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Book Review

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Cordelia Fine.2025.Patriarchy Inc.: What We Get Wrong about Gender Equality–and Why Men Still Win at Work, New York City: WW Norton & Company

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Abstract

This review examines the book titled *Patriarchy Inc.: What We Get Wrong About Gender Equality – And Why Men Still Win at Work*, which was published in 2025 by Cordelia Fine. The book challenges dominant explanations that attribute persistent gender equality. Fine, who is the Professor in the History and Philosophy of Science at the University of Melbourne, offers a critical argument that such interpretations are fundamentally misplaced, demonstrating that inequality is structurally embedded within social, economic, and institutional arrangements. *Patriarchy Inc.* challenges the idea that gender inequality is mainly the result of individual choice or natural differences between men and women. Also, it critiques “choice feminism” and biological explanations that present workplace disparities as inevitable or freely chosen. This review underscores the significance that gender equality requires structural transformation of institutions and workplace norms, rather than relying on individual choice or surface-level reforms.

Keywords: *Gender inequality, Patriarchy, Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI), Workplace inequality, Structural inequality, Social institutions, Intersectionality, Labor markets*

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1. Introduction

In the landscape of modern work, a strange paradox persists. Despite decades of progress towards gender equality, persistent disparities in pay, leadership, caregiving, and cultural power still exist. Men still dominate corporate boardrooms and trades, although women mostly fill roles in care and administration. This divide provides two seemingly contradicting reasons. Firstly, provide a comforting “different but equal” narrative that suggests women choose these various career paths based on their free will and natural inclination. Secondly, it comes from the corporate world itself, the multi-billion-dollar Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion

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(DEI) industry, which promises that with the right training and targets, the pipeline will eventually balance itself.

Now the question is: what if both are wrong? In her incisive and witty recent book, *Patriarchy Inc.: What We Get Wrong About Gender Equality And Why Men Still Win at Work*, Cordelia Fine examines these narratives that suggest gender inequality is either largely solved or reducible to women's individual choices. With a sharp style and rigorous engagement with social science research, the author reframes patriarchy not as a relic of the past but as an adaptive system, one that continuously reinvents itself under the guise of meritocracy, market logic, and even empowerment.

The main argument of Fine's book is that prevailing explanations for gender inequality are fundamentally misplaced. She argues that workplace gender inequality should not be understood as an unintended flaw, but rather as a structural outcome of existing social and institutional arrangements. As stated earlier, the book's *raison d'être* is to dismantle two dominant yet inadequate frameworks. In the book, Fine first challenges what she describes as "choice feminism" and biological deterministic accounts of gender gaps. Instead, she argues that inequalities are reproduced through institutional incentives, workplace norms, policy frameworks, and social expectations that systematically advantage men while appearing neutral. She further reveals the "corporate rebranding" of patriarchy, arguing that rather than using overt exclusion, contemporary patriarchy operates through efficiency, productivity, competition, and market-friendly rationalisations that mask gendered effects. In this sense, men "still win" not because of conspiracy, but because institutions are designed around historically male life patterns, particularly the model of the unencumbered worker free from caregiving responsibilities (Fine, 2025). By dismantling common misconceptions about individual preference and meritocracy, the author argues that genuine gender equality requires structural transformation, not just additional changes.

Cordelia Fine, born in 1975, is a Canadian-born British Professor in the History and Philosophy of Science at the University of Melbourne, with a prestigious academic pedigree that includes degrees in experimental Psychology from Oxford University, Criminology from Cambridge, and a PhD in Psychology from University College London. She is the award-winning author of *Delusions of Gender and Testosterone Rex*, which won the Royal Society Science Book Prize in 2017. Her career has been defined by a rigorous, evidence-based challenge to the popular myths and "neurosexism" that pervade scientific and cultural explanations of sex differences. In 2018, Fine was awarded the Edinburgh Medal for her work in challenging gender bias in science and contributing to public debates about gender equality. *Patriarchy Inc.* fits squarely within her wider research trajectory, extending her critique from the lab and the bedroom to the heart of the economy: the workplace (Ireland, 2010: 21).

The book synthesises interdisciplinary research from sociology, economics, psychology, and organisational studies. Fine draws on quantitative data regarding wage gaps, leadership disparities, and parental leave uptake, as well as experimental studies on bias and social perceptions. She also engages in policy analysis, comparing different national approaches to caregiving, labor regulation, and workplace reform. Substantively, Fine (2025) addresses three key issues: first, she criticises the "pipeline problem" theory, which contends that gender differences in leadership are merely a result of past marginalisation. She demonstrates how cultural barriers, such as long-hours culture and biased evaluation metrics, continue to operate. Secondly, she examines the ideology of choice, arguing that women's preferences to work in the corporate world are shaped within constrained opportunity structures. Thirdly, she explores how men's dominance is reinforced through workplace norms that reward overwork and penalise caregiving, effectively entrenching a gendered division of labor.

Fine does not just diagnose the problem; she uses her interdisciplinary toolkit to reveal that the modern gendered division of labor is not a natural given but a historical and social construct designed to fit the needs of industrial capitalism. Importantly, Fine reframes gender equality as beneficial not only to women but also to men, who are often constrained by rigid masculinity norms that discourage caregiving and emotional engagement. The book's method is synthetic rather than ethnographic. The author does not conduct original fieldwork but instead weaves together existing empirical studies into a cohesive, accessible argument (Fine, 2025).

The greatest strength of this book lies in its ability to bridge rigorous scholarship and public debate. Fine translates complex empirical findings into clear, persuasive prose without oversimplifying the evidence. Her critique of biological determinism is particularly compelling, as she systematically dismantles the claim that gender gaps reflect natural aptitude or hormonal destiny. As a sociology student, the book offers a valuable synthesis of structural and cultural analyses of inequality. Its structure guides the reader through this flawed landscape, then offers a compelling alternative. Furthermore, Fine's framing of patriarchy as a flexible, market-compatible system is conceptually powerful and analytically generative.

However, one weakness of *Patriarchy Inc.* is that it has limited its engagement with intersectionality. While the author acknowledges that gender inequality intersects with race, class, and other axes of power, these dimensions are not explored in sustained depth. The primary focus remains on gender disparity in relatively affluent Western contexts. A more thorough engagement with how patriarchy operates differently across racialised and global contexts would have strengthened the analysis and broadened its applicability.

Patriarchy Inc. is a brilliant, timely, and essential book. It successfully moves beyond tired clichés and failed corporate initiatives, rejuvenating the campaign for gender justice. The author has provided a new and vital vocabulary for understanding why the world's work remains so stubbornly unequal. *Patriarchy Inc.* is a must-read for a wide audience and essential for anyone who is working in or studying gender studies, sociology, and economics. It is also highly accessible to policy makers, HR practitioners, and general readers interested in understanding why gender gaps endure despite decades of progress.

Biography

"Oratile Mmolatlou is an MA Sociology candidate at the University of Johannesburg. Her research interests include gender studies, labor studies and social inequality, with a particular focus on patriarchy, masculinity, and how social norms shape the roles of men and women in the labor force in post-apartheid South Africa." to "Oratile Mmolatlou is an MA Sociology candidate at the University of Johannesburg. Her research interests broadly centre on gender, work and social inequality, with particular attention to how gender norms, masculinities and social structures shape people's experiences and opportunities in society. Her work engages with questions of gender relations, labour and inequality in contemporary South Africa, including the ways in which gender intersects with broader economic and social structures. Her current research examines the relationship between spatial inequality, labour and commuting patterns among domestic workers in Johannesburg. Her previous scholarly writing has explored masculinity, gender expectations and gender equality. She is also the author of the Opinion-Editorial (Op-Ed), "Masculinity Should Not Be Reduced to Money," published by the Mail & Guardian."

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