

Feminist

Business



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In the early 1960s, a woman looking for a job would open her newspaper to find two lists of employment advertisements: one for men, and another for women. Not surprisingly, the jobs available to men were challenging positions with potential for advancement, while those available to women were typically low-paying and involved mundane clerical tasks.

Regardless of their education or abilities, women were systematically excluded from opportunities in the workplace. Those women who did establish careers were often paid less than men—an estimated 51 cents per dollar—for the same work. Today, as a direct result of the women's liberation movement of the 1960s—which urged the passage of antidiscrimination laws in the workplace and challenged societal beliefs that “a woman's place was in the home”—the barriers that prevented women from seeking careers have been eliminated. Although many feminists maintain that women still do not have full equality in the professional world, most people agree that feminism has dramatically expanded women's job opportunities. Over half of the work force is now composed of women, and many women have attained positions of prestige. Sharon Donovan, director of the Alexis de Tocqueville Institute, reports that as of 1996, women owned an estimated 8 million businesses.

In politics, the global average for women legislators rose from 7.4 percent to 11 percent between 1975 and 1995. Furthermore, according to the Women's History Project, “now we see women in literally thousands of occupations which would have been almost unthinkable just one generation ago: dentist, bus driver, veterinarian, airline pilot, and phone installer.” Clearly, the advancement of women within the workplace is among feminism's many accomplishments, successes that include voting rights, economic

independence and property rights for women, equal opportunities for education, and a greater awareness of rape and domestic violence. However, not everyone agrees that women's entrance into the workplace has been entirely beneficial to women. Some contend that women are now forced to sacrifice their personal lives— either by choosing not to have families or by severely restricting the time spent with their families—in order to survive within a competitive workplace.

As columnist Suzanne Fields explains, Feminists' changes have made it easier for my daughter to have broader choices than women had growing up when feminism was in its insurgency. She knows she has work options if she chooses them, options that the 1950s generation of mothers did not have. But she has no illusions about what it means to be a working mother. A pressured and stressful job can't compete in the quality of life categories with cooking for her husband and son. Furthermore, some contemporary women report that feminism simply doubled their responsibilities.

Whereas women of the 1950s were responsible for domestic duties such as cooking, cleaning, and child care, many women today still take on a large proportion of these duties—in addition to a demanding career. Both feminists and “ post-feminists”—those who are critical of the classic tenets and goals of feminism—agree that finding a balance between work and family is a crucial issue for women. However, the two groups propose very different solutions to this problem. According to post-feminists, women should shift their priorities from careers to family. Danielle Crittenden, former president of the Independent Women's Forum and the author of *What Our Mothers Didn't Tell Us: Why Happiness Eludes the Modern Woman*, suggests that <https://assignbuster.com/feminist/>

women should marry and bear children at an early age, stay home to raise their children, and then pursue careers later in life. Many post-feminists argue that, although women deserve the right to work and receive equal pay for their work, women are happier and more fulfilled in the home—as reflected by polls reporting that the majority of young mothers under 25 prefer the lifestyle of the 1950s.

According to writer Amy C. Goldman, feminists should recognize that traditional gender roles can be beneficial to both men and women. She claims that “ a better form of feminism would be not to rebel against ‘ gender roles,’ but instead to assert the value of these roles and to ensure their continuing existence. . . .

It is where distinctions between the sexes are properly maintained that men and women complement each other and promote each other’s happiness.” Goldman and others assert that feminists who criticize traditional gender roles devalue the importance of motherhood. Most feminists, on the other hand, object to the notion that women should revert to traditional gender roles. In their view, the difficulty women experience in managing work and family responsibilities demonstrates a need for changes within the workplace and the home. Betty Friedan, founder of the National Organization for Women and author of *The Feminine Mystique*, which acted as a catalyst for the women’s liberation movement of the 1960s, contends that the two primary challenges facing contemporary feminism are to restructure the workplace to create more flexibility for parents, and to alter the assumption that women should bear more of the child-rearing and domestic responsibilities than men.

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She writes that “ what women and men today need [are] real choices about having children . . . without paying an inordinate price or facing dilemmas in their careers. We need to restructure hours and conditions of work.

The technology of work today . . . urge[s] us to flextime, with staggered hours of starting and leaving work, and variable schedules during the work week.” In addition to more flexible working hours, Friedan and other feminists claim, a national child care program would enable both single and married mothers to balance the responsibilities of work and family. The opposing views represented by Crittenden and Friedan are part of a larger conflict between conservative and liberal perspectives on feminism.

Conservatives, such as Crittenden, believe that feminism has harmed women and society by de-emphasizing the importance of the traditional family and transforming social norms that discouraged women from engaging in premarital sex. On the other hand, liberals, such as Friedan, defend these developments as important steps in helping women attain status equal to men. In the chapters: What Is the Status of Women in America?, How Has Feminism Affected Society?, Is Feminism Obsolete?, and What Should the Goals of Feminism Be?, *Feminism: Opposing Viewpoints* offers a wide variety of opinions about the legacies and the future of the feminist movement.