

# Evaluate feminist views on the role and functions of religion in society today.

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



Evaluate feminist views on the role and functions of religion in society today. Feminists see religion as a patriarchal institution; maintaining male dominance over women by making them believe it is god's will. Feminists believe that women are controlled by religions in several ways, for example, dress code, arranged marriage, lifestyle, and education. However functionalists believe otherwise and argue that its function is not to oppress women but to keep society stable whilst Marxists believe that religion oppresses the working class not females. Feminists argue that women's oppression is shown in almost every religion as they criticise that in almost all the religions, the gods are male. Supernatural beings and religious professionals are overwhelmingly male, and in many religions, women play a secondary role in worship. In traditional religious societies, women tend to have fewer options and less favourable treatment. Females are largely absent in sacred texts in general. In Catholicism Women are seen as "unclean" and "impure" and so should not be given roles of power within the church, this shows women's inferiority as they cannot have the same roles as men, showing that religion justifies patriarchy by maintaining male dominance and backs up the feminists point that it keeps women in control and stops them from fighting against it. The church also commands women to take obedient roles through their scriptures by saying "He is in the glory of God; but woman is in the glory of the man", this maintains male dominance and oppresses women even further as they are seen as the men's possession, justified by religion as it says it in the bible. Judaism also instils gender inequality as Women who are menstruating should stay away from men, children and the community showing that women are inferior to

men. Feminist sociologist Simone de Beauvoir argues that Women are deceived by religion into thinking of themselves as equal to men, making it an instrument of deception where it is used by the oppressors (men) to control the oppressed (women). Many women believe that their suffering in this world will be rewarded in heaven and therefore do not rise up against their oppression. Nawal El Saadawi also believes that men distort religion to serve their own interest and legitimate the oppression of women. She uses Islam to provide evidence, " Men are in charge women... hence good women are obedient" The Qur'an, this shows that women are inferior to men as they have to obey their every demand and are like a possession to them. However While religion may be used to oppress women, she argues that it is not the direct cause of their subordination, just men reinterpreting religious beliefs in ways that favour patriarchy. Other feminists also argue that religion is a tool of oppression, such as Jean Holm, where she found that women weren't allowed to enter places of worship during pregnancy or menstruation. Karen Armstrong sees women's exclusion from the priesthood of most religions as evidence of their marginalization. Both sociologist show evidence of women's inferior status and that religion is a patriarchal institution. However feminists have been criticised as not all religions are oppressive, for example, Quakers who are committed to gender equality have never been oppressive to women. Many other sociologists disagree with feminists perspectives and believe that religion liberates women and also. Linda Woodhead uses the example of the hijab or veil worn by many Muslim women. While Western feminists tend to see it as a symbol of oppression, to the person wearing it, it may symbolize resistance to

oppression. Woodhead argues that some Muslim women choose to wear the hijab to escape the confines of the home and enter education and employment. For them, the hijab is a symbol of liberation that enables them to enter the public sphere without losing their culture and history. Many Muslims believe the veil shows their independence and separate identity and shows that they are proud of their religion. Though feminists would argue that due to primary socialization women are taught to be relatively passive and are less likely to question their social inferiority. Functionalists also criticise feminists and believe religion stabilises society by creating social solidarity and integration between groups and do not believe it oppresses women. Functionalists believe sacred symbols represent a collective consciousness and that regular shared worship and rituals reinforce social integration. By performing together, each individual feels part of a group which also highlights the group identity and therefore strengthens and motivates them thus preventing women from feeling inferior to men. Durkheim also argues that religion creates social order and encourages harmony. Though feminists would argue that functionalists focus too much on the positives and overlook the oppressive practices in religion. Though both Marxists and feminists believe that religion masks the oppression they do not believe it serves the same people. Marxists as well criticise the feminist view and believe they ignore the fact the religion oppresses the ruling class. Though Marxist feminists share the view that religion is a tool of women's oppression but under capitalism where the Church reinforces traditional gender roles whilst benefiting the ruling class. Marxists believe the main role of religion is to legitimise and maintain the power of the ruling

class by keeping the working class from rising up, doing this by misleading them into believing their suffering will be favoured in the afterlife. However radical and liberal feminists disagree with Marxists and argue that they focus too much on the economic system and ignore women's inferiority, In conclusion feminists believe the main role and function of religion is to maintain a patriarchy to stop women from uprising against men. They believe religion oppresses women through rituals and worships, sacred texts and practices. However it has been heavily criticised by functionalists and Marxists for being too bias and not considering any positives.