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Feminism

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eminism is a well-established ideology with certain core positions and a range of variants that move in somewhat different directions. Feminism is also an international movement that cuts across class, national, racial, ethnic, and religious barriers even though those same barriers reveal significant differences.

One subject on which feminists agree is the need to replace what they see as the system of male dominance, or *patriarchy*, that affects all social institutions. Clearly, feminism focuses on the position of women in society and the roles they play, but feminists argue that improving the status of women will also benefit all human beings whatever their gender.

An obvious example of the problems women can face were the laws the Taliban imposed in Afghanistan, laws that are being reimposed in areas under Taliban control once again. Such laws require most women to stay at home unless accompanied by a male relative; they also prohibit the employment and education of women and require them to wear the *burqa*, a traditional head-to-toe covering. The Taliban also restricts mens freedom in many ways but much less severely; for example, men are required to wear beards. Extreme measures such as those imposed on women in Afghanistan are rare, but women face a wide variety of major and minor restrictions, both customary and legal, throughout the world.

One of the slogans of the womens movement in the sixties was The Personal Is The Political; our understandings of ourselves and our relations with others, even those closest to us, are all at least partly political, at least partly power relations. Given the ability of the socialization process to form the understanding

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people have of their social roles, often women themselves do not recognize the restrictions that limit them; and the modern women's movement has often focused on *consciousness raising*, or helping first women and then men to become aware of the limits imposed on women by both law and custom. The 1960s saw the rapid growth of feminism and thousands of consciousness-raising groups in North America and Europe.

THE DEVELOPMENT OF FEMINISM

Debates over the social roles of men and women go back to classical and biblical times. Both the Old and New Testaments contain passages that have been used to argue either that women are inferior or that women are equal. Plato's (c. 427 to 347 B.C.) *Republic* has been interpreted as contending both that women should be treated as equals to men and that women are naturally inferior.

Such debates are a constant of Western history. For example, in March 1776, Abigail Adams (1744-1818) wrote to her husband John Adams (1735-1826), then involved in the movement for American independence and, later, second president of the United States, entreating him to Remember the Ladies in the laws drawn up for the newly independent country. John Adams responded, I cannot but laugh, and continued, We know better than to repeal our Masculine systems.

At about the same time in England, Mary Wollstonecraft (1759-1797) was writing the first major work arguing for rights for women. Her *Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792) was part of a European and American movement to develop a theory of individual human rights. Thomas Paine's (1737-1809) *The Rights of Man* (1791-1792) and the French *Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen* (1789) are other expressions of the movement, but in most cases, these rights were only for men. Thus Wollstonecraft's book was an early plea, generally neglected at the time, that the radical thinkers of the day should argue for human rights rather than men's rights.

Earlier, writers such as Mary Astell (1668-1731), in *A Serious Proposal to the Ladies* (1694), and Sarah Scott (1723-1795), in *A Description of Millenium Hall* (1762), had concluded that women would never be treated as independent beings so they argued that women should separate themselves from men. And, as we shall see, some women still believe today that real freedom for women can come only through separation from men.

In the nineteenth century, the women's movement began as a general movement for sexual equality and ended dominated by a single issue: the campaign for the vote. In the United States, this pattern was repeated with the attempt to pass the Equal Rights Amendment (ERA), which was for a time the sole political focus of the U.S. women's movement. In both cases the general feminist arguments tended to get lost in the political campaign. In the first half of the nineteenth century in the United States, women like Angelina Grimke (1805-1879), Sarah Grimke (1792-1873), Margaret Fuller (1810-1850), and Frances Wright (1795-1852) became involved in the movement to abolish slavery and, from there, moved into other areas of reform including the rights of women. As Angelina Grimke put it, I recognize no rights but human rights! I know nothing of man's rights and women's rights. Later, Elizabeth Cady Stanton (1815-1902), Susan B. Anthony (1820-1906), and others argued for a wide-ranging emancipation of women. As Anthony put it in a famous statement to the court upon being found guilty of voting (a sympathetic clerk had allowed her to cast a ballot), You have trampled underfoot every vital principle of our government. My natural rights, my civil rights, my political rights, are all alike ignored. Robbed of the fundamental privilege of citizenship, I am degraded from the status of a citizen to that of a subject.

Similar movements existed in most western European countries plus Australia and New Zealand, and they generally followed the same pattern of radical demands for equality, giving way to the sole demand for the vote. In Britain three works in the nineteenth century were particularly important in establishing the early stages of the women's movement. *Appeal of One-Half of the Human Race, Women, Against the Pretensions of Other Half Men* (1825) by William Thompson (1775-1833) and Anna Doyle Wheeler (1785-1848), whom he credited with many of the ideas in the book but whose name does not appear on the title page; *The Enfranchisement of Women* (1851) by Harriet Taylor (1807-1858); and *The Subjection of Women* (1869) by John Stuart Mill (1806-1873) all pointed to the mistreatment of women. Although these works stressed documenting the status of women legally and socially, they also argued for the vote and for equality before the law.

In 1848, a convention in Seneca Falls, New York, was called to discuss the social, civil, and religious conditions and rights of woman. This convention passed the famous Declaration of Sentiments, modeled on the U.S. Declaration of Independence. It stated that it is the duty of the women of this country to secure to themselves their sacred right to the elective franchise. It also stated, much more radically, in words similar to those of

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Thoreaus (1817-1862) On the Duty of Civil Disobedience (1849), that all laws which prevent women from occupying such a station in society as her conscience shall dictate, or which place her in a position inferior to that of man, are contrary to the great precept of nature, and therefore of no force or authority.

In Britain, Emmeline Pankhurst (1858-1928) was one of the leaders in the movement for the vote. Her group, the Womens Social and Political Union, used civil disobedience in their campaign. As a result, Pankhurst and many of her

followers were repeatedly jailed, thus bringing more attention to the movement. Her daughters Christobel (1880-1958) and Sylvia (1882-1960) were also active feminists; Sylvia attacked the institution of marriage and bore a child out of wedlock.

Before World War I, the single most important issue for the women's movement besides the vote was birth control. The most prominent figure in the birth control movement was Margaret Sanger (1883-1966), but others, notably the U.S. anarchist Emma Goldman (1869-1940), whose broad radical agenda included many issues of particular interest to women, supported her. Others in the United States who were concerned with more than the vote included Charlotte Perkins Gilman (1860-1935), whose journal *The Forerunner* was a forceful advocate for women. Her *Women and Economics* (1898) was a widely acclaimed study that argued for the need to restructure social institutions to permit women to work. Her utopian novel *Moving the Mountain* (1911) fictionally shows such a changed society. Jane Addams (1860-1935) exemplified and argued for an active role for women in improving life in the cities and is best known as the founder of the famous Hull House in Chicago, which was an early project to help the poor, and particularly poor women. She was also deeply involved in the peace movement at the time of World War I.

When the vote was won, it had little noticeable effect on social policy. But during World War II, women were encouraged to join the workforce for the war effort and learned to do things they had been taught were impossible for women. After the war these same women were told to go back home and give up the money and independence they had come to expect. The publication in France in 1949 of Simone de Beauvoirs (19081986) *Le Deuxieme Sexe* (published in English in 1952 as *The Second Sex*), a study of the treatment of women by various academic disciplines, helped fan the anger at this loss.

Still, it was not until the 1960s and the publication of *The Feminine Mystique* (1963) by Betty Friedan (19212006), combined with the rejection of womens issues by the New Left, that a renewed feminist movement began. Although this burgeoning movement was predominantly white, a number of African-American women also became active in the cause. Today the womens movement is acutely aware of the importance of speaking to the needs of minority women and of women in the developing nations. And these women are finding their voices and speaking for themselves, and in doing so, they often reject the approach taken by women in the developed world.

THE PERSONAL IS THE POLITICAL

In opposing all forms of discrimination, feminists have argued that the term *political* needs to be redefined. If, as some would have it, politics are about power, then politics exists between men and women both individually and in groups. Power relations exist between friends and lovers and within families. For example, in the family, who makes decisions and how they are made are political questions, as are questions about who spends how much and on what, who allocates tasks around the house, and the division of labor reflected in such allocation.

An interesting case is housework. This is an important issue, because it includes the traditional sexual division of labor in which men work outside the home for a wage and, if a mans wage is high enough, the woman does not work. But if the mans income is not high enough to pay for servants, the woman works at home without a wage. And, of course, if a woman works outside the home, in the traditional division of labor, she still does the housework. Housework is the largest sector of unwaged labor in the economy, and anyone attempting to replace that unpaid labor with paid labor finds that certain aspects of it command substantial wages because, although the work is not well paid, long hours are required. Cooking and child care can be very expensive; regular cleaning is not cheap, and

high-quality work is hard to find. Housework is also repetitive and not particularly exciting work. Many people men and women alike if given a choice do not do it.

For these reasons, housework illustrates just how political work allocation is in a modern household. Generally, although increased awareness has produced a change toward men helping more around the house (the word *help* implies assistance freely donated, not required), the traditional pattern remains common, with the added factor that the woman works outside the home for a wage, as well as doing the same work in the home as before. In other words, the pattern of sexual division of labor that once applied only to the poor has spread to the middle class. Thus both the economics and the internal dynamics of housework illustrate the maxim that the personal is the political. Similar questions affect all relations between women and men. Another way of describing the situation in which women find themselves can be seen in an expansion of the notion of the personal as the political. If all human relationships are power relationships, whatever else they may also be, women as individuals and as a group have been among the powerless and, with some exceptions, are less powerful than men even in the developed world and still mostly powerless elsewhere. An example can illustrate the point: When men were telephone operators and secretaries, these positions were adequately paid and had some prestige; when these positions became women's work, they changed into low-paid positions with little prestige. And women were excluded from many positions. For example, in *Bradwell v. Illinois* (83 U.S. [16 Wall] 130 [1872]), the U.S. Supreme Court upheld an Illinois law that prohibited women from practicing law, and in most areas of the United States, only single women were allowed to teach in elementary and secondary schools.

The fact that we are aware of power relations where we previously failed to notice them does not mean that such relations are necessarily subject to public policy, but our changed awareness does raise the complicated question of the relationship between the public and the private and what activities should belong to each sphere. Many things we consider private have entered the public arena. For example, until recently spousal and, to a slightly lesser extent, child abuse were not considered appropriate subjects for public action. In most states in the United States, it was, until the last few decades, legally impossible for a man to rape his wife; he literally owned access to her body, and she had no right to deny him that access. Thus a central debate raised by feminism is what, if anything, remains private and not subject to public or political scrutiny. At present, the answer is not clear, but

the boundaries set by both public opinion and the law have clearly moved toward including more life experiences within the public realm. At the same time, significant opposition to such changes remains.

SEXISM

Sexism is the belief that women are inferior to men, just as *racism* is the belief that one group of people is inferior or superior based on factors such as skin color. But sexism and racism are just examples of the much broader point that people are oppressed both individually and as groups by socially constructed patterns of beliefs, attitudes, and practices. Like racism, sexism is pervasive in language, art, literature, and religion. More obviously, sexism pervades politics and the economy, and it is part of what feminists oppose and hope to eliminate. Eliminating sexism will be extremely difficult because it is, as feminists contend, part of all Western languages and part of many dearly held beliefs, including religious beliefs.

Socialization

Feminists argue that the process of socialization should not eliminate options for women and that women should be allowed to see all the possibilities open to them, not just a few. For example, as mentioned earlier, at one time women could not be secretaries or telephone operators; these jobs were reserved for men, both because women were not thought capable of doing them and because women were not expected to have paid employment. But, of course, poor women have always worked in paid employment, and women on farms have always worked along with other family members. And feminist historians have discovered multitudes of women who have refused to be limited by stereotypes of acceptable female behavior. This illustrates how the work of recovering the history of women African Americans, ethnic minorities, and other groups provides psychological support for individuals living today and a basis for political arguments against discrimination.

In addition, feminists contend that women are socialized to accept both physical and mental mistreatment. Rape has been considered the most underreported crime in the United States, but the discovery of the extent of incest and child abuse indicates a number of rarely reported crimes, almost all of which are crimes against women and children. Feminists argue that these crimes are underreported for several reasons. First, women who report rape must still generally deal with male police officers; even if too rarely they are sensitive to the woman's trauma, they are still men. Second, the legal system has traditionally treated the woman as the responsible party; victims have often been blamed for allowing themselves to be victimized. Third, women have been taught to accept such abuse from men

and to consider it almost normal. This socialization process, along with women's common fear of leaving their abusive homes because of the financial consequences, also encourages women to accept abuse from husbands or companions.

Feminists note that in addition to physical abuse, women are subject to pervasive mental abuse. It consists, in large part, of attacks on women's self-esteem and treating women as objects or things rather than as individuals or persons. Clearly rape is the most extreme form of treating a person as an object, but many other ways of abusing women do not involve physical abuse.

Physical and mental abuse are part of the oppression of women, as is the fact that in many jobs, women are not paid the same as men for doing the same work and are often sexually harassed at work. In addition, although overt political discrimination has been reduced, more subtle forms are still common.

Language

Feminists have often been both criticized and laughed at for proposing changes in language use to remove the male bias. But taking the argument seriously and looking at the history (some feminists note that the word *history* itself can be read as his story and prefer to use herstory) of language use, we can see the force of their point. For example, a female first-year university student is called a *freshman*. Why? Not long ago women could not attend university, and the term implies that. Of course, language use changes, and most people now use freshman to refer to both male and female first-year students; but the word is a relic of past sexual discrimination.

As another example, when Thomas Jefferson drafted the Declaration of Independence and wrote, All men are created equal, did he mean all human beings or just male human beings? We do not really know what Jefferson meant, but we do know that for many people at the time, the words referred only to white, male human beings. And when we read the writings of major thinkers of the past, we often do not know what the word *man* means; we can read it to mean all human beings, but we may miss what the author intended us to understand.

A particularly interesting example can be seen in the novel *The Left Hand of Darkness* (1969) by Ursula K. Le Guin (b. 1929). When *The Left Hand of Darkness* was originally published, relatively little awareness existed regarding the gendered character of language, and Le Guin called her characters, who changed gender at different points in their lives, he. The twenty-fifth anniversary edition (1994) of *The Left Hand of Darkness*

addressed the criticism

Le Guin received for her lack of awareness by providing sample chapters with four different sets of pronouns: one using invented pronouns and genderless personal nouns and titles; one using feminine pronouns and personal nouns, rather than the masculine of the original; one using pronouns that reflected the changes her characters go through, neuter and gendered at different life stages; and one using masculine and feminine pronouns for the same character, as that person goes through a transition. Understanding of the text varies remarkably depending on the set of pronouns and personal nouns used, which makes this exercise by Le Guin a striking contribution to the debate on language.

Religion

Orthodox Judaism makes a rigid division between men and women, with men and women separated during worship and with women defined as inferior. Liberal Judaism advocates, but does not always practice, equality. Women have been rabbis in reform congregations for some years but have only recently been allowed to become rabbis in conservative ones, and the acceptance of women as rabbis is spreading slowly, even where the policy is to allow it.

Even though in the New Testament Christ is portrayed as treating men and women equally, the same pattern of gender discrimination holds true in Christianity. Almost as soon as the first Christian churches were organized, women were placed in subordinate roles. In fact, some of the earliest heresies centered on the advocacy of equality for women, and such heresies continued to appear from time to time, particularly around the Reformation and again in seventeenth-century England.

Christian churches today are still divided over the role of women. The Episcopal Church in the United States decided, after a long, intense debate, to admit women to the priesthood. As a result, many women have joined the priesthood, amounting to over a quarter of the Episcopal clergy, and an African-American woman has been consecrated as a bishop in the United States. Some Episcopal churches and priests left the denomination as a result. The Roman Catholic Church excludes women from the priesthood. Most Protestant denominations encourage the ordination of women as ministers, but still relatively few women are ministers in most churches.

These divisions reflect a deep ambivalence about women in Christianity, particularly in the Roman Catholic Church. Two women, Eve the rebel and temptress and Mary the mother of Christ, can symbolize the conflict.

Roughly the position has been that to the extent that women emulate Mary and remain subordinate to men, they are correctly fulfilling their natures; to

the extent that they emulate Eve they are dangerous. As a result, many feminists see Eve, the rebel, as a symbol of the real strength of women. And recently there has developed a critique of the patriarchy of the established churches around the figure of Mary Magdalene, who, in some places in the Bible, is described as one of the Apostles and was the first person to see Christ after his Resurrection. But the message that most churches present to women is one of subordination to men.

Afeminist theology emerged from Liberation Theology (see the discussion of Feminist Liberation Theology in Chapter 12) and has developed in a number of different directions both in parallel with Liberation Theology and separate from it (one of those directions relates to ecofeminism, discussed in Chapter 13). For most feminist theologians in the West, the initial concern was critical and had to do with identifying the ways that patriarchy dominated and permeated religious belief and practice; and the most significant changes have come in practice, with substantially more women becoming ministers and holding positions of authority in their denominations.

In Islam men and women worship separately, just as in Orthodox Judaism, and there are no women imams (religious leaders) that have ever been officially recognized. But just as in Christianity and Buddhism, a feminist movement exists in Islam; and in some Western countries, women have unofficially held important religious roles during the early stages of the establishment of a new mosque.

THE FEMINIST RESPONSES

Feminists agree on some responses to sexism, but they also disagree. Almost all feminists agree that fundamental answers to the problem of women's position in modern society include freedom and equality, but disagreements persist over both the meaning of these terms and how to achieve the desired result. All feminists agree that any changes should not benefit women alone. They oppose racism, sexism, and discrimination based on sexual orientation, and they argue that discrimination against any human being is an attack on all human beings; and they agree that men will also benefit from a free and egalitarian society.

Feminist responses can be classified in a number of ways, but none is entirely satisfactory because all of them tend to group people who have important disagreements and to separate people who agree on significant questions. No set of categories is currently acceptable, and many of the suggested categories are nonpolitical. The categories I use are reform or liberal, Marxist, socialist, integrative or transformative, and separatist or radical. Some commentators

add a term to describe conservative antifeminists, but because they are antifeminists, I do not include them here (in addition, ecofeminism is discussed in Chapter 13). Following Angela Miles (b. 1946),¹¹ I have chosen to call the middle group *transformative* feminism, because this generally tries to recognize and incorporate the concerns of all feminists while taking a strong political stand.

Reform or Liberal Feminism

Reform feminists argue that the basic pattern of society is generally acceptable but that changes are needed so women are not put at a disadvantage because of their gender. Reform feminists want an equal opportunity to compete with men, and they propose that the means be found, such as improved and expanded day care facilities and improved parental leave policies, to more readily allow women to combine paid employment and motherhood. Obviously, these proposals also suggest that men must change their attitude toward sharing responsibility for child rearing, housework, and all other aspects of traditionally unpaid labor, which used to be called "womens work"

Reform feminists in the United States were particularly supportive of the Equal Rights Amendment, which reads in its entirety as follows:

Section 1. Equality of rights under the law shall not be denied by the United States or by any State on account of sex.

Section 2. The Congress shall have the power to enforce, by appropriate legislation, the provisions of this article.

Section 3. This amendment shall take effect two years after the ratification. Forces that considered the amendment dangerously radical or unnecessary defeated its passage. The most effective opponent a conservative woman, Phyllis Schlafly (b. 1942) has continued her opposition to feminism in her most recent book, *Feminist Fantasies* (2003).

Marxist Feminism

In its earliest manifestations, Marxism had a split personality regarding women. Marxists often said that womens issues must wait until after the class revolution. On the other hand, in 1884 Friedrich Engels (1820-1895) published *Origins of the Family, Private Property, and the State*, in which he noted the central role of women and the family in the development and maintenance of the social system. Engels thereby put what was called the woman question at the forefront of issues Marxists needed to solve, and many women were attracted to Marxism because of this.

In the last quarter of the twentieth century, feminists noted both of these tendencies within Marxism; and although many believed that Marx's analysis of capitalism was correct and pointed in useful directions, most

concluded that Marxists in the twentieth century had generally ignored the insights of Engels and others and had adopted the wait until after the revolution approach. And because the so-called Marxist revolutions in China, Russia, and other countries did not produce the significant changes in women's roles that had been promised, considerable disillusionment resulted. As a result, today many Marxists argue that the insights of feminism need to be added to Marxism.

Socialist Feminism

Contemporary socialist feminists are perhaps best seen as democratic socialists with a focus. They reject the Marxist tendency to put class before gender, race, sexual identification, ethnicity, and the other ways in which human beings identify and classify themselves. And in doing so, they stress democratic decision making and the acceptance of difference within community.

Transformative Feminism

Transformative feminists have shown how men have created a male-centered way of understanding the world that severely limits our ability to conceptualize human relations that are not hierarchical and patriarchal. The goal of these feminists is to break through those mental barriers as well as the political, economic, and cultural barriers that keep all human beings from becoming fully human. For example, Nancy Hartsock (b. 1943) has noted that feminists have reconceptualized the notion of power. Power as dominance gives way to power as energy and competence. All our ways of thinking need to undergo a similar revolution. Hence transformative feminists are arguing for a fundamental transformation of not only our political and economic lives but our social, cultural, and personal lives as well. As Angela Miles says, "The alternative value core of transformative feminisms in all their variety is the holistic, egalitarian, life-centered rejection of dominant androcentric, dualistic, hierarchical, profit-centered ideology and social structures" The goal is to achieve equality while recognizing difference or specificity.

Separatist or Radical Feminism

Separatist feminism, with some exceptions, argues for lesbianism and a woman-centered culture. Shulamith Firestone (b. 1945) argues for the abandonment of the biological family in *The Dialectic of Sex* (1970), and the development of a woman's culture can be seen in the works of Judy Chicago (b. 1939) and others.

There are significant separatist subcultures, both female and male, with everything from bars to music festivals to publishing houses, and lesbian communes exist in all Western countries. The lesbian subculture includes publishing houses that publish lesbian crime fiction, science fiction, romance, and other so-called genre fiction as well as nonfiction aimed at a lesbian readership. Much of this has to do with wanting a culture that speaks to the interests and needs of a variety of people, but it also provides space in which it is possible for a person to be who they are.

While gay men and lesbians cooperate on political issues that affect both groups, the divisions are deep. This is hardly surprising; at an important level, both groups are defined by the rejection of the other group, and both groups want to associate with the same sex as much as possible. Of course, it is never quite that simple, and the overwhelming majority of gays and lesbians have close friendships with members of the opposite sex. Still, gay men often feel that lesbians have it easy in that the public expression of affection between women has always been more acceptable than the public expression of affection between men; and, of course, AIDS (Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome) has killed relatively few lesbians but tens of thousands of gay men. But lesbians feel that gay men are still men, socialized as men, and no more capable of treating women as equals than any other man.

One striking phenomenon is that, with the revival of utopian literature in the 1970s, a large number of books describing lesbian utopias have been published but almost none about gay male utopias. The lesbian utopias mostly depicted a positive, single-sex future, but the gay male works are mostly depictions of negative futures or dystopias in which gay men were even more oppressed than at present.

CURRENT TRENDS

Feminism is developing a critical apparatus for analyzing contemporary society that is challenging all contemporary ideologies. Feminist philosophers and political philosophers are proposing new ways of understanding the world. Feminist economists are analyzing the economic roles of women and suggesting a transformation of economic life.

Specifically, feminists have discovered the central role that women play in the agricultural economies of Third World countries and are arguing that the bias-rooted failure to recognize this fact has undercut all attempts to improve agricultural production in developing countries. And feminist writers and artists are developing a substantial body of literature and art that speaks to different concerns than had been previously addressed.

An example of the way the feminist movement has spread around the globe

is the history of the book *Our Bodies Ourselves: A Course By and For Women*, which was originally put together by the Boston Womens Health Course Collective (later the Boston Womens Health Book Collective) in 1971 and published by the New England Free Press, an underground press. It was considered required reading for young women in the United States, because it was the first book written by women that spoke directly to womens concerns, and particularly because it did so through the stories of real women in easily understood language. It was the first stage in a revolution in womens health care in the United States, and it helped bring about profound changes in medical research, which had generally assumed that men were the norm and that separate research on women was unnecessary. It has now sold over four million copies worldwide with numerous translations and adaptations and more of both in process. The most recent edition in English was published in 2005 as *The New Our Bodies Ourselves: A New Edition for a New Era*.

Feminists encourage all human beings to envision the possibility of a society free from sexism, racism, discrimination based on sexual orientation, and all the other ways in which human beings have subjugated other human beings. At present, feminists are divided over exactly how to go about this transformation, and reform feminists are not convinced that such a transformation is either necessary or desirable; but feminism is potentially the most radical of ideologies and the most likely to change the way most of us live today.

Votes for Women

In the twentieth century, women achieved the right to vote in most countries. But this franchise did not translate into many women being elected to office; and although the number slowly rose in most developed countries in the last quarter of the twentieth century, the number of women elected to office has never come close to the percentage of women of voting age in the electorates. Although many arguments are made about both the causes and cures for this situation, one cure that is gaining ground is to set aside a certain number of positions to which only women can be elected. Precedents for this practice set in New Zealand dictate that seats be set aside for Maori, and in India, seats are reserved for the Dalit, or Untouchables.

In France, where the practice is called *parity*, a constitutional amendment was passed that states the law favors equal access for men and women to electoral mandates and elective offices. This amendment is being implemented by requiring that in certain circumstances, political parties must put forward

an equal number of men and women as candidates for office. This does not, of course, guarantee election, but it is believed that more women will be elected under this system than have been previously. Anne Phillips (b. 1950) has developed proposals for a similar system designed for Britain. Today, 25 countries allocate access to political power based on gender, either setting aside seats in the legislature or through electoral representation, 15 countries do so based on ethnicity, and 9 do so on the basis of both gender and ethnicity. Also, a growing number of countries practice some form of proportional representation, and such systems almost always produce more minority and women legislators. As of 2007, Sweden had the highest number of women in its legislature with 47.3 percent; the United States had 16.3 percent in the House of Representatives and 16 percent in the Senate.

Feminism and Legal Theory

Catharine A. MacKinnon (b. 1946) developed a legal theory that stresses that male dominance has been accepted in American law. She contends that the male has always been the standard, even if not stated as such, and presents a position generally called *nonsubordination*, which argues for the recognition of women's actual lived experience as opposed to the supposed objective model that has turned out to be from the male perspective.

MacKinnon's initial work was on sexual harassment; when she began, harassment was not considered sexual discrimination but merely what should be expected between men and women. It is easy to see that looking at sexual harassment from the point of view of the harassed is essential to seeing the entire picture. MacKinnon's analysis provided the basis for changes in case law and legal codes so that today, sexual harassment is seen as sexual discrimination.

MacKinnon's work to reveal pornography as discrimination based on sex has been much more controversial. She argues that freedom of expression is based on the false assumption of general equality and that gender inequality invalidates negative liberty, or the right of people to be left alone. Thus pornography is not, for MacKinnon, a question of civil liberties but an issue central to the institutionalization of male dominance. Opponents of MacKinnon's position, which on this issue include many feminists, argue that freedom of the press is too important a negative liberty to be compromised to get rid of pornography, however desirable that might be.

Multiculturalism

Given the emphasis on difference by many feminists, multiculturalism would appear to be an obvious position for feminists to take, and many do. But Susan Moller Okin (1947-2004) questions Is Multiculturalism Bad for

Women?, suggests that accepting multiculturalism may lead to the acceptance of cultures with gender divisions that disadvantage women. Okin's argument poses a serious question for both feminists and multiculturalists. The assertion of universal human rights has been central to the arguments feminists have made that such rights belong equally to both women and men. On the other hand, the recognition of important differences between and among men and women has become central to the argument that equality of rights can go hand in hand with respect for differences among human beings. The problem is that if difference includes cultural differences, then some of those differences include the rejection of equal rights. The valuing of differences can allow difference to be used to undermine gender equality, through the argument that valued differences require differential treatment. Okin contended that equality of rights must not be sacrificed in the name of multicultural respect.

Clearly, as Okin pointed out, multiculturalism poses a major issue for feminists, but the issue is important not just for feminists. As noted throughout this book, in the past all ideologies posited certain universal values; but with the advent of postmodernism, universals of all sorts are now being questioned. The problem, acutely stated by Okin, is how to keep important universals while respecting differences among human beings.

Women of Color The multicultural argument reflects a central, long-standing problem for feminists, particularly in the United States: the fact that most feminists are white. African-American author bell hooks (Gloria Watkins, b. 1952), in her *Aint I a Woman? Black Women and Feminism* (1981), and the collection of essays *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color* (1983) edited by Cherrie Moraga (b. 1952) and Gloria Anzaldua (1942-2004), made early statements that the universal claims of white feminists did not necessarily apply to black women. The title of the work by bell hooks was taken from the famous speech *Aint I a Woman?* (1851), given by Sojourner Truth (c. 1797-1883) at a women's rights convention, which illustrates that the issue is not a new one.

Third World Feminism The multicultural issue, seen through a different lens, is one that continues to be a problem within feminism: the position of women in the Third World. The extent of the problem can be seen in the fact that far fewer girls than boys are born because excess girls are either aborted or killed at birth; and far fewer girls survive to maturity than boys because poverty-stricken families feed boys more and they feed them more often, and

boys are more likely to get medical care than girls. It has been estimated that at least 100 million women are missing worldwide.

Many Western feminists, such as Okin, point to the obvious mistreatment of women in the Third World, the Taliban being only the most glaring case, and argue that the Western model of individual rights is the appropriate solution. On the other hand, both a growing number of Western feminists and many Third World feminists see this as an attempt to impose Western, and particularly American, values where they are not appropriate.

And women in the Third World are not at all happy with the way they are discussed by some Western feminists, who seem to think that Western women should be able to speak for them. Thus, as with the question of race, separate and sometimes antagonistic feminisms have developed among Third World and indigenous women. Both sides in this issue are trying to find common ground, and much progress has been made, but considerable misunderstanding and distrust still exists.

Reproductive Rights

All feminists share a concern with freeing women from unwanted child bearing. This concern has been called *reproductive rights*, the right of a woman to control her own body, or, more recently, *reproductive freedom* in an attempt to separate it from the narrow, legal concept of rights. For most feminists this means that all methods of birth control should be available and either free or inexpensive and, because no system of birth control is 100 percent effective, that safe, and affordable abortions should be available to all women. For a few radical feminists, this means the end of biological motherhood and the development of artificial means of reproduction; but for most feminists, it means the transformation of society to allow full participation by women. Most feminists envision a remodeling of all institutions of socialization so that all human beings can participate fully in all life activities as they freely and independently choose.

There is a difference among feminists on this issue: Some assume that men are capable of the changes needed; others argue that a much more radical transformation of social institutions, with a resulting change in men, is necessary before men can participate fully in raising children. They argue that without this change, increased male participation in child rearing will only reduce women's power.

Third Wave Feminism

Feminism in the United States is usually described as having experienced two waves and is now in its third wave. The first wave occurred in the early part of the twentieth century, when women first got the right to vote. The second wave was the rapid growth of and attention to feminism in the

1980s and 1990s. Much literature sees the waves as generational, with a certain amount of tension between mothers and daughters, thought of as both biological and intellectual; thus the daughters of each new wave reject the concerns and approaches of their mothers in the previous wave. The waves can also be seen as responses to the differing issues that women have faced at these times.

Third wave feminism is characterized by much more consciously extending the concerns raised by feminism to gay and lesbian issues, postcolonial issues, and racial issues. The inclusion of postcolonial issues reflects an awareness that globalization is a feminist issue, as well as an economic and political one. Third wave feminists are likely to say that feminism today is much less of a political movement than second wave feminism; it is more cultural and local, which may reflect the influence of postmodernism with its emphasis on viewing the world from specific standpoints.

Some third wave feminists distinguish between what they call victim feminism, which they equate with the second wave, and power or equality feminism, which they use to refer to themselves. The idea is that feminists in the second wave presented themselves as victims of patriarchy, but those in the third wave see themselves in a position to make real equality possible.

Postfeminism The term *postfeminism* is used quite frequently, but it is used in different, even contradictory, ways, and therefore it is a word to avoid. In the media, the term *postfeminism* is often used to refer to what are sometimes called ladettes, or young women who act similarly to men, and this is presented as meaning going out to get drunk and have sex with whomever is available. Feminists wanted sexual freedom, but the ladette culture has turned sex into a commodity, and most feminists find this troubling. On the other hand, postfeminism is also used in a way that relates it to postmodernism and the instability of identity, which brings it close to Queer Theory, discussed in Chapter 12.

The Sex Industry

Sex work is a recognized category of work, and prostitution, a subcategory of sex work, is legal in many countries on the assumption that both prostitutes and their clients will be safer and healthier if the prostitutes and one should remember that both men and women work as prostitutes can have legally enforceable contracts requiring defined hours, pay, health care, trade unions, and so

forth. The legalization of prostitution is quite controversial among feminists, with strongly expressed positions both for and against.

One of the arguments for legalization relates to a significant worsening of the position of women in certain parts of the world. The argument is that where prostitution is legal and regulated, it is harder for organized crime to control it and the women involved. One of the effects of the collapse of communism in Russia and some of the formerly communist countries of eastern Europe is that organized crime has become very powerful. The rampant poverty that came with the end of communism has made it easy to prey upon poor women, by either kidnapping them or by tricking them into believing that they are going to a job in western Europe or the United States, and then selling them into prostitution with threats to kill family members in the home country if they try to escape. Although police task forces are working on the problem in all the countries involved, they have had little effect.

A related area of concern is the growth of child-sex tourism, particularly in Southeast Asia. Children, mostly girls but also many boys, are either kidnapped or they are sold by their parents because they cannot afford to feed them. Male tourists come primarily from Europe, Japan, and the United States, and under pressure from feminist groups, a number of countries have passed laws that make it possible to prosecute the men in their home countries for crimes committed in other countries. Although some have been successfully prosecuted, the trade continues to grow.

Conclusion

The effect of the ideas and policies inspired by feminism have been profound, and the lives of both women and men have changed as a result, both in the developed world and, to a growing extent, in the developing world.

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