

Outline and assess
feminist explanations
of gender equality in
the contemporary u...



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Outline and assess Feminist explanations of gender equality in the contemporary UK Feminist thinkers such as Anne Oakley will point to evidence which shows the women face more inequality in the workplace and home than men for example it can be seen that more women are in part time employment or the secondary sector as it is described by Barron and Norris than men who are more likely to be in full time employment, so women are paid less than men and have lower status.

Feminists point to the patriarchal nature of society as the basis for inequality of women in the workplace. Feminists believe that the fact that society is inherently patriarchal as seen in many social institutions such as politics and the mass media it therefore caters to the needs of men and puts barriers to prevent women from reaching higher positions in the workplace i. e. 'the glass ceiling'. Feminists also highlight the concept of the 'glass cliff' where women are put in positions of power with greater risks of failure and criticism.

Marxist Feminists who believe that capitalism creates inequality due to its nature argue that more fundamental changes are needed to society to tackle inequality and consequently gender equality. Marxist feminists recommend a total upheaval of the nature of the capitalist system. Marxist feminists argue that women's subordination suits the need of capitalism as they are part of the reserve army of labour which puts them at a disadvantage and therefore are beneficial to the operation of capitalism. However Marxist feminists are criticised heavily by postmodernists who question traditional Marxist feminist arguments as they do not take into account the considerable social change which has taken place in the 19th and 20th century which has contributed to

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the feminisation of the workplace and women are more likely to be paid more than men.

Radical feminists argue that patriarchy is the supreme cause of gender equality. Radical feminists say that all institutions are patriarchal which reinforces men's dominance over women in both the private sphere in the family and personal relationships and in the public sphere in economy and politics. Radical feminists point to rape and physical as methods through which men have secured and maintained their power both of which can be linked to the natural biological differences between sexes. Radical feminist similarly to Marxist feminists do not acknowledge the social changes which have made it more accessible for women to enter the high status jobs.

Liberal feminism argues that gender inequality must be understood in the context of gender equality, feminists argue that gender role socialisation is to blame for the reproduction of the division of labour in the workplace. Anne Oakley argues that the subordination of women is taught at an early age and therefore the dominance of the housewife position in the family leads to subordination of women in the workplace. However a problem with his approach is the extent to which social and cultural attitudes have caught up with the law and the potential of winning a sexual discrimination cases.

Postmodern Feminists question feminists as equalities and discrimination legislations mean that the fight for women's rights, freedoms and equal opportunities have been won politically and legally. Postmodern feminists argue that women as a group are too diverse and therefore not one group

can account for all women. Postmodern feminists argue that we should focus our attention on differences rather than equality.

Black feminists are critical of other forms of feminists for being too ethnocentric and that all women experience patriarchy differently. Black feminists also argue that feminism fails to address the consequences of slavery and colonialism on the lives of black women.

Functionalist and New right thinkers argue that men and women perform different social roles due to innate biological differences. However due to the belief in meritocracy functionalist argue that if a person is willing to work hard and be determined than any person regardless of gender can succeed.

Traditional Marxists take a gender blind approach to class as they believe that focusing on gender differences which fragments the working class, they view the working class as a identical group.

In conclusion many of the traditional strands of feminism can be seen to be out dated as they do not acknowledge the social changes of the past century. New equality and discrimination legislation have made it so that women are treated equally in the economic and political worlds.