

FEMINIST THEORY

Examining Branches of Feminism

Feminism Defined

What follows are different branches of feminism theory that are recognized by feminists and feminist scholars. These different theories of feminism are widely acknowledged and taught in women's studies courses, gender studies courses, and the like.

Often people have created their own definition of feminism to best suit them. The definitions here are theoretical, and are an example of the diversity among feminists. *Why* one believes in feminism and *what* their ideas are to make feminism a reality is the primary source of conflict within the feminism movement.

You may find that you believe in the theory of feminism, but do not see yourself fitting into the branches of feminism below, that is common. You can believe that women and men should be politically, economically and socially equal for your own reasons and hold your own ideas pertaining how you can make that happen. If that is the case you are likely practicing some form of feminism whether or not you directly associate yourself with the feminist movement or theory.

Feminism

Feminism is theory that men and women should be equal politically, economically and socially.

This is the core of all feminism theories. Sometimes this definition is also referred to as "core feminism" or "core feminist theory." Notice that this theory does not subscribe to differences between men and women *or* similarities between men and women, nor does it refer to excluding men or only furthering women's causes. Most other branches of feminism do.

Feminist

One who believes in that men and women should be equal politically, economically and socially as defined above.

Cultural Feminism

The theory that there are fundamental personality differences between men and women, and that women's differences are special and should be celebrated. This theory of feminism supports the notion that there are biological differences between men and women. For example, "women are kinder and more gentle than men," leading to the mentality that if women ruled the world there would be no wars.

Cultural feminism is the theory that wants to overcome sexism by celebrating women's special qualities, women's ways, and women's experiences, often believing that the "woman's way" is the better way.

Ecofeminism

Ecofeminism is a theory that rests on the basic principal that patriarchal philosophies are harmful to women, children, and other living things. Parallels are drawn between society's treatment of the environment, animals, or resources and its treatment of women. In resisting patriarchal culture, eco-feminists believe they are also resisting plundering and destroying of the Earth. They feel that the patriarchal philosophy emphasizes the need to dominate and control unruly females and the unruly wilderness.

Ecofeminism views patriarchal society to be a structure which has developed over last 5,000 years, while considering matriarchal societies (a society in which females are centre of the societal roles and structures, to be the original hierarchy.

Individualist, or Libertarian Feminism

Individualist feminism is based upon individualism or libertarian (minimum government or anarchocapitalist) philosophies. The primary focus is individual autonomy, rights, liberty, independence and diversity. Individualist Feminism tends to widely encompass men and focuses on barriers that both men and women face due to their gender.

Material Feminism

A movement that began in the late 19th century focused on liberating by improving their material condition. This movement revolved around taking the "burden" off women in regards to housework, cooking, and other traditional female domestic jobs.

Moderate Feminism

This branch of feminism tends to be populated mostly by younger women or women who perceive that they have not directly experienced discrimination. They often believe that the ideals of the feminism movement are no longer viable, and therefore question the need for further efforts. They often view feminism as overbearing and too overt. Often this group espouses feminists ideas while not accepting or wanting the label of 'feminist'.

National Organization for Women (N.O.W.) Feminism a.k.a. Gender Feminism

This theory is based on the notion that in order for men and women to be equal (as the core of 'feminism' states), women must be granted some special privileges, and men should not be the central issue or 'barrier' in feminism. N.O.W. feminism

encompasses only women and fights to offer special privileges to women with the intent of making women equal to men.

Radical Feminism

Radical feminism is the breeding ground for many of the ideas arising from feminism. Radical feminism was the cutting edge of feminist theory from approximately 1967-1975. It is no longer as universally accepted as it was then, and no longer serves to solely define the term, "feminism."

This group views the oppression of women as the most fundamental form of oppression, one that cuts across boundaries of race, culture, and economic class. This is a movement intent on social change, change of rather revolutionary proportions.

Radical feminism questions why women must adopt certain roles based on their biology, just as it questions why men adopt certain other roles based on gender. Radical feminism attempts to draw lines between biologically-determined behavior and culturally-determined behavior in order to free both men and women as much as possible from their previous narrow gender roles.

Amazon Feminism

Amazon feminism focuses on physical equality and is opposed to gender role stereotypes and discrimination against women based on assumptions that women are supposed to be, look, or behave as if they are passive, weak and physically helpless. Amazon feminism rejects the idea that certain characteristics or interests are inherently masculine (or feminine), and upholds and explores a vision of heroic womanhood. Amazon feminists tend to view that all women are as physically capable as all men.

Separatists

Separatists are often wrongly depicted as lesbians. These are the feminists who advocate separation from men; sometimes total, sometimes partial.

The core idea is that "separating" (by various means) from men enables women to see themselves in a different context. Many feminists, whether or not separatist, think this is a necessary "first step," for personal growth. However, they do not necessarily endorse permanent separation.

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