

Feminism and feminist epistemology and science sociology essay



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The word "feminism" is very challenging and difficult to describe specifically but it has a greater value in today's society mostly in the developing areas like Nepal, Srilanka, Bangladesh etc. The women of developing countries are facing so many problems like inequality from political issues to even in their house. To eradicate such inequality problem from the existing society the word feminism developed. "Feminism refers to the beliefs that are injustices against women and they have been devalued and denied full equality" (1).

Feminism helps to exaggerate the women roles, power and their contribution to the society. It gives the full freedom to the women about their choices of lives. This feminism refers to the equality between men and women. They have equal rights and responsibility towards the society.

In the mid-1800s the term feminism was used to refer to "the qualities of females" (2). The term Feminism was derived from the French word 'feministe' in the 1892 after the first international women's conference in Paris. The term "feministe" means belief in and advocacy of equal rights for women based on the idea of the equality of the sexes. Although the term "feminism" in English is rooted in the mobilization or women suffrage in Europe and the US during the late 19th and early 20th century (3). The feminist movement is divided in to three waves;

First wave begin during the 19th century and it refers on "a newer feminist movement that focused as much on fighting social and cultural inequalities as further political inequalities" (4). The second wave in the early of 1960s, "feminism saw cultural and political inequalities as inextricably linked and this movement encouraged women to understand aspects of their own lives as

deeply politicized and reflective of a sexist structure of power" (5). The third wave movement arise ideology of " A post structuralist interpretation of gender and sexuality" in the early 1990s (6). These three movements encourage the women for their rights and their equality. The ideology of feminism starts influencing throughout the society after this movement. It brings a revolution in the way men and women are equal to each other and effects fundamental change in society. It entails that the women have equal rights and duty as a man in all aspect.

What is feminist epistemology and science?

Epistemologist focus on " the nature, origins and the limits of human knowledge" (7). It is the nature of knowledge itself and its study focuses for acquiring knowledge and differentiate between truth and falsehood.

Epistemology concerns every scientific discipline which helps to the collective efforts of human beings. In the modern days the epistemology is the debate between the empiricism (i. e., knowledge is obtained through experience) and rationalism (knowledge can be acquired through reason). There are many aspects of knowledge like social, economical and many more but many of the epistemologist focus on the social aspect of knowledge where the production creation and discovery concerns. " Social epistemology is the study of the relevance of social relations, interests, and institutions to knowledge" (8).

Feminism has also roles in social investigation of knowledge and its epistemology is concerned to the " whose knowledge" is being considered.

Feminist epistemologist does not confess about the empirical evidence but instead of that it suggests knowing the social contexts and social beliefs
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because of its factuality. Feminist epistemologists of science typically argue that the way science is done includes cultural and social standards in the description of nature. Gender is both part of the cultural idea that shapes how nature is described and is also described by the process of science.

The feminist critiques of science:

The feminist critique of sciences is a crucial subject where the science may be negatively impacted by postmodern or feminist critiques in a similar way to humanities and social sciences. There is also a debate between the realism and relativism. Realism is that there is an objective world which people learn about. Relativism is the idea that truth is "relative" in one way or another. It is easy to fall into the trap that a feminist social epistemology- and any field which it makes a statement about, even science-is relativist, and many thinkers have addressed this, either making cases that relativism is correct or making claims for a realist feminist science.

Background for the feminist studies of objectivity in sciences:

Objectivity is commonly taken to be the extent to which we allow our scientific beliefs to be driven by "some impartial and non arbitrary criteria rather than by our wishes as to how things ought to be" (9). 1 Science is more objective than other areas such as art and literary criticism. To be a science the research programs must follow some criteria, certain norms and rules (i. e., scientific method) rather than the prejudices, guesses and emotions.

According to the great philosophers, " Thomas Kuhn and Paul Feyerabend suggested the views that emphasize the degree to which what we call science is constituted by factors that seem to fall outside the realm of justification". They are not trying to focus on the extent to which science is independent of 'who does' it but instead of that it raise the questions about the real level of objectivity in science and how the scientist outline or modeled which hypothesis or theories pass for scientific knowledge. It is the crucial things to distinct between the real sciences and the rest things (non sciences).

Another philosopher, " Quine also raised a question about how autonomous science is from the other subjects such as prejudices, guesses and emotions i. e., metaphysical commitments". He suggested that science is not separable from other social, political beliefs that we have. The ideas given by Kuhn and Quine raise a question about the objectivity of science and these doubts arose well within what is sometime considered traditional philosophy of science. 9

When the issue of gender was raised mostly many feminists were interested in determining what the possible factors of gender counts are as a scientific knowledge. A feminist tries to find out how the gender plays a role in recreation of scientific knowledge. Moreover, Gender is related with the sexism here the word sexism refers to the male, female and assumption about the superiority of one gender to the other gender however there is no conclusive evidence for that assumption. The way of women are ignoring and demoralizing in almost every field so the feminists began to criticize on those things in which science excluded women, ignored scientific issues pertaining <https://assignbuster.com/feminism-and-feminist-epistemology-and-science-sociology-essay/>

to women and even the scientific theories influenced by the women's societal views reveal a question about the real objectivity of science.

Science as Social (Helen Longino & Harding):

The problem seen by Harding regarding the objectivity in science is that she assumed the traditional conceptions of objectivity. "To revealing and assessing the role of cultural and personal interests and values in sciences is very difficult to measure and assess. If the role is being played by cultural and personal interests and values then it is judged to be bad for science, or if the role played is considered inappropriately large then it is argued that it need have a way to eliminate or mitigate this role, thus increasing the extent to which science is objective"(10). Harding was the person who finds the way to reveal and assess interests and values in science is to examine them from an alternate point of view, and she claims that current conceptions of objectivity are inadequate for these tasks. Helen Longino also faces the same problem as seen by Harding and Longino tries to solve this problem by focusing on how the scientific community is comprised and behaves instead of not giving attention to what individual scientists are doing. Longino claims that science is social, in the sense that doing science requires the interaction of individuals.

Feminism and post-feminism:

Feminism refers to the belief that women are equal to men. Some feminists argue that women need is not equality rather they need to be recognized and valued in their differences from men but some feminists believe that women need liberation from oppression instead of equal treatment and

respect for their differences to men. "Feminism seeks to improve the lot of
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those people who have been made into women, but it cannot rightly be said that feminism seeks to improve the condition of women - that would be an impossible, self-contradictory mission" (11).

According to Rosalind Delmar, " it makes more sense to speak of a plurality of feminism than a single one" (1986: 9). It means that there must be some underlying commitment that all feminists share and make them feminist.

Valerie Bryson says that all feminists share " the belief that women are disadvantaged in comparison with men, and that this disadvantage is not a natural and inevitable result of biological difference but something that can and should be challenged and changed" (Bryson 1993: 192). But some feminists would reject even this, perhaps on the grounds that women's biology does disadvantage them but that recent technologies such as the contraceptive pill allow women to overcome their biological limitations (Firestone 1970).

" Post-feminists believe that women have achieved second wave goals while being critical of third wave feminist goals. The term was first used in the 1980s to describe a backlash against second-wave feminism. It is now a label for a wide range of theories that take critical approaches to previous feminist discourses and includes challenges to the second wave's ideas".(39) Other post-feminists say that feminism is no longer relevant to today's society.(40) Amelia Jones wrote that the post-feminist texts which emerged in the 1980s and 1990s portrayed second-wave feminism as a monolithic entity and criticized it using generalizations.(41)

One of the earliest uses of the term was in Susan Bolotin's 1982 article "Voices of the Post-Feminist Generation", published in New York Times Magazine. This article was based on a number of interviews with women who largely agreed with the goals of feminism, but did not identify as feminists. (42) Some contemporary feminists, such as Katha Pollitt or Nadine Strossen, consider feminism to hold simply that "women are people". Views that separate the sexes rather than unite them are considered by these writers to be sexist rather than feminist.'(43)(44)

Conclusion:

39. Wright, Elizabeth (2000). *Lacan and Postfeminism (Postmodern Encounters)*. Totem Books. ISBN 978-1-84046-182-9.

40.^ Modleski, Tania (1991). *Feminism without women: culture and criticism in a " postfeminist" age*. New York: Routledge. pp. 188. ISBN 0-415-90416-1.

41.^ Jones, Amelia. " Postfeminism, Feminist Pleasures, and Embodied Theories of Art", in *New Feminist Criticism: Art, Identity, Action*, ed. by Joana Frueh, Cassandra L. Langer and Arlene Raven. New York: HarperCollins, 1994. 16-41, 20.

42.^Rosen, Ruth (2001). *The world split open: how the modern women's movement changed America*. New York, N. Y.: Penguin. pp. 444. ISBN 0-14-009719-8.

43.^Pollitt, Katha (1995). *Reasonable creatures: essays on women and feminism*. New York: Vintage Books. ISBN 978-0-679-76278-2.

44 Strossen, Nadine (1995). *Defending pornography: free speech, sex, and the fight for women's rights*. New York, N. Y.: Scribner. ISBN 978-0-684-19749-4.