, he had certain blinkers on that prevented him from seeing what she regarded as pressing social problems. He was very tactical in his approach to nonviolence, very instrumental.

Michael said that there had been a debate in the mid 1970s amongst the theorists of social defence between the 'instrumentalists' and the 'structuralists', with Sharp and Adam Roberts adopting the instrumentalist approach and others saying you had to look more at structures. Nevertheless Sharp's approach would allow for the insertion of a more structuralist analysis at certain points. Moreover, even if one took the position that all exchange type relationships were oppressive at some level, it was still the case that some political systems were far more oppressive than others. Non-cooperation and various forms of nonviolent action were a method of modifying the



political systems in a positive direction. Kate said that in a monograph published in 1990, *The Role of Power in Nonviolent Struggle*, Sharp had opened up just a bit to structural issues.

Essentialism, social patterning and ethical values

Explaining her rejection of essentialism, Kate said she did not have a fixed perspective on the nature of human beings and did not believe that we had unchanging natural identities that we discovered or unveiled for ourselves - that there was a core there, a thing called human nature that we could identify. Essentialism meant that you posited an essential human nature. She would argue very strongly against that inherited idea. The interrogation of an essential human nature had earlier roots as part of a whole agency-structure debate, and more recently has been developed within the context of post-structuralism and post-modernism. However, one of the criticisms of dismissing the idea of an essential human nature was that it could give rise to relativity, a kind of infinite regress. There were also serious issues surrounding our ideas about human identity and its material conditions.

Walter said that Kate placed a great deal of stress - rightly in his view - on the part played by an ethic of care in women as opposed to an ethic of justice. He liked the phrase 'core essentialism', and thought it was right that many of the things which were claimed to be essential to men, or women or humanity turned out to be the product of cultural conditioning. But how far could you push that analysis? How far would Kate say that an ethic of care was a cultural product, and how far was it due to the fact that women actually have babies? Kate replied that she saw it as a cultural construct. The relationship of women to their bodies, particularly women as childbearers, was culturally conditioned. Women grew the foetus, carried it around and gave birth to it, but that in no way obligated them to take care of the child for example; the notion of that obligation was a social construct.

Walter asked if, in Kate's view, there was no stage in the early period of the child's development when the relationship to the mother was essential or primary. Kate said that that was certainly the assumption on which our society organised its social relations, but she did not think it was the way they needed to be organised. A whole part of why that seemed to be a natural thing was based on sexist social relations, including ideas linked to the social contract. Andrew, said that anthropological studies had shown the existence of a wide variety of child-rearing patterns, thus undermining assumptions about what was 'natural'. Christina asked if the love a mother experienced for the child she had just given birth to was simply a matter of social construction. . Kate commented that desires and feelings could also be socially constructed. Motherhood was one way women were naturalised into particular secondary roles in society; it was a central social institution for keeping women in their place. At the same time, however, it accorded women some type of power, both in the home and in society at large. There were no givens. Nothing about who we were was simply given.

Walter asked how then did Kate arrive at the concept of women's ethic of care. His impression was that Kate's basic argument was that Sharp failed to take account of the special nature of women's experience and that therefore there was an empirical failure in his analysis. How could you use this argument without having some concept of women's experience that was more than a culturally conditioned concept? She was placing the whole weight of her criticism of Sharp on this. In order to use a concept in that way, you had implicitly to claim for it some kind of validity which transcended its empirical manifestations in history. Kate said that though Carol Gilligan's work did have some essentialist tendencies to it, she herself was quite clear about the fact that she was looking at different patterns of socialisation, not different essential identities. Women were not natural caretakers; they had been socialised to be caretakers, whereas men had not. Walter suggested that Kate was claiming some kind of normative validity for this way of experiencing the world as against the male way of doing so. This implied some kind of comparable core, although it might be very difficult to define what was left when you had subtracted all the cultural conditions.

Kate said she did not think you could subtract the cultural factors and get down to a core. Certainly that was not what Gilligan's work was based on. Michael said he thought there was an implication in Kate's paper that there was something morally admirable about the ethic of care and that an ethic of justice didn't quite match up to that. Walter said the very use of the term patriarchy in the argument meant it was heavily loaded towards the ethic of care concept. One might, with great difficulty, describe what constituted a state of oppression in a way which did not carry an overt ethical charge, but actually all the time you would implicitly be making a claim to an objective judgement. Otherwise what were you doing? What would be the purpose of pointing out that a state of affairs was oppressive? It was oppressive - so what? It was a state of affairs like many others.



Kate said she thought that these were some of the issues we had still to negotiate our way through in terms of looking at things contextually and as social constructions. Judgement, for example, did become problematic when you had removed any foundation or standards for criticism, but she did not think we could settle for remaining within the framework inherited from the Enlightenment. Some people were struggling with a great deal of difficulty to move beyond that dichotomous way of looking at our world. In using Gilligan's work in her critique of Sharp she wasn't positing some kind of essentialism. She might not have protected herself well against that charge, but her intent was to look at patterns of socialisation. Within social relations, we could see different gendered patterns. Some of them were harmful and some of them weren't. But you could look at those things without necessarily incorporating an objective or neutral position. She believed that some mix of an ethic of care and an ethic of justice was useful. It wasn't a matter of choosing one or the other. But she was clear which one was dominant, and which one had been excluded and silenced on sexist grounds. Making that voice heard was very important, though she would see it from the point of view of social construction.

Notes:

[1.](#) For a valuable definition of patriarchy that also includes an understanding of its contested and non-universal character, see Adrienne Rich, *Of Woman Born* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1976). Also, for a useful discussion of the ways in which patriarchy interacts and changes over time with other systems of oppression, see Sylvia Walby, *Theorizing Patriarchy* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1990).

[2.](#) 'A feminist perspective recognizes that just over half of humanity is female; that human experience must be considered on the basis of that proportion. Moreover, throughout human history life chances, life choices, and life experience have differed in many important respects for women and men [as well as among women and among men]. A feminist perspective recognizes gender as a category of fundamental significance, and the consequences of gender in historical settings as a focal issue. A feminist methodology would examine the world from the perspective of women ... [I]t is not enough to include women in the account, it is necessary to look out through women's eyes. For me, a feminist methodology presupposes that lived experience must be the basis for analysis and theory, which should not be stripped from the real life context in which they have arisen. The personal and the political are not only linked, but they are interdependent' (Roberts, 1984, p.196)

[3.](#) For example, see Jean Bethke Elshtain and Sheila Tobias, eds, *Women, Militarism, and War* (Maryland: Rowman and Littlefield, 1990); Adrienne Harris and Ynestra King, eds, *Rocking the Ship of State: Towards a Feminist Peace Politics* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1989); Berenice Carroll, 'Feminism and Pacifism: Historical and Theoretical Connections', in Ruth Roach Pierson, ed., *Women and Peace* (London: Croom Helm, 1987), Christine Sylvester, 'Some Dangers in Merging Feminist and Peace Projects' in *Alternatives*, October 1987; Barbara Roberts, 'The Death of Machothink: Feminist Research and the Transformation of Peace Studies', *Women's Studies International Forum*, vol. 7, no. 4, 1984; and Pam McAllister, ed., *Reweaving the Web of Life* (Philadelphia: New Society Publishers, 1982).

[4.](#) Sharp cites Hillenbrand, Spitz and deterrence or balance of power theories as evidence of the widespread acceptance of this traditional view of power as monolithic (Sharp, 1973, p. 33).

[5.](#) Sharp distinguishes between 'free' and 'forced' consent (though the latter seems like a contradiction in terms). Free consent is active support for or passive submission to a government. Forced consent is a subject's submission based on fear of sanctions if he or she does not cooperate. Nonetheless, Sharp insists that even forced consent represents a choice: '... that it is better to submit and avoid the penalties than to defy and incur suffering' (Sharp, 1980, p. 172). Beyond this, Sharp does not develop the idea that consent may be mitigated by circumstances. Obedience always represents a choice.

[6.](#) For Sharp, 'ruler' refers to those in control of power structures, such as heads of state, etc. 'Subjects' refers to a ruler's agents and helpers and the general population. Though he retains the terminology of the ruler-subject dichotomy associated with monolithic power theories, Sharp has redefined the term 'subject'.

[7.](#) Throughout my analysis I make liberal use of the terms 'women' and 'men' as apparently unified categories. This requires an explanation. Admittedly, using either of these categories analytically is to take a somewhat abstract approach that bears a difficult resemblance to reality. After all, these categories are comprised of individuals who are extraordinarily diverse and whose experiences differ widely. However, these categories have been constructed in relation to each other, as well as within and by a system of domination of one (men) over the other (women). For this reason, it is valuable to consider what it means to belong to one or the other of these categories. Hence my emphasis on the similarities of women or the similarities of men, and the differences between these two categories relative to Sharp's theory of power. I wish to make it very clear that by using these categories analytically, I am not suggesting that all women (or all men) experience patriarchy in the same way. This is not the case.



[8.](#) See Summy, 1983, p. 39 for a similar discussion.

[9.](#) Guillaumin coins the word 'sexage' to represent the type of relations between the sex classes in the modern domestic economy. Sexage is intended to signify what 'slavery' or 'serfdom' mean to the feudal economy (Guillaumin, 1981, p. 7). Guillaumin argues against discussing women's oppression at the level of labor power, which is often considered the ultimate resource individuals can use to sustain material existence. She considers this level of analysis inadequate for explaining the position of the class of women (1981, p. 6).

[10.](#) Difficulty in making estimates about the number of men who use sexual violence stems from unreported incidents of such violence, male definitions that exclude forms of sexual violence (such as street harassment) that women experience, and state complicity in maintaining both male definitions and use of sexual violence.

[11.](#) Roberts also replaces the conservative 10% of wives who are battered with another estimate placing the prevalence of that abuse at 50%, changing the total to 95?105% of men who are attackers (Roberts, 1984, p.196).

[12.](#) In the following discussion I intend to use the phrase 'shared political culture' in its broadest possible meaning. Because the personal and political are not merely related, but profoundly interdependent, my use of this phrase extends to numerous aspects of social relations.

[13.](#) It is important to note that both Gilligan and Margolis are careful not to overstate gender differences. Gilligan identifies the differences in moral voices according to theme, not gender. In characterizing different social patterns, Margolis is not arguing that women and men inhabit discrete worlds. However, both see different moral and social patterns affect women and men (Gilligan, 1982, p. 2).

[14.](#) Margolis cites the following references to support her claim that exchange theories dominate the western sociological traditions: Peter P. Ekeh, *Social Exchange Theory: The Two Traditions* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1974); Nancy Hartsock, *Money, Sex, and Power: Toward a Feminist Historical Materialism* (New York: Longman, 1983); Judy Lown, 'Not So Much a Factory, More a Form of Patriarchy: Gender and Class During Industrialization', ch. 3 in Eva Gamarnikow, et al., eds, *Gender, Class, and Work* (London: Heinemann, 1983) (Margolis, 1989, p. 412, footnote 12).

[15.](#) Margolis reasons that if power is embedded in the normative definition of social relations, then the sources of power not only vary but in some instances may be barriers. To verify this claim, Margolis looks at knowledge ? generally regarded by many as a valuable source of power. This is apropos to Sharp because knowledge is one of his sources of power. For Sharp, the sources of power vary in importance, but they are never sources of weakness or powerlessness. However, Margolis finds evidence to the contrary in women's lives. She writes:

Nurturing, for instance, a gloss for the broad range of skills involved with caring work, is said to be natural for women. Such knowledge, rather than being a grounds for prestige and authority, is part of the impervious structural barrier that surrounds [women] in placing institutions (Margolis, 1989, p. 407).

Contained within the social structure, barriers are imposed in at least two ways. They are rooted in assumptions of innate inferiority (i.e. in a rational world, care taking roles [based in part on emotional resources] are assumed to have lesser value; those in such roles are thus inferior). Or, they are based in an outright denial of access to other social positions (e.g. very often motherhood is the only respectable position for a woman) (Margolis, 1987, p. 408). This view of knowledge as either a source of power or powerlessness, depending on the social context, challenges Sharp's view that knowledge is a source of power.

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