



Feminism

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Preview

As a political term, 'feminism' was a twentieth-century invention and has only been a familiar part of everyday language since the 1960s. ('Feminist' was first used in the nineteenth century as a medical term to describe either the feminization of men or the masculinization of women.) In modern usage, feminism is invariably linked to the women's movement and the attempt to advance the social role of women.

Feminist ideology is defined by two basic beliefs: that women are disadvantaged because of their sex; and that this disadvantage can and should be overthrown. In this way, feminists have highlighted what they see as a political relationship between the sexes, the supremacy of men and the subjection of women in most, if not all, societies. In viewing gender divisions as 'political', feminists challenged a 'mobilization of bias' that has traditionally operated within political thought, by which generations of male thinkers, unwilling to examine the privileges and power their sex had enjoyed, had succeeded in keeping the role of women off the political agenda.

Nevertheless, feminism has also been characterized by a diversity of views and political positions. The women's movement, for instance,

has pursued goals that range from the achievement of female suffrage and an increase in the number of women in elite positions in public life, to the legalization of abortion, and the ending of female circumcision. Similarly, feminists have embraced both revolutionary and reformist political strategies, and feminist theory has both drawn on established political traditions and values, notably liberalism and socialism, and, in the form of radical feminism, rejected conventional political ideas and concepts. However, feminist ideology has long since ceased to be confined to these 'core' traditions, modern feminist thought focusing on new issues and characterized, generally, by a more radical engagement with the politics of difference.

Origins and development

Although the term 'feminism' may be of recent origin, feminist views have been expressed in many different cultures and can be traced back as far as the ancient civilizations of Greece and China. Christine de Pisan's *Book of the City of Ladies*, published in Italy in 1405, foreshadowed many of the ideas of modern feminism in recording the deeds of famous women of the past and advocating women's right to education and political influence. Nevertheless, it was not until the nineteenth century that an organized women's movement developed. The first text of modern feminism is usually taken to be Mary Wollstonecraft's (see p. 236) *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* ([1792] 1967), written against the backdrop of the French Revolution. By the mid-nineteenth century, the women's movement had acquired a central focus: the campaign for female suffrage, the right to vote, which drew inspiration from the progressive extension of the franchise to men. This period is usually referred to as **first-wave feminism**, and was characterized by the demand that women should enjoy the same legal and political rights as men. Female suffrage was its principal goal because it was believed that if women could vote, all other forms of sexual discrimination or prejudice would quickly disappear.

FIRST-WAVE FEMINISM

The early form of feminism which developed in the mid-nineteenth century and was based on the pursuit of sexual equality in the areas of political and legal rights, particularly suffrage rights.

The women's movement was strongest in those countries where political democracy was most advanced; women demanded rights that in many cases were already enjoyed by their husbands and sons. In the USA, a women's movement emerged during the 1840s, inspired in part by the campaign to

abolish slavery. The famous Seneca Falls convention, held in 1848, marked the birth of the US women's rights movement. It adopted a Declaration of Sentiments, written by Elizabeth Cady Stanton (1815–1902), which deliberately drew on the language and principles of the Declaration of Independence and called, among other things, for female suffrage. The National Women's Suffrage Association, led by Stanton and Susan B. Anthony (1820–1906), was set up in 1869 and merged with the more conservative American Women's Suffrage Association in 1890. Similar movements developed in other western countries. In the UK, an organized movement developed during the 1850s and, in 1867, the House of Commons defeated the first attempt to introduce female suffrage, an amendment to the Second Reform Act, proposed by John Stuart Mill (see p. 53). The UK suffrage movement adopted increasingly militant tactics after the formation in 1903 of the Women's Social and Political Union, led by Emmeline Pankhurst (1858–1928) and her daughter Christabel (1880–1958). From their underground base in Paris, the Pankhursts coordinated a campaign of direct action in which 'suffragettes' carried out wholesale attacks on property and mounted a series of well-publicized public demonstrations.

'First-wave' feminism ended with the achievement of female suffrage, introduced first in New Zealand in 1893. The Nineteenth Amendment of the US Constitution granted the vote to American women in 1920. The franchise was extended to women in the UK in 1918, but they did not achieve equal voting rights with men for a further decade. Ironically, in many ways, winning the right to vote weakened and undermined the women's movement. The struggle for female suffrage had united and inspired the movement, giving it a clear goal and a coherent structure. Furthermore, many activists naïvely believed that in winning suffrage rights, women had achieved full emancipation. It was not until the 1960s that the women's movement was regenerated, with the emergence of feminism's 'second wave'.

The publication in 1963 of Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique* did much to relaunch feminist thought. Friedan (see p. 236) set out to explore what she called 'the problem with no name', the frustration and unhappiness many women experienced as a result of being confined to the roles of housewife and mother. **Second-wave feminism** acknowledged that the achievement of political and legal rights had not solved the 'women's question'. Indeed, feminist ideas and arguments became increasingly radical, and at times revolutionary. Books such as Kate Millett's *Sexual Politics* (1970) and Germaine Greer's *The Female Eunuch* (1970) pushed back the borders of what had previously been considered to be 'political' by focusing attention on the personal, psychological and sexual aspects of female oppression. The goal of second-wave feminism was not merely political

emancipation but 'women's liberation', reflected in the ideas of the growing Women's Liberation Movement. Such a goal could not be achieved by political reforms or legal changes alone, but demanded, modern feminists argued, a more far-reaching and perhaps revolutionary process of social change.

SECOND-WAVE FEMINISM

The form of feminism that emerged in the 1960s and 1970s, and was characterized by a more radical concern with 'women's liberation', including, and perhaps especially, in the private sphere.

Since the first flowering of radical feminist thought in the late 1960s and early 1970s, feminism has developed into a distinctive and established ideology, whose ideas and values challenge the most basic assumptions of conventional political thought. Feminism has succeeded in establishing **gender** and gender perspectives as important themes in a range of academic disciplines, and in raising consciousness about gender issues in public life in general. By the 1990s, feminist organizations existed in all western countries and most parts of the developing world. However, two processes have accompanied these developments. The first is a process of deradicalization, whereby there has been a retreat from the sometimes uncompromising positions that characterized feminism in the early 1970s. This has led to the popularity of the idea of 'postfeminism', which suggests that, as feminist goals have been largely achieved, the women's movement has moved 'beyond feminism'. The second process is one of fragmentation. Instead of simply losing its radical or critical edge, feminist thinking has gone through a process of radical diversification, making it difficult, and perhaps impossible, any longer to identify 'common ground' within feminism. In addition to the 'core' feminist traditions – liberal, socialist/Marxist and **radical feminism** – must now be added postmodern feminism, psychoanalytical feminism, black feminism, lesbian feminism, transfeminism and so on.

GENDER

A social and cultural distinction between males and females, as opposed to sex, which refers to biological and therefore ineradicable differences between women and men.

RADICAL FEMINISM

A form of feminism that holds gender divisions to be the most politically significant of social cleavages, and believes that they are rooted in the structures of domestic life.

Core themes: the politics of the

personal

Until the 1960s, the idea that feminism should be regarded as an ideology in its own right would have been highly questionable. It is more likely that feminism would have been viewed as a sub-set of liberalism and socialism, the point at which the basic values and theories of these two ideologies can be applied to gender issues. The rise of radical feminism changed this, in that radical feminists proclaimed the central political importance of gender divisions, something that no conventional ideology could accept. Conventional ideologies were therefore viewed as inadequate vehicles for advancing the social role of women, and even, at times, criticized for harbouring patriarchal attitudes and assumptions. However, the emergent ideology of feminism was a cross-cutting ideology, encompassing, from the outset, three broad traditions: **liberal feminism**; Marxist or **socialist feminism**; and radical feminism. In addition, the 'core' feminist traditions each contain rival tendencies and have spawned hybrid or 'dual-system' feminisms (such as the attempt to blend radical feminism with certain Marxist ideas), and new feminist traditions have emerged, particularly since the 1980s. It is thus easy to dismiss feminism as hopelessly fragmented, to argue that it is characterized more by disagreement than by agreement. A range of 'common ground' themes can nevertheless be identified within feminism. The most important of these are:

- redefining 'the political'
- patriarchy
- sex and gender
- equality and difference.

LIBERAL FEMINISM

A form of feminism that is grounded in the belief that sexual differences are irrelevant to personal worth, and calls for equal rights for women and men in the public sphere.

SOCIALIST FEMINISM

A form of feminism that links the subordination of women to the dynamics of the capitalist economic system, emphasizing that women's liberation requires a process of radical social change.

Redefining 'the political'

Traditional notions of what is 'political' locate politics in the arena of public rather than private life. Politics has usually been understood as an activity that

takes place within a 'public sphere' of government institutions, political parties, pressure groups and public debate. Family life and personal relationships have normally been thought to be part of a 'private sphere', and therefore to be 'non-political'. Modern feminists, on the other hand, insist that politics is an activity that takes place within all social groups and is not merely confined to the affairs of government or other public bodies. Politics exists whenever and wherever social conflict is found. Kate Millett (1970), for example, defined politics as 'power-structured relationships, arrangements whereby one group of persons is controlled by another'. The relationship between government and its citizens is therefore clearly political, but so is the relationship between employers and workers within a firm, and also relationships in the family, between husbands and wives, and between parents and children.

The definition of what is 'political' is not merely of academic interest. Feminists argue that sexual inequality has been preserved precisely because the sexual division of labour that runs through society has been thought of as 'natural' rather than 'political'. Traditionally, the public sphere of life, encompassing politics, work, art and literature, has been the preserve of men, while women have been confined to an essentially private existence, centred on the family and domestic responsibilities, as illustrated in Figure 8.1. If politics takes place only within the public sphere, the role of women and the question of sexual equality are issues of little or no political importance. Women, restricted to the private role of housewife and mother, are in effect excluded from politics.

Feminists have therefore sought to challenge the divide between 'public man' and 'private woman' (Elshtain, 1993). However, they have not always agreed about what it means to break down the public/private divide, about how it can be achieved, or about how far it is desirable. Radical feminists have been the keenest opponents of the idea that politics stops at the front door, proclaiming instead that 'the personal is the political'. Female oppression is thus thought to operate in all walks of life, and in many respects originates in the family itself. Radical feminists have therefore been concerned to analyse what can be called 'the politics of everyday life'. This includes the process of conditioning in the family, the distribution of housework and other domestic responsibilities, and the politics of personal and sexual conduct. For some feminists, breaking down the public/private divide implies transferring the responsibilities of private life to the state or other public bodies. For example, the burden of child-rearing on women could be relieved by more generous welfare support for families or the provision of nursery schools or crèches at work. Socialist feminists have also viewed the private sphere as political, in that they have linked women's roles within the

conventional family to the maintenance of the capitalist economic system. However, although liberal feminists object to restrictions on women's access to the public sphere of education, work and political life, they also warn against the dangers of politicizing the private sphere, which, according to liberal theory, is a realm of personal choice and individual freedom.

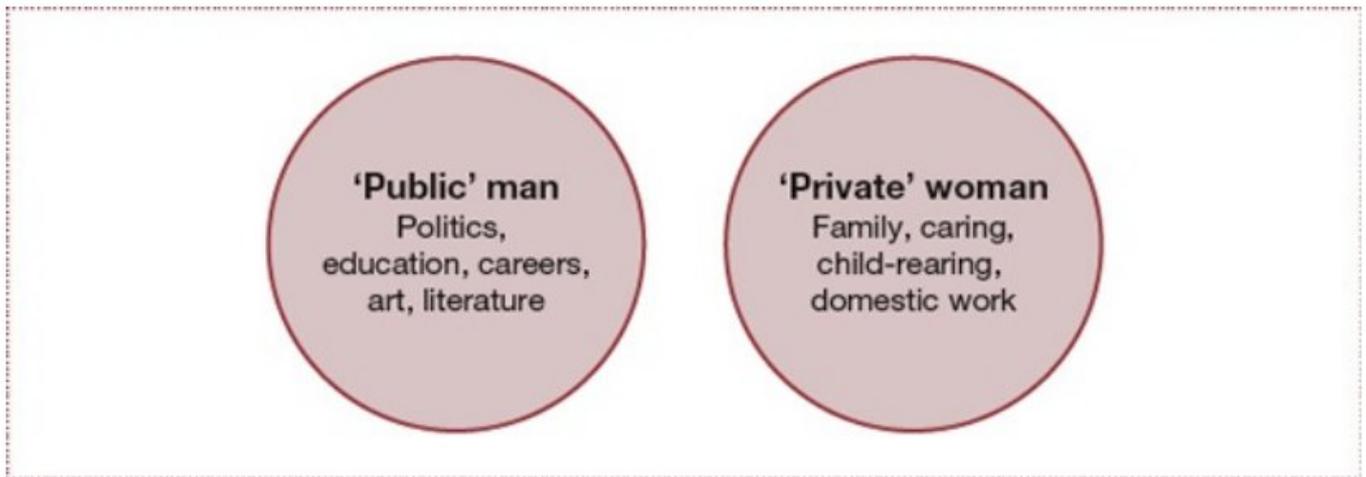


Figure 8.1 The sexual division of labour

Patriarchy

Feminists believe that gender, like social class, race or religion, is a politically significant social cleavage. Indeed, radical feminists argue that gender is the deepest and most politically important of social divisions. Feminists have therefore advanced a theory of 'sexual politics', in much the same way that socialists have preached the idea of 'class politics'. They also refer to 'sexism' as a form of oppression, drawing a conscious parallel with 'racism' or racial oppression. However, conventional political theory has traditionally ignored sexual oppression and failed to recognize gender as a politically significant category. As a result, feminists have been forced to develop new concepts and theories to convey the idea that society is based on a system of sexual inequality and oppression.

Feminists use the concept of '**patriarchy**' to describe the power relationship between women and men. The term literally means 'rule by the father' (*pater* meaning father in Latin). Some feminists employ patriarchy only in this specific and limited sense, to describe the structure of the family and the dominance of the husband-father within it, preferring to use broader terms such as 'male supremacy' or 'male dominance' to describe gender relations in society at large. However, feminists believe that the dominance of the father within the family symbolizes male supremacy in all other institutions. Many would argue, moreover, that the patriarchal family lies at the heart of a systematic process of male domination, in that it reproduces male dominance in all other walks of life: in education, at work and in politics. Patriarchy is therefore commonly used in a broader sense to mean

quite simply 'rule by men', both within the family and outside. Millett (1970), for instance described 'patriarchal government' as an institution whereby 'that half of the populace which is female is controlled by that half which is male'. She suggested that patriarchy contains two principles: 'male shall dominate female, elder male shall dominate younger'. A patriarchy is therefore a hierarchic society, characterized by both sexual and generational oppression.

PATRIARCHY

Literally, rule by the father; often used more generally to describe the dominance of men and subordination of women in society at large.

The concept of patriarchy is, nevertheless, broad. Feminists may believe that men have dominated women in all societies, but accept that the forms and degree of oppression have varied considerably in different cultures and at different times. At least in western countries, the social position of women improved significantly during the twentieth century as a result of the achievement of the vote and broader access to education, changes in marriage and divorce law, the legalization of abortion (see p. 226) and so on. However, in parts of the developing world, patriarchy still assumes a cruel, even gruesome, form: 80 million women, mainly in Africa, are subjected to the practice of circumcision; bride murders still occur in India; and the persistence of the dowry system ensures that female children are often unwanted and sometimes allowed to die.

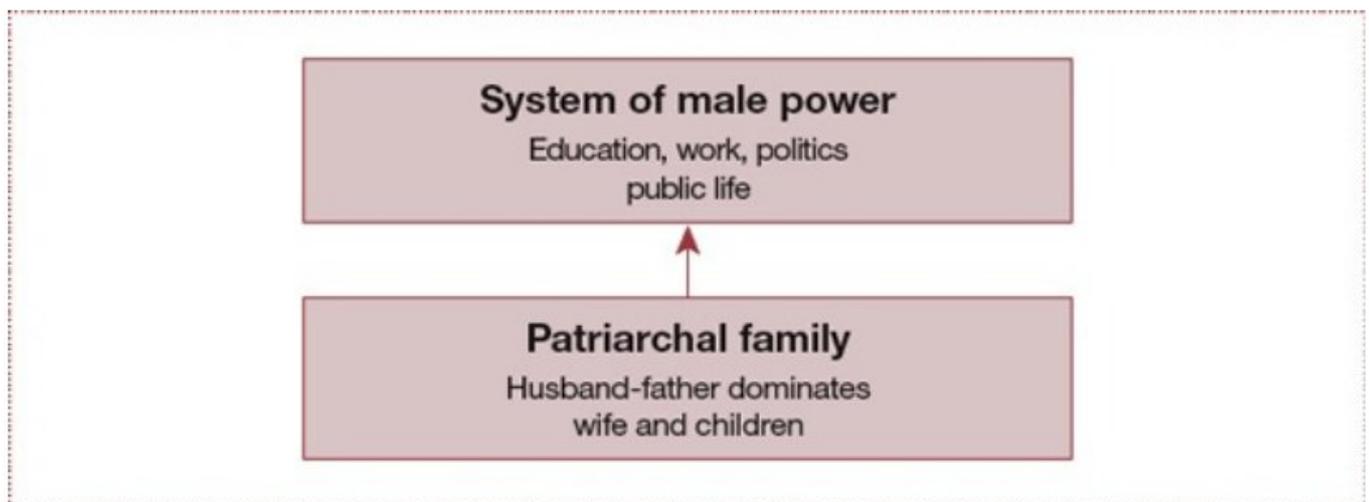


Figure 8.2 Radical feminist view of patriarchy

Feminists do not have a single or simple analysis of patriarchy, however. Liberal feminists, to the extent that they use the term, use it to draw attention to the unequal distribution of rights and entitlements in society at large. The face of patriarchy they highlight is therefore the under-representation of women in senior positions in politics, business, the professions and public life generally. Socialist feminists tend to emphasize the economic aspects of patriarchy. In their view, patriarchy operates in tandem with capitalism,

gender subordination and class inequality being interlinked systems of oppression. Some socialist feminists, indeed, reject the term altogether, on the grounds that gender inequality is merely a consequence of the class system: capitalism, not patriarchy, is the issue. Radical feminists, on the other hand, place considerable stress on patriarchy. They see it as a systematic, institutionalized and pervasive form of male power that is rooted in the family. Patriarchy thus expresses the belief that the pattern of male domination and female subordination that characterizes society at large is, essentially, a reflection of the power structures that operate within domestic life, as illustrated in [Figure 8.2](#).

Sex and gender

The most common of all anti-feminist arguments, often associated with conservatives, asserts that gender divisions in society are 'natural': women and men merely fulfil the social roles for which nature designed them. A woman's physical and anatomical make-up thus suits her to a subordinate and domestic role in society; in short, 'biology is destiny'. The biological factor that is most frequently linked to women's social position is their capacity to bear children. Without doubt, childbearing is unique to the female sex, together with the fact that women menstruate and have the capacity to suckle babies. However, feminists insist that in no way do such biological facts necessarily disadvantage women nor determine their social destiny. Women may be mothers, but they need not accept the responsibilities of motherhood: nurturing, educating and raising children by devoting themselves to home and family. The link between childbearing and child-rearing is cultural rather than biological: women are *expected* to stay at home, bring up their children and look after the house because of the structure of traditional family life. Domestic responsibilities could be undertaken by the husband, or they could be shared equally between husband and wife in so-called 'symmetrical families'. Moreover, child-rearing could be carried out by the community or the state, or it could be undertaken by relatives, as in 'extended' families.

**POLITICAL IDEOLOGIES IN
ACTION ... Legalizing abortion**



EVENTS: In January 1973, the US Supreme Court made a landmark decision on abortion. In *Roe v. Wade*, the Court ruled that criminal laws which prohibit abortion except to save the life of the mother are unconstitutional violations of the right to privacy as protected by the Fourteenth Amendment. Although the Supreme Court judgement had a particularly high profile, it came in the context of a wider shift in favour of legalized abortion. Between 1950 and 1985, abortion was legalized in almost all developed states, although the circumstances in which it could take place and the timescales applied to it differed, sometimes significantly. Currently, about 25 per cent of the world's population live in countries where abortion remains illegal or access to it is highly restrictive, mainly in Latin America, Africa and Asia.

SIGNIFICANCE: The legalization of abortion across much of the world during the second half of the twentieth century was largely a consequence of the campaigning efforts of the women's movement and of feminism's success in reshaping attitudes and values, operating in tandem with concerns over health and medicine. Indeed, in the early 1970s abortion emerged as almost the defining issue of second-wave feminism. The fundamental feminist argument in favour of abortion is that women have a basic and inalienable right to limit their reproduction. However, there is no single feminist theory of abortion. Liberal feminists understand the issue in terms of individual freedom of choice (hence the idea that they are 'pro-choice') and effective access to the public realm. Radical feminists, for their part, have stressed that abortion symbolizes women's sexual and reproductive self-determination, also warning that restricting access to abortion helps to promote patriarchy by institutionalizing motherhood.

Since the late 1970s, abortion has lost its central place in the concerns of western feminism, largely because abortion law has been liberalized, but also because some have seen the issue as

less morally and ideological straightforward. Nevertheless, since the 1980s abortion has been a major political battleground, particularly in the USA, through the tendency of the New Right's politics of morality to coalesce around a 'pro-life' opposition to abortion. This reflects the emergence of an important tendency within US conservatism which is inspired by religious belief and especially the ideas of evangelical Protestantism. However, the extent to which it has been able to 'roll back' abortion law has been limited.

Feminists have traditionally challenged the idea that biology is destiny by drawing a sharp distinction between sex and gender. 'Sex', in this sense, refers to biological differences between females and males; these differences are natural and therefore are unalterable. The most important sex differences are those that are linked to reproduction. 'Gender', on the other hand, is a cultural term; it refers to the different roles that society ascribes to women and men. Gender differences are typically imposed through contrasting stereotypes of 'masculinity' and 'femininity'. As Simone de Beauvoir (see p. 236) pointed out, 'Women are made, they are not born'. Patriarchal ideas blur the distinction between sex and gender, and assume that all social distinctions between women and men are rooted in biology or anatomy. Feminists, in contrast, usually deny that there is a necessary or logical link between sex and gender, and emphasize that gender differences are socially, or even politically, constructed.



PERSPECTIVES ON... GENDER

LIBERALS have traditionally regarded differences between women and men as being of entirely private or personal significance. In public and political life, all people are considered as individuals, gender being as irrelevant as ethnicity or social class. In this sense, individualism is 'gender-blind'.

CONSERVATIVES have traditionally emphasised the social and political significance of gender divisions, arguing that they imply that the sexual division of labour between women and men is natural and inevitable. Gender is thus one of the factors that gives society its organic and hierarchical character.

SOCIALISTS, like liberals, have rarely treated gender as a politically significant category. When gender divisions are significant it is usually because they reflect and are sustained by deeper economic and class inequalities.

FASCISTS view gender as a fundamental division within humankind. Men naturally monopolize leadership and decision-making, while women are suited to an entirely domestic, supportive and subordinate role.

FEMINISTS usually see gender as a cultural or political distinction, in contrast to biological and ineradicable sexual differences. Gender divisions are therefore a manifestation of male power. Difference feminists may nevertheless believe that gender differences reflect a psycho-biological gulf between female and male attributes and sensibilities.

ISLAMISTS have an ultra-conservative view of gender roles, typically characterized by male 'guardianship' over the family, the observation by women of a strict dress code, and restrictions on women's access to aspects of public life.

Most feminists believe that sex differences between women and men are relatively minor and neither explain nor justify gender distinctions. As a result, human nature is thought to be **androgynous**. All human beings, regardless of sex, possess the genetic inheritance of a mother and a father, and therefore embody a blend of both female and male attributes or traits. Such a view accepts that sex differences are biological facts of life but insists that they have no social, political or economic significance. Women and men should not be judged by their sex, but as individuals, as 'persons'. The goal of feminism is therefore the achievement of genderless 'personhood'. Establishing a concept of gender that is divorced from biological sex had crucial significance for feminist theory. Not only did it highlight the possibility of social change – socially constructed identities can be reconstructed or even demolished – but it also drew attention to the processes through which women had been 'engendered' and therefore oppressed.

ANDROGYNY

The possession of both male and female characteristics; used to imply that human beings are sexless 'persons' in the sense that sex is irrelevant to their social role or political status.

Although most feminists have regarded the sex/gender distinction as empow-ering, others have attacked it. These attacks have been launched from

two main directions. The first, advanced by so-called '**difference feminists**', suggests that there are profound and perhaps ineradicable differences between women and men. From this '**essentialist**' perspective, accepted by some but by no means all difference feminists, social and cultural characteristics are seen to reflect deeper biological differences. The second attack on the sex/gender distinction challenges the categories themselves. Postmodern feminists have questioned whether 'sex' is as clear-cut a biological distinction as is usually assumed. For example, the features of 'biological womanhood' do not apply to many who are classified as women: some women cannot bear children, some women are not sexually attracted to men, and so on. If there is a biology–culture continuum rather than a fixed biological/cultural divide, the categories 'female' and 'male' become more or less arbitrary, and the concepts of sex and gender become hopelessly entangled. An alternative approach to gender has been advanced by the trans movement, which seeks to explode the dualistic conception of gender, in which divides the human world is tidily divided into female and male parts. Such thinking is examined later in the chapter, in connection with **transfeminism**.

DIFFERENCE FEMINISM

A form of feminism which holds that there are deep and possibly ineradicable differences between women and men, whether these are rooted in biology, culture or material experience.

ESSENTIALISM

The belief that biological factors are crucial in determining psychological and behavioural traits.

TRANSFEMINISM

A form of feminism that rejects the idea of fixed identities and specifically avows gender and sexual ambiguity.

Equality and difference

Although the goal of feminism is the overthrow of patriarchy and the ending of sexist oppression, feminists have sometimes been uncertain about what this means in practice and how it can be brought about. Traditionally, women have demanded equality with men, even to the extent that feminism is often characterized as a movement for the achievement of sexual equality. However, the issue of equality has also exposed major faultlines within feminism: feminists have embraced contrasting notions of equality and some have entirely rejected equality in favour of the idea of difference. Liberal feminists champion legal and political equality with men. They have supported an equal rights agenda, which would enable women to compete in public life on equal terms with men, regardless of sex. Equality thus means

equal access to the public realm. Socialist feminists, in contrast, argue that equal rights may be meaningless unless women also enjoy social equality. Equality, in this sense, has to apply in terms of economic power, and so must address issues such as the ownership of wealth, pay differentials and the distinction between waged and unwaged labour. Radical feminists, for their part, are primarily concerned about equality in family and personal life. Equality must therefore operate, for example, in terms of child care and other domestic responsibilities, the control of one's own body, and sexual expression and fulfilment.

Despite tensions between them, these egalitarian positions are united in viewing gender differences in a negative light. **Equality feminism** links 'difference' to patriarchy, seeing it as a manifestation of oppression or subordination. From this viewpoint, the feminist project is defined by the desire to liberate women *from* 'difference'. However, other feminists champion difference rather than equality. Difference feminists regard the very notion of equality as either misguided or simply undesirable. To want to be equal to a man implies that women are 'male identified', in that they define their goals in terms of what men are or what men have. The demand for equality therefore embodies a desire to be 'like men'. Although feminists seek to overthrow patriarchy, many warn against the danger of modelling themselves on men, which would require them, for example, to adopt the competitive and aggressive behaviour that characterizes male society. For many feminists, liberation means achieving fulfilment as women; in other words, being 'female identified'.

EQUALITY FEMINISM

A form of feminism that aspires to the goal of sexual equality, whether this is defined in terms of formal rights, the control of resources, or personal power.

Difference feminists are thus often said to subscribe to a '**pro-woman**' position, which accepts that sex differences have political and social importance. This is based on the essentialist belief that women and men are fundamentally different at a psycho-biological level. The aggressive and competitive nature of men and the creative and empathetic character of women are thought to reflect deeper hormonal and other genetic differences, rather than simply the structure of society. To idealize androgyny or personhood and ignore sex differences is therefore a mistake. Women should recognize and celebrate the distinctive characteristics of the female sex; they should seek liberation *through* difference, as developed and fulfilled women, not as sexless 'persons'. In the form of **cultural feminism**, this has led to an emphasis on women's crafts, art and literature, and on experiences that are

unique to women and promote a sense of 'sisterhood', such as childbirth, motherhood and menstruation.

'PRO-WOMAN' FEMINISM

A form of feminism that advances a positive image of women's attributes and propensities, usually stressing creativity, caring and human sympathy, and cooperation.

CULTURAL FEMINISM

A form of feminism that emphasizes an engagement with a woman-centred culture and life-style, and is typically repelled by the corrupting and aggressive male world of political activism.

Types of feminism

Feminism is a cross-cutting ideology. The rival traditions of feminism have largely emerged out of established ideologies or theories, most obviously liberalism and socialism, but also, more recently, ideas such as postmodernism (see p. 59) and psychoanalysis. Such ideologies and theories have served as vehicles for advancing the social role of women because they are generally sympathetic towards equality. Hierarchical or elitist ideologies or theories, in contrast, are associated more commonly with anti-feminism. For instance, traditional conservatism holds that the patriarchal structure of society and the sexual division of labour between 'public' man and 'private' woman is natural and inevitable. Women are born to be housewives and mothers, and rebellion against this fate is both pointless and wrong. At best, conservatives can argue that they support sexual equality on the grounds that women's family responsibilities are every bit as important as men's public duties. Women and men are therefore 'equal but different'.

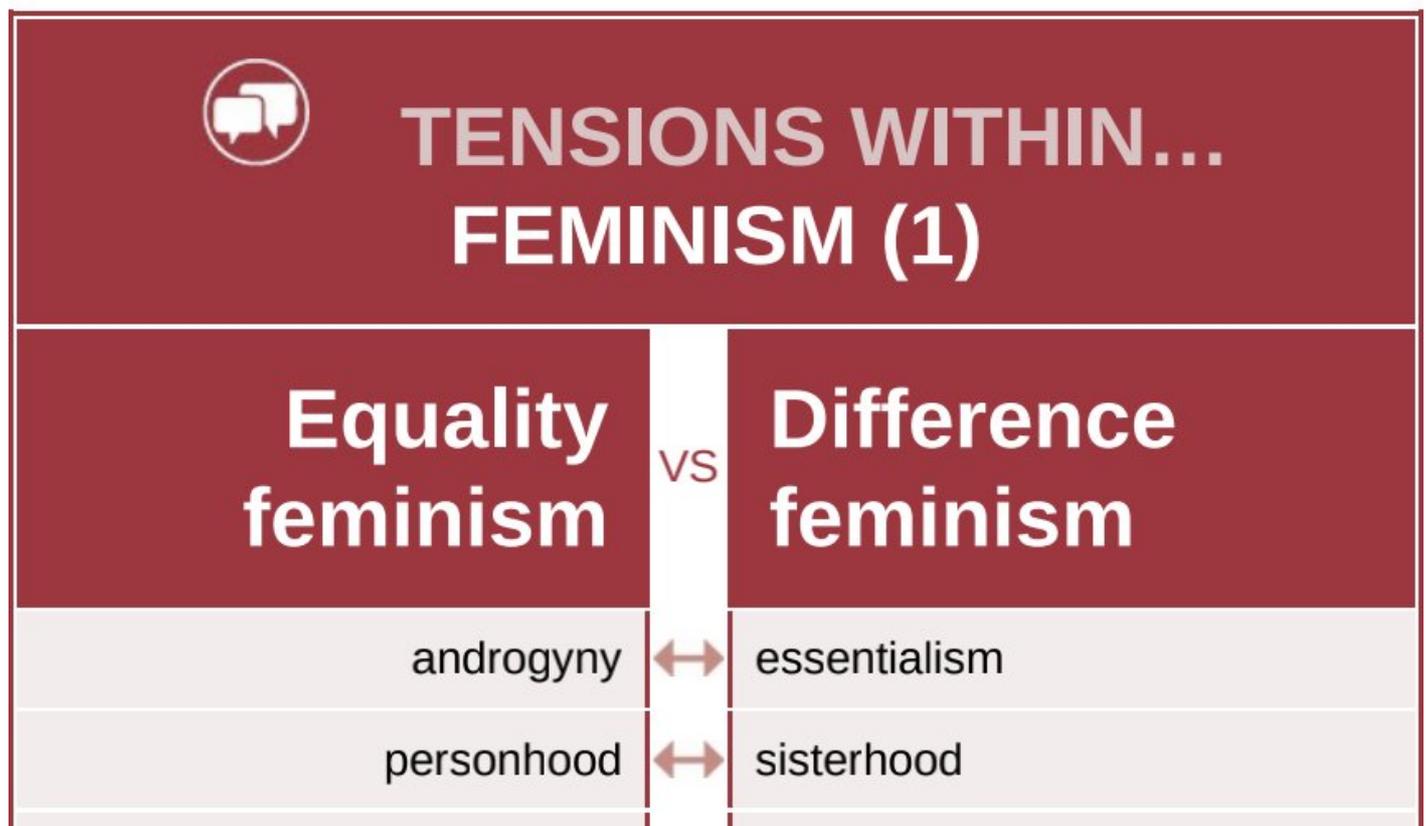
Forms of reactionary feminism have also developed in certain circumstances. This has occurred when the traditional status and position of women has been threatened by rapid social or cultural change. So-called Islamic feminism has this character. In Islamic states, such as Iran, Pakistan and Sudan, the imposition of *sharia* law (see p. 312) and the return to traditional moral and religious principles have sometimes been portrayed as a means of enhancing the status of women, threatened by the spread of western attitudes and values. From this perspective, the veil and other dress codes, and the exclusion of women from public life, have been viewed by some Muslim women as symbols of liberation. Iran is a particularly complex example of this, in that the reimposition of traditionalist values and female dress codes since the 1979 Islamic Revolution (see p. 303) has gone hand in hand with, for instance, a dramatic increase in female participation in higher education. However, from the perspective of conventional feminism, reactionary

feminism is simply a contradiction in terms, reflecting the misguided belief that the traditional public/private divide genuinely afforded women status and protection. Indeed, it provides evidence of the ideological power of patriarchy, through its capacity to recruit women into their own oppression. The major traditions within feminism are the following:

- liberal feminism
- socialist feminism
- radical feminism
- third-wave feminism and beyond.

Liberal feminism

Early feminism, particularly the ‘first wave’ of the women’s movement, was deeply influenced by the ideas and values of liberalism. The first major feminist text, Wollstonecraft’s *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* ([1792] 1967), argued that women should be entitled to the same rights and privileges as men on the grounds that they are ‘human beings’. She claimed that the ‘distinction of sex’ would become unimportant in political and social life if women gained access to education and were regarded as rational creatures in their own right. John Stuart Mill’s *On the Subjection of Women* ([1869] 1970), written in collaboration with Harriet Taylor, proposed that society should be organized according to the principle of ‘reason’, and that ‘accidents of birth’ such as sex should be irrelevant. Women would therefore be entitled to the rights and liberties enjoyed by men and, in particular, the right to vote.



human rights	↔	women's rights
gender equality	↔	sexual liberation
abolish difference	↔	celebrate difference
sex/gender divide	↔	sex equals gender
transcend biology	↔	embrace biology
pro-human	↔	pro-woman
men are redeemable	↔	men are 'the problem'
engagement with men	↔	feminist separatism

'Second-wave' feminism also has a significant liberal component. Liberal feminism has dominated the women's movement in the USA; for instance, the publication of Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique* marked the resurgence of feminist thought in the 1960s. The 'feminine mystique' to which Friedan referred is the cultural myth that women seek security and fulfilment in domestic life and 'feminine' behaviour, a myth that serves to discourage women from entering employment, politics and public life in general. She highlighted what she called 'the problem with no name', by which she meant the sense of despair and deep unhappiness many women experience because they are confined to a domestic existence and are thus unable to gain fulfilment in a career or through political life. In 1966, Friedan helped to found and became the first leader of the National Organization of Women (NOW), which has developed into a powerful pressure group and the largest women's organization in the world.

The philosophical basis of liberal feminism lies in the principle of individualism (see p. 27), the belief that the human individual is all-important and therefore that all individuals are of equal moral worth. Individuals are entitled to equal treatment, regardless of their sex, race, colour, creed or religion. If individuals are to be judged, it should be on rational grounds, on the content of their character, their talents, or their personal worth. Liberals express this belief in the demand for equal rights: all individuals are entitled to participate in, or gain access to, public or political life. Any form of discrimination against women in this respect should therefore be prohibited. Wollstonecraft, for example, insisted that education, in her day the province of men, should be opened up to women. J.S. Mill argued in favour of equal citizenship and political rights. Indeed, the entire suffrage movement was

based on liberal individualism and the conviction that female emancipation would be brought about once women enjoyed equal voting rights with men. Liberal feminist groups therefore aim to break down the remaining legal and social pressures that restrict women from pursuing careers and being politically active. They seek, in particular, to increase the representation of women in senior positions in public and political life.

Liberal feminism is essentially reformist: it seeks to open up public life to equal competition between women and men, rather than to challenge what many other feminists see as the patriarchal structure of society itself. In particular, liberal feminists generally do not wish to abolish the distinction between the public and private spheres of life. Reform is necessary, they argue, but only to ensure the establishment of equal rights in the public sphere: the right to education, the right to vote, the right to pursue a career and so on. Significant reforms have undoubtedly been achieved in the industrialized West, notably the extension of the franchise, the 'liberalization' of divorce law and abortion, equal pay and so on. Nevertheless, far less attention has been paid by liberal feminists to the private sphere, specifically to the sexual division of labour and distribution of power within the family.

Liberal feminists have usually assumed that women and men have different natures and inclinations, and therefore accept that, at least in part, women's leaning towards family and domestic life is influenced by natural impulses and so reflects a willing choice. This certainly applied in the case of nineteenth-century feminists, who regarded the traditional structure of family life as 'natural', but it is also evident in the work of modern liberal feminists such as Friedan. In *The Second Stage* (1983) Friedan discussed the problem of reconciling the achievement of 'personhood', made possible by opening up broader opportunities for women in work and public life, with the need for love, represented by children, home and the family. Friedan's emphasis on the continuing and central importance of the family in women's lives has been criticized by more radical feminists for contributing to a 'mystique of motherhood'. Others have condemned it for suggesting that women can 'have it all', being successful in terms of career advancement as well as in terms of motherhood and homemaking.

Finally, the demand for equal rights, which lies at the core of liberal feminism, has principally attracted those women whose education and social backgrounds equip them to take advantage of wider educational and career opportunities. For example, nineteenth-century feminists and the leaders of the suffrage movement were usually educated, middle-class women who had the opportunity to benefit from the right to vote, pursue a career or enter public life. The demand for equal rights assumes that all women would have

the opportunity to take advantage of, for example, better educational and economic opportunities. In reality, women are judged not only by their talents and abilities, but also by social and economic factors. If emancipation simply means the achievement of equal rights and opportunities for women and men, other forms of social disadvantage – for example, those linked to social class and race – are ignored. Liberal feminism may therefore reflect the interests of white, middle-class women in developed societies but fail to address the problems of working-class women, black women and women in the developing world.

Socialist feminism

Although some early feminists subscribed to socialist ideas, socialist feminism only became prominent in the second half of the twentieth century. In contrast to their liberal counterparts, socialist feminists have not believed that women simply face political or legal disadvantages that can be remedied by equal legal rights or the achievement of equal opportunities. Rather, they argue that the relationship between the sexes is rooted in the social and economic structure itself, and that nothing short of profound social change, some would say a social revolution, can offer women the prospect of genuine emancipation.

The central theme of socialist feminism is that patriarchy can only be understood in the light of social and economic factors. The classic statement of this argument was developed in Friedrich Engels' *The Origins of the Family, Private Property and the State* ([1884] 1976). Engels suggested that the position of women in society had changed fundamentally with the development of capitalism and the institution of private property. In pre-capitalist societies, family life had been communistic, and 'mother right' – the inheritance of property and social position through the female line – was widely observed. Capitalism, however, being based on the ownership of private property by men, had overthrown 'mother right' and brought about what Engels called 'the world historical defeat of the female sex'. Like many subsequent socialist feminists, Engels believed that female oppression operates through the institution of the family. The 'bourgeois family' is patriarchal and oppressive because men wish to ensure that their property will be passed on only to *their* sons. Men achieve undisputed paternity by insisting on monogamous marriage, a restriction that is rigorously applied to wives, depriving them of other sexual partners but, as Engels noted, is routinely ignored by their husbands. Women are compensated for this repression by the development of a 'cult of femininity', which extols the attractions of romantic love but, in reality, is an organized hypocrisy designed to protect male privileges and property. Other socialist feminists have proposed that the

traditional, patriarchal family should be replaced by a system of communal living and 'free love', as advocated by early utopian socialists such as Charles Fourier (1772–1837) and Robert Owen (see p. 124).

Most socialist feminists agree that the confinement of women to a domestic sphere of housework and motherhood serves the economic interests of capitalism. Some have argued that women constitute a 'reserve army of labour', which can be recruited into the workforce when there is a need to increase production, but easily shed and returned to domestic life during a depression, without imposing a burden on employers or the state. At the same time, women's domestic labour is vital to the health and efficiency of the economy. In bearing and rearing children, women are producing the next generation of capitalism's workers. Similarly, in their role as housewives, women relieve men of the burden of housework and child-rearing, allowing them to concentrate their time and energy on paid and productive employment. The traditional family provides the worker with a powerful incentive to find and keep a job because he has a wife and children to support. The family also provides male workers with a necessary cushion against the alienation and frustrations of life as 'wage slaves'. Male 'breadwinners' enjoy high status within the family and are relieved of the burden of 'trivial' domestic labour.

Although socialist feminists agree that the 'women's question' cannot be separated from social and economic life, they are profoundly divided about the nature of that link. Gender divisions clearly cut across class cleavages, creating tension within socialist feminist analysis about the relative importance of gender and social class, and raising particularly difficult questions for Marxist feminists. Orthodox Marxists insist on the primacy of class politics over sexual politics. This suggests that class exploitation is a deeper and more significant process than sexual oppression. It also suggests that women's emancipation will be a by-product of a social revolution in which capitalism is overthrown and replaced by socialism. Women seeking liberation should therefore recognize that the 'class war' is more important than the 'sex war'. Such an analysis suggests that feminists should devote their energies to the labour movement rather than support a separate and divisive women's movement.

However, modern socialist feminists have found it increasingly difficult to accept the primacy of class politics over sexual politics. In part, this was a consequence of the disappointing progress that had been made by women in state-socialist societies such as the Soviet Union, suggesting that socialism does not, in itself, end patriarchy. For modern socialist feminists, sexual oppression is every bit as important as class exploitation. Many of them

subscribe to a form of neo-Marxism, which accepts the interplay of economic, social, political and cultural forces in society. They therefore refuse to analyse the position of women in simple economic terms and have, instead, given attention to the cultural and ideological roots of patriarchy. For example, Juliet Mitchell (1971), suggested that women fulfil four social functions: (1) they are members of the workforce and are active in production; (2) they bear children and thus reproduce the human species; (3) they are responsible for socializing children; and (4) they are sex objects. From this perspective, liberation requires that women achieve emancipation in each of these areas, and not merely that the capitalist class system is replaced by socialism.

Radical feminism

One of the distinctive features of second-wave feminism is that many feminist writers moved beyond the perspectives of existing political ideologies. Gender differences in society were regarded for the first time as important in themselves, needing to be understood in their own terms. Liberal and socialist ideas had already been adapted to throw light on the position of women in society, but neither acknowledged that gender is the most fundamental of all social divisions. During the 1960s and 1970s, however, the feminist movement sought to uncover the influence of patriarchy not only in politics, public life and the economy, but in all aspects of social, personal and sexual existence. This trend was evident in the pioneering work of Simone de Beauvoir, and was developed by early radical feminists such as Eva Figes, Germaine Greer (see p. 237) and Kate Millett (see p. 236).

 TENSIONS WITHIN... FEMINISM (2)		
Liberal feminism	vs	Radical feminism
female emancipation	↔	women's liberation
gender inequality	↔	patriarchy
individualism	↔	sisterhood

conventional politics	↔	the personal is political
public/private divide	↔	transform private realm
access to public realm	↔	gender equality
equal rights/opportunities	↔	sexual politics
reform/gradualism	↔	revolutionary change
political activism	↔	consciousness raising



KEY FIGURES IN... FEMINISM



Mary Wollstonecraft (1759–97) A British social theorist, Wollstonecraft was a pioneer feminist thinker, drawn into radical politics by the French Revolution. Her *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792) stressed the equal rights of women, especially in education, on the basis of the notion of 'personhood'. Wollstonecraft's work drew on an Enlightenment liberal belief in reason, but developed a more complex analysis of women as the objects and subjects of desire; it also presented the domestic sphere as a model of community and social order.



Simone de Beauvoir (1906–86) A French novelist,

playwright and social critic, de Beauvoir's work reopened the issue of gender politics and foreshadowed the ideas of later radical feminists. In *The Second Sex* (1949), she developed a complex critique of patriarchal culture, in which the masculine is represented as the positive or the norm, while the feminine is portrayed as the 'other' – fundamentally limiting women's freedom and denying them their full humanity. De Beauvoir placed her faith in rationality and critical analysis as the means of exposing this process.



Betty Friedan (1921–2006) A US political activist, Friedan is sometimes seen as the 'mother' of women's liberation. In *The Feminine Mystique* (1963) (often credited with having stimulated the emergence of second-wave feminism), Friedan attacked the cultural myths that sustained domesticity, highlighting the sense of frustration and despair that afflicted suburban American women confined to the roles of housewife and mother. In *The Second Stage* (1983), she nevertheless warned that the quest for 'personhood' should not encourage women to deny the importance of children, the home and the family.



Kate Millett (born 1934) A US feminist writer, political activist and artist, Millett developed a comprehensive critique of patriarchy in western society and culture that had a profound impact on radical feminism. In *Sexual Politics* (1970), Millett analysed the work of male writers, from D. H. Lawrence to Norman Mailer, highlighting their use of sex to degrade and undermine women. In her view, such literature reflects deeply patriarchal attitudes that pervade culture and society at large, providing evidence that patriarchy is a historical and social constant.



Germaine Greer (born 1939) An Australian writer, academic and journalist, Greer's *The Female Eunuch* (1970) helped to stimulate radical feminist theorizing. Its principal theme, the extent to which male domination is upheld by a systematic process of sexual repression, was accompanied by a call for women to re-engage with their libido, their faculty of desire and their sexuality. In *Sex and Destiny* (1985), Greer celebrated the importance of childbearing and motherhood, while *The Whole Woman* (1999) criticized 'lifestyle feminists' and the alleged right to 'have it all'.



Jean Bethke Elshtain (1941–2013) A US political philosopher and social critic, Elshtain has made a major contribution to feminist scholarship and wider political debates. In *Public Man, Private Woman* (1993), she examined the role of gender in forming the division between the public and private spheres in political theory. Her *Women and War* (1987) discussed the perceptual lenses that determine the roles of men and women in war, highlighting the myths that men are 'just warriors' and women are 'beautiful souls' to be saved.



Andrea Dworkin (1946–2005) A feminist writer and activist, Dworkin was a trenchant critic of patriarchal culture and an advocate of radical lesbianism. In *Woman Hating* (1976) and (with Catharine MacKinnon) *Pornography and Civil Rights* (1988), Dworkin argued that pornography is the tool by which men control, objectify and subjugate women. With MacKinnon, she drafted a Minnesota ordinance that proposed that victims of rape

and other sex crimes should be able to sue pornographers for damage, based on the belief that pornography supports sexual violence against women.



bell hooks (born 1952) A cultural critic, feminist and writer, Gloria Jean Watkins (better known by her pen name bell hooks) has emphasized that feminism must be approached through the lenses of gender, race and class. In her classic *Ain't I a Woman* (1985), hooks examined the history of black women in the USA. Arguing that in the USA racism took (and takes) precedence over sexism, she advanced a powerful critique of the implicit racism of the white women's movement. Her other books include *Feminism is for Everyone* (2000) and *Outlaw Culture* (2006).

Figes's *Patriarchal Attitudes* (1970) drew attention not to the more familiar legal or social disadvantages suffered by women, but to the fact that patriarchal values and beliefs pervade the culture, philosophy, morality and religion of society. In all walks of life and learning, women are portrayed as inferior and subordinate to men, a stereotype of 'femininity' being imposed on women by men. In *The Female Eunuch* (1970), Greer suggested that women are conditioned to a passive sexual role, which has repressed their true sexuality as well as the more active and adventurous side of their personalities. In effect, women have been 'castrated' and turned into sexless objects by the cultural stereotype of the 'eternal feminine'. In *Sexual Politics* (1970), Millett described patriarchy as a 'social constant' running through all political, social and economic structures and found in every historical and contemporary society, as well as in all major religions. The different roles of women and men have their origin in a process of 'conditioning': from a very early age boys and girls are encouraged to conform to very specific gender identities. This process takes place largely within the family – 'patriarchy's chief institution' – but it is also evident in literature, art, public life and the economy. Millett proposed that patriarchy should be challenged through a process of '**consciousness-raising**', an idea influenced by the Black Power movement of the 1960s and early 1970s.

CONSCIOUSNESS-RAISING

Strategies to remodel social identity and challenge cultural inferiority by an emphasison pride, self-

The central feature of radical feminism is the belief that sexual oppression is the most fundamental feature of society and that other forms of injustice – class exploitation, racial hatred and so on – are merely secondary. Gender is thought to be the deepest social cleavage and the most politically significant; more important, for example, than social class, race or nation. Radical feminists have therefore insisted that society be understood as ‘patriarchal’ to highlight the central role of sex oppression. Patriarchy thus refers to a systematic, institutionalized and pervasive process of gender oppression.

For most radical feminists, patriarchy is a system of politico-cultural oppression, whose origins lie in the structure of family, domestic and personal life. Female liberation thus requires a sexual revolution in which these structures are overthrown and replaced. Such a goal is based on the assumption that human nature is essentially androgynous. However, radical feminism encompasses a number of divergent elements, some of which emphasize the fundamental and unalterable difference between women and men. An example of this is the ‘pro-woman’ position, particularly strong in France and the USA. This position extols the positive virtues of fertility and motherhood. Women should not try to be ‘more like men’. Instead, they should recognize and embrace their sisterhood, the bonds that link them to all other women. The pro-woman position therefore accepts that women’s attitudes and values are different from men’s, but implies that in certain respects women are superior, possessing the qualities of creativity, sensitivity and caring, which men can never fully appreciate or develop. Such ideas have been associated in particular with ecofeminism, which is examined in [Chapter 9](#).

The acceptance of deep and possibly unalterable differences between women and men has led some feminists towards cultural feminism, a retreat from the corrupting and aggressive male world of political activism into an apolitical, woman-centred culture and life-style. Conversely, other feminists have become politically assertive and even revolutionary. If sex differences are natural, then the roots of patriarchy lie within the male sex itself. ‘All men’ are physically and psychologically disposed to oppress ‘all women’; in other words, ‘men are the enemy’. This clearly leads in the direction of feminist separatism. Men constitute an oppressive ‘sex-class’ dedicated to aggression, domination and destruction; so the female ‘sex-class’ is therefore the ‘universal victim’. For example, Susan Brownmiller’s *Against Our Will* (1975) emphasized that men dominate women through a process of physical and sexual abuse. Men have created an ‘ideology of rape’, which amounts to a ‘conscious process of intimidation by which all men keep all women in a state

of fear'. Brownmiller argued that men rape because they can, because they have the 'biological capacity to rape', and that even men who do not rape nevertheless benefit from the fear and anxiety that rape provokes among all women.

	Liberal feminism	Radical feminism	Socialist feminism	Black feminism	Postmodern feminism
Key themes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Individualism • Rights • Legal and political equality 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Patriarchy • Personal is political • Sisterhood 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Class oppression • Bourgeois family • Capitalism and patriarchy linked 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Racism • Multiple oppressions • Differences between women 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Anti-foundationalism • Discourse • Deconstruct gender identities
Core goal	Equal access for women and men to the public realm	Radical transformation of all spheres of life	Restructure economic life to achieve gender equality	Counter interconnected racial, gender and class structures	Embrace fluid, free-floating gender identities

Figure 8.3 Types of feminism

Feminists who have pursued this line of argument also believe that it has profound implications for women's personal and sexual conduct. Sexual equality and harmony is impossible because all relationships between women and men must involve oppression. Heterosexual women are therefore thought to be 'male identified', incapable of fully realizing their true nature and becoming 'female identified'. This has led to the development of political lesbianism, which holds that sexual preferences are an issue of crucial political importance for women. Only women who remain celibate or choose lesbianism can regard themselves as 'woman-identified women'. In the slogan attributed to Ti-Grace Atkinson: 'feminism is the theory; lesbianism is the practice' (Charvet, 1982). However, the issues of separatism and lesbianism have deeply divided the women's movement. The majority of feminists see such uncompromising positions as a distorted reflection of the misogyny, or woman-hating, that pervades traditional male society. Instead, they remain faithful to the goal of sexual equality and the belief that it is possible to establish harmony between women and men in a non-sexist society. Hence, they believe that sexual preferences are strictly a matter of personal choice and not a question of political commitment.

Developments in modern feminism

Since the 1970s, it has become increasingly difficult to analyse feminism simply in terms of the threefold division into liberal, socialist and radical traditions. Tensions within the 'core' traditions have sometimes deepened, and, on other occasions, boundaries between the traditions have been blurred. New forms of feminism have also emerged, including third-wave feminism, transfeminism and postfeminism.

Third-wave feminism

The term 'third-wave feminism' has been adopted increasingly since the 1990s by a younger generation of feminist theorists for whom the campaigns and demands of the 1960s and 1970s women's movement have seemed to be of limited relevance to their own lives. This was both because of the emergence of new issues in feminist politics and because of the political and social transformations that second-wave feminism has brought about (Heywood and Drake, 1997). If there is a unifying theme within third-wave feminism it is a more radical engagement with the politics of difference, especially going beyond those strands within radical feminism that emphasize that women are different *from* men by showing a greater concern with differences *between* women. In so doing, third-wave feminists have tried to rectify an over-emphasis within earlier forms of feminism on the aspirations and experiences of middle-class, white women in developed societies, thereby illustrating the extent to which the contemporary women's movement is characterized by diversity and hybridity.

This has allowed the voices of, among others, low-income women, women in the developing world and 'women of colour' to be heard more effectively. Black feminism has been particularly effective in this respect, challenging the tendency within conventional forms of feminism to ignore racial differences and to suggest that women endure a common oppression by virtue of their sex. Especially strong in the USA, black feminism portrays sexism and racism as linked systems of oppression, and highlights the particular and complex range of gender, racial and economic disadvantages that confront women of colour.

In being concerned about issues of 'identity', and the processes through which women's identities are constructed (and can be reconstructed), third-wave feminism also reflects the influence of **poststructuralism**. Influenced particularly by the ideas of the French philosopher, Michel Foucault (1926–84), poststructuralism has drawn attention to the link between power and systems of thought using the idea of **discourse**, or 'discourses of power'. In crude terms, this implies that knowledge is power. Poststructuralist or postmodernist feminists question the idea of a fixed female identity, also rejecting the notion that insights can be drawn from a distinctive set of

women's experiences. From the poststructural perspective, even the idea of 'woman' may be nothing more than a fiction, as supposedly indisputable biological differences between women and men are, in significant ways, shaped by gendered discourses (not all women are capable of bearing children, for example). However, it is questionable whether the consistent application of poststructural or postmodern analysis is compatible with the maintenance of a distinctively feminist political orientation.

POSTSTRUCTURALISM

An intellectual tradition, related to postmodernism (see p. 59), that emphasizes that all ideas and concepts are expressed in language that itself is enmeshed in complex relations of power.

DISCOURSE

Human interaction, especially communication: discourse may disclose or illustrate power relations.

Transfeminism

Transfeminism (also written as 'trans feminism') emerged out of feminism's encounters, from the early 1990s onwards, with the concerns of people who identify themselves as **transgender** or **transsexual**. Although what is called 'trans politics' is not associated with a single or simple theory of gender, its central theme is a rejection of the binary conception of gender, with a stress, instead, on gender and sexual ambiguity, sometimes based on the idea of a gender continuum. People are thus seen as neither women nor men (Beasley, 2005). From the trans perspective, gender is not something ascribed to individuals by society, or imposed on them by cultural stereotypes; instead it is a matter of self-definition based on inner feelings. In this vein, Butler (2006) proposed a concept of gender as a reiterated social performance, rather than the expression of a prior reality.

TRANSGENDER

Denoting or relating to people who do not conform to prevailing expectations about gender, usually by crossing over or moving between gender identities.

TRANSSEXUAL

Denoting or relating to people who do not conform to the sex they were assigned at birth, and who may seek to realign their gender and their sex through medical intervention.

Such thinking has nevertheless been viewed as deeply problematic by traditional feminists, not least because of the importance they placed on culturally-defined gender in explaining the oppression of women. However, over time, there has been a greater willingness by feminists to take on board issues raised by the trans movement, while supporters of trans politics have

increasingly recognized the extent to which its thinking may be applicable to all women (Scott-Dixon, 2006). Not only does this reflect widening support within feminism for a more personalized and nuanced approach to gender, but it also demonstrates a growing awareness of the parallels and overlaps that exist between sexism and **transphobia**.

TRANSPHOBIA

Prejudice against or dislike of people who do not conform to prevailing expectations about gender identity.

Postfeminism

The process of deradicalization within feminism has nevertheless been most marked in relation to so-called 'postfeminism', which is defined by a rejection of second-wave feminist issues and themes, rather than by an attempt to update or remodel them. For instance, Camille Paglia (1990) attacked the tendency of feminism to portray women as 'victims', and insisted on the need for women to take greater responsibility for their own sexual and personal conduct. Similarly, in *Fire with Fire* (1994), Naomi Wolf called on women to use the 'new female power', based on the belief that the principal impediments to women's social advancement are psychological rather than political. Confronted by such tendencies, established feminists have sometimes protested against the rise of what they see as 'life-style feminism'. In *The Whole Woman* (1999), Germaine Greer attacked the notion that women are 'having it all', arguing that they have abandoned the goal of liberation and settled for a pho-ney equality that amounts to assimilation, aping male behaviour and male values. This, perhaps, highlights the capacity of patriarchy to reproduce itself generation after generation, in part by subordinating women through creating bogus forms of emancipation.

Feminism in a global age

The advance of globalizing tendencies in modern society raises two important issues for feminists and feminism. First, to what extent has feminism, or can feminism, become a truly global ideology? Second, how should feminists respond to the process of globalization: is globalization an agent of female emancipation or its enemy? In relation to the first question, feminism has always had a global orientation: the desire to foster sisterhood is, by its nature, transnational. This has certainly been reflected in the worldwide growth of women's groups and organizations, which can now be found across Africa, Asia and Latin America, far beyond feminism's western heartland. This was also underlined by the 1995 Beijing Fourth World Conference on

Women, which involved 189 governments and more than 5,000 representatives from some 2,100 non-governmental organizations. However, does evidence of an apparently worldwide women's movement indicate a genuinely global willingness to engage with feminist thinking? The key issue here is: are feminist ideas universally applicable, or are they tainted by Eurocentrism and therefore bear an indelibly western imprint? Postcolonial theorists, in particular, argue that women's rights are essentially a western concept, and may thus not be applicable to the non-western world. From this perspective, sexual equality may be seen both to devalue women's traditional roles as homemakers and mothers, and to undermine traditional institutions and cultural practices. Feminists, for their part, have argued that the postcolonial-ist emphasis on cultural rights over women's rights amounts to a thinly veiled defence of patriarchy.

On the second issue, the impact of globalization on the role and status of women, contrasting positions have been adopted. Pro-globalization theorists have argued that globalization has opened up opportunities for women in the developing world, not least through the 'feminization of work'. Examples of this include the growth of the Asian electronics industry and the clothing assembly plants in Mexico. The developed world has also witnessed the growth of new 'feminized', or 'pink-collar' jobs, through the expansion of service industries such as retailing, cleaning and data processing. Such trends have, arguably, helped to advance a sexual revolution, not least by giving women higher status and greater financial independence. However, although the number of women in paid work has grown, such trends have also been associated with growing vulnerability and exploitation. Not only are women workers usually cheap (in part because of their seemingly abundant supply), but they also tend to be employed in economic sectors where there are fewer workers' rights and weak labour organizations. Women workers therefore suffer from the double burden of undertaking low-paid work while still being expected to shoulder the burden of domestic responsibilities. Thanks to the advance of neoliberal globalization, this also often happens in the context of reduced state support for health, education and basic food subsidies. Many feminists, particularly those whose feminist orientation is not grounded in liberal individualism, have therefore found a home within the wider anti-globalization or anti-capitalist movement.



QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

- Why and how have feminists challenged conventional notions of politics?
- Why has the distinction between sex and gender been so important

to feminist analysis?

- What role does patriarchy play in feminist theory?
- Why do some feminists reject the goal of gender equality?
- To what extent is feminism compatible with liberalism?
- In what sense is radical feminism revolutionary?
- Is socialist feminism a contradiction in terms?
- Are the differences within feminism greater than the similarities?
- Have the core liberal, socialist and radical feminist traditions been exhausted?
- To what extent can feminism engage with the politics of difference?
- Is feminism compatible with trans theory?
- Have the objectives of feminism largely been achieved?



FURTHER READING

Bryson, V., *Feminist Political Theory: An Introduction*, 2nd edn (2003). A thorough and accessible introduction to the development and range of feminist theories.

Butler, J., *Gender Trouble* (2006). A stimulating book that challenges traditional feminism's 'essentialist' notion of the female, and proposes a concept of gender as reiterated social performance.

Schneir, M., *The Vintage Book of Feminism: The Essential Writings of the Contemporary Women's Movement* (1995). A useful and comprehensive collection of writings from major feminist theorists.

Walter, M., *Feminism: A Very Short Introduction* (2005). A historical account of feminism that explores its earliest roots as well as the issues that have concerned feminism at different points in its development.