

Radical feminism versus liberal feminism

[Sociology](#), [Feminism](#)



Feminist theories are an extension of feminism into theoretical and philosophical discourse. They aim at understanding of the nature of gender inequality. They in turn examine women's social roles and life experiences. While in general some provide a critique of social relationships. Most feminist theories also focus on analysing gender inequality and the promotion of women's rights, interests and issues. Among such theories are the Liberal feminism and the Radical feminism theories.

While Liberal and Radical feminism both seek to ensure that women have access to resources and human rights in a gender equal environment they however do not necessarily employ similar methods in achieving these results. Each has its own distinct reason behind whatever methods they engage to achieve their goals. Wikipedia the free internet dictionary defines feminism as "the belief that women have equal political, social, and sexual, intellectual and economic rights as men do. It is a discourse that involves various movements, theories and philosophies which are concerned with the issues of gender differences."

The adaptation of the equality for women and the campaign for women's rights and interests". Ritzer (1992) identifies feminism as that body of theories which analyse the social world from the point of view of women and other minority groups and the major objective is to investigate the situations and experience of women in diverse societies. Britannica encyclopaedia identifies the term feminism as used to describe a political or economic, cultural, or economic movement aimed at establishing equal rights and legal protection for women. It involves political, cultural sociological theories.

As well as philosophies concerned with issues of gender differences. It also is a movement that advocates for women's rights and interests. Patriarchy according to Robert (1991) is " derived from a Greek word Patria means father and arche means to rule, beginning, and origins. A male head of the family exercising autocratic authority or by extension a member of the ruling class, government of a society controlled by senior men. " Scafer (2000) describes a radical group as a group that is set apart from others because of obvious physical differences.

According to Bryson in Haralambos and Holborn (2000), " radical feminism is a theory that views women as an oppressed group which has to struggle for its liberation against its oppressors. " According to Harton and Hunt , " a liberal is one who accepts the social system as basically sound but feels that extensive reforms maybe needed. " Liberal feminism is the first form of feminism recorded; it asserts the equality of men and women, through political and legal reform. It's mostly individualistic thus it focuses mainly on women's ability to show and maintain their equality through their own action and choices .

It looks closely at the interactions that occur between men and women in the public sphere . Liberal feminism cites such interactions as the starting ground from where to transform society into a more gender equitable place . However other issues important to liberal feminists also include reproductive rights , abortion access, sexual harassment voting , education, fair compensation for work , affordable healthcare , and bringing to light the

frequency of sexual and domestic abuse against women.

This philosophy tends to have a neutral vision towards different gender.

It requires women to mould themselves to fit a citizenship that already exists. On the other hand Radical feminism is a movement that got its inspiration largely from the Marxist theory. It addresses issues Liberal feminism overlooked. It is a “current” within feminism that pays a great deal of attention to the theory of patriarchy. According to Haralambos, Horlborn and Heald (2000), “Radical feminism blames the exploitation of women on men.” The term Radical is derived from the Latin word Radix, radic, meaning the root.

Radical feminists strongly believe that the root cause of the oppression of women emanates from the patriarchal society that they exist in. The main perpetrators being male. They identify patriarchy as a system of power that organises society into a complex of relationships based on an assumption of males being the more superior of the sexes. The end result in such societies is the oppression of women by men. Radical feminists identify only one solution, to challenge and completely overthrow patriarchy by whatever means possible. Including opposing standard gender roles. Whatever they see as male oppression of women calls for a reordering of society”, Wikipedia the internet free dictionary. Liberal feminists generally work for the eradication of institutional bias and the implication of better laws. They legally challenge ideas and practices that result in women being seen as second class citizens. They do not challenge capitalism, patriarchy or any other fundamental structures of society. They advocate for transformational

changes. Liberal feminists wish to achieve gender equality by working with the system rather than overthrowing it, for example liberals do not call for the abolishment of the marriage institution instead they want the institution to be structured in such a way that it is not oppressive and imbalanced. In contrast Radicals are extremists and they strongly believe in a revolutionary change. Radicals on the left wing according to Henslin (1995) believe that subjugation of women is the most basic and fundamental cause of oppression. Radicals therefore believe that the only way to deal with that oppression is to have a complete radical change.

Unlike the liberals, they call for the eradication of the existing structures that result in women being oppressed. Campbell and Warsaw (1970) postulate that radical feminism aims to challenge and overthrow patriarchy, opposing gender roles and what they identify as male oppression of women. Liberal feminist movement is preferred by government than other forms of feminism movement's. The liberals see value in working with the system therefore usually the liberal feminists work hand in hand with the governments.

For example in the United States of America Liberal Feminism have historically worked for the ratification of the Equal Rights Amendment which ensures that men and women are treated as equals under democratic laws that also influence important spheres of women's lives including reproduction, work and equal pay. In Britain they supported such measures as the Sex Discrimination Act (1975) and the Equal Pay Act (1970) in the hope that these would help end discrimination. Whereas radical feminists don't

work closely with the government and neither does the government desire to work with them.

To them the government also represents within it patriarch. At the same time the government views the radicals more often than not undesirable as they advocate certain changes that do not necessarily work hand in hand with what the government desires. Most times conflict occurs between the two. Radical feminism places emphasis on the oppression of women by men . This idea distinguishes the Radical theory from the Liberal theory as the later concentrates on the oppression of both men and women.

Unlike the radical feminists, liberal feminist take into consideration less dominant men who are oppressed by other men. Thus liberals view gender inequality as power that men have as a group over women and also the power that some men have over women. According to Valerie Bryson (1999) radical feminists see women as an oppressed group who had to struggle for their own liberation. Radical feminists view society and especially the society and especially the family as the key institution oppresses women in modern society. Similarly, liberal feminist also believe that the social system catalyses gender inequality.

They believe that society should not impose separate roles for women and those they should be allowed to compete freely with men and they should enjoy the same privileges and opportunities. Radical feminists challenge and thrive to completely over throw patriarchy, by opposing the normal gender roles. They believe that male domination over women is as a result of gendered roles. Such roles have a diminishing effect on the importance of

women is society. They argue that men exploit women because of the free domestic labour that they provide.

Women are excluded from other important issues such as politics and positions of power and influence. On the same note liberal feminists identify gender roles as one of the main reasons responsible for gender inequality. They believe that childhood conditioning prepares the children for the inflexible and rigid gender roles that they take up in the future. Valarie Bryson (1999) identifies Radical feminism, “ it tends to ignore variations in experience of oppression of women of different classes and ethnic background. Radical feminism originated from the west.

Most radicals are white hence radical feminism tends to concentrate on those problems that affected the white women. Very little attention is paid to those that affected the black women. Similarly, liberal feminism originates from the western hemisphere hence most who subscribe to this school of thought are white women . According to Giddens (2004), “ liberal feminists aim for gradual change in the political, economic and social systems of western societies. ” Therefore liberal feminism too tends to ignore the experiences of women in other societies.

The liberal feminists have played a huge role in ensuring that women in Zimbabwe have access to resources and opportunities . They set up organisations that see to the welfare of women. For example the Musasa Project. This project aids mostly women who would have been subjected to violence and the aid is for free. It has assisted women to come to terms

with issues such as physical abuse by spouses and boyfriends as well as to help them realise that it is not right for them to be abused in such ways.

Likewise radical feminists have fought for women to have equal access as men to resources. Through doing so several groups have been formed by the Radical feminists in Zimbabwe organisations such as WOZA and Girl Child. WOZA, Women of Zimbabwe Arise is an organisation that was started in 2003 by women who felt compelled to empower female voices in Zimbabwe. Their main objective was to achieve social justice for women as well as to provide them with a forum on which they could speak about the things they want for their country.

In conclusion both liberal and radical feminism provide women all over the world with a platform to share their experiences. They both involve the formation of organisations that provide a voice for women to be heard. While Liberal feminists challenge only ideas and practises that treat women as second class citizens. They concentrate mostly on the public sphere issues, for example representation of women in politics and women being paid equal salaries with men when performing similar jobs.

While on the other hand the radical feminists challenge the private interaction that exists between men and women. They concentrate on the private sphere issues, for example non-rights to sexuality, rape and violence. The end of the day both theories work towards enabling women to achieve their full potential

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Compare and contrast Radical and Liberal Feminism