

Comprehensive perspective of radical feminism



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In Rosemarie Putnam Tong's book, *Feminist Thought: A More Comprehensive Introduction*, she describes the perspective of radical feminism. By splitting radical feminism into two different parts, the radical-libertarian feminists and the radical-cultural feminists, Tong shows how two parties that have the same basic theory and goal can have significant differences.

In the beginning of the chapter, Tong points out that "a feminist must insist the sex/gender system is the fundamental cause of women's oppression" (Tong, p. 46). This differs from the liberal view of feminism because the radical feminists want an entirely new system opposed to working with the system for change.

Tong illustrates two very different methods for achieving a solution to women's oppression, the radical-libertarian and the radical-cultural feminists. The radical-libertarian feminists oppose the concept of femininity and all things including reproductive, mothering and sexual roles. They believed in an androgynous society which combines both masculine and feminine characteristics exemplified by society. "This expressed radical feminists' original desire to transcend the limits of the sex/gender system by daring women to be masculine as well as feminine" (Tong, p. 47). The radical-cultural feminists differs from radical-libertarian because it rejects masculinity and encourages women to be more like women and emphasizes the values and virtues associated with women (Tong, p. 47).

Both methods have conflicting ideas about sex, reproduction, and mothering. The radical-libertarians believe in all forms of sexual expression and freedom as long as pleasure is achieved for both parties. Any form of sexual

restriction is looked at as cruel (Tong, p. 62). Pornography is looked at as a way to control sexuality (p. 68). On the other hand, the radical-cultural feminists see male sexuality as flawed (Tong, p. 62).

When looking at reproduction and mothering, radical-libertarian feminists look at reproduction as a weakness. They are also against biological motherhood and prefer reproduction to be done artificially. Radical-cultural feminists see reproduction as a woman's source of power, hence men always trying to control it. The best choice is for women to be mothers on their own terms (Tong, p. 80-81).

Planned Parenthood founder, Margaret Sanger was one of the cornerstone representatives of radical feminist movement of the twentieth century. In her book, *Woman and the New Race*, Sanger discusses birth control and women's rights to her own body. As she states clearly in the beginning of the section, "no woman can call herself free who does not own and control her body. No woman can call herself free until she can choose consciously whether she will or will not be a mother" (Sanger, 138). Sanger compares both man and woman and the effects of pregnancy on both of them. Though men do suffer from the consequences of the situation, Sanger feels women suffer much more. The woman is the one who has to face the physical difficulty of bearing and rearing the unwanted children" (Sanger, p. 139).

Like many liberal feminists, Sanger touches on the fact that a change needs to be made. Unlike other feminists though, Sanger took action. Regardless of what is right, the fact is that women will never gain freedom until women take it for themselves. Women should not accept but challenge as pointed

out by Sanger. Instead of looking into the past like most of society would, look at what should be. Before it is a man's problem, it is a woman and she should therefore be able to decide for herself (Sanger, p. 139).

"Birth control is woman's problem. The quicker she accepts it as hers alone, the quicker will society respect motherhood" (Sanger, p. 139). Sanger brings up an important fact about motherhood. No one can enjoy something they never really wanted in the first place. By giving women the right to choose, society is making it more likely for woman to be satisfied and enjoy motherhood. By just giving woman the choice is a satisfying enough step for Sanger. This relates to radical feminism in that as Tong stated earlier, Sanger wanted a completely new system of women's right to her own body rather than just fixing what society saw as acceptable (Sanger, p. 139).

Kate Millett's Theory of Sexual Politics relates to radical feminism by showing how thoroughly culture and society are dominated by men. The central thesis to this theory of sexual politics is that when one group rules another, the relationship between the two is political. When this is carried out over a long period of time it develops into a belief. She defined sex as a status category that contained political implications. Such areas in society like the military, industry, technology, universities, science, political office, finance, and police force are all powered by males (Millett, p. 219). Politics equals power and according to Millett, males dominate female and elder males dominate younger (Millett, p. 220).

Millett also touches point on democracies, aristocracy, and patriarchy. In a democracy, females have not held office except in small areas. This differs

from an aristocracy in that women are permitted to hold power and the elder male rule is not present either. In a patriarchy, men hold power over women, children, and most areas of society (Millett, p. 220).

Millett's beliefs of sexual politics can be related to Tong's original theory of radical feminism. Millet wished to destroy the sex/gender system and create a new society where men and women are equal throughout society. Millett also believed in the idea of androgyny and that it was only valid if feminine and masculine qualities are worthy enough separately (Tong, p. 51). This androgynous person must combine the balance of the best masculine and feminine characteristics (Tong, p. 53).

Tong ends chapter two with a critique of radical feminism. This theory of women is shown to be fascinated by roles and stereotypes that ignore the flaws of women. It is also described as being a historical by social feminists. Radical Feminism is the root to women's oppression. Women realize their strength and power and want society to acknowledge that. Women are given few choices in a male dominated society. Sanger and Millett focus on the lack of choices when dealing with birth control and political power. Both want a change and an entirely new system.