

# Liberal Feminism

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## ABSTRACT-

Liberal feminism, also called mainstream feminism, is a main branch of feminism defined by its focus on achieving gender equality through political and legal reform within the framework of liberal democracy. As the oldest of the "Big Three" schools of feminist thought, liberal feminism has its roots in 19th century first-wave feminism that focused particularly on women's suffrage and access to education, and that was associated with 19th century liberalism and progressivism. Traditional liberal feminism has a strong focus on political and legal reforms aiming to give women equal rights and opportunities. Liberal feminists argue that society holds the false belief that women are, by nature, less intellectually and physically capable than men; thus it tends to discriminate against women in the academy, the forum, and the marketplace. Liberal feminists believe that "female subordination is rooted in a set of customary and legal constraints that blocks women's entrance to and success in the so-called public world". and strive for sexual equality via political and legal reform. Liberal feminism "works within the structure of mainstream society to integrate women into that structure." Radical feminism is a perspective within feminism that calls for a radical reordering of society in which male supremacy is eliminated in all social and economic contexts, while recognizing that women's experiences are also affected by other social divisions such as in race, class, and sexual orientation.

**Keywords – Gender, Suffrage, Progressivism, Discriminate, Radical, Eliminated, Fundamental.**

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## INTRODUCTION

Jagger described liberal feminism as theory and work that concentrates more on issues such as equality in the workplace, in education, and in political rights. Liberal feminism also focuses on how private life impedes or enhances public equality. Thus, liberal feminists tend to support marriage as an equal partnership, and more male involvement in child care. Support for abortion and other reproductive rights have to do with control of one's life and autonomy. Ending domestic violence and sexual harassment remove obstacles to women achieving on an equal level with men.

Liberal feminism's primary goal is gender equality in the public sphere, such as equal access to education, equal pay, ending job sex segregation, and better working conditions. From this standpoint, legal changes would make these goals possible. Private sphere issues are of concern mainly as they influence or impede equality in the public sphere. Gaining access to and being paid and promoted equally in traditionally male-dominated occupations is an important goal. What do women want? Liberal feminists believe they want the same things men want:

- to get an education
- to make a decent living
- to provide for one's family.

### ➤ Means and Methods -

Liberal feminism tends to rely on the state to gain equality-to see the state as the protector of individual rights.

Liberal feminists, for example, support affirmative action legislation requiring employers and educational institutions to make special attempts to include women in the pool of applicants, on the assumption that past and current discrimination may simply overlook many qualified women.

Passage of the Equal Rights Amendment (ERA) has been a key goal for liberal feminists. From the original women's suffrage proponents who moved to advocate a federal equality amendment to many of the feminists of the 1960s and 1970s in organizations including the National Organization for Women, each generation viewed the amendment as necessary to create a more just society. The amendment is one state shy of the 38 needed for passage, but ERA supporters in 2019 saw renewed hope as the 100th anniversary of women's suffrage approached. A vote that could have made Virginia the 38th state to ratify the ERA missed by a single vote in early 2019. But the U.S. Supreme Court upheld new redistricting lines in the state later in 2019 and a move was underway in Congress to officially extend the ratification deadline. The text of the Equal Rights Amendment, as passed by Congress and sent to the states in the 1970s, is classical liberal feminism: "Equality of rights under the law shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any state on account of sex."

Radical feminism is a philosophy emphasizing the patriarchal roots of inequality between men and women, or, more specifically, the social domination of women by men. Radical feminism views patriarchy as dividing societal rights, privileges, and power primarily along the lines of sex, and as a result, oppressing women and privileging men. Radical feminism opposes existing political and social organization in general because it is inherently tied to patriarchy. Thus, radical feminists tend to be skeptical of political action within the current system and instead tend to focus on culture change that undermines patriarchy and associated hierarchical structures.

Radical feminists tend to be more militant in their approach (radical as "getting to the root") than other feminists. A radical feminist aims to dismantle patriarchy rather than making adjustments to the system through legal changes. Radical feminists also resist reducing oppression to an economic or class issue, as socialist or Marxist feminism sometimes did or does. Radical feminism opposes patriarchy, not men. To equate radical feminism to man-hating is to assume that patriarchy and men are inseparable, philosophically and politically. (Although, Robin Morgan has defended "man-hating" as the right of the oppressed class to hate the class that is oppressing them.)

Central issues engaged by radical feminists include:-

- Reproductive rights for women, including the freedom to make choices to give birth, have an abortion, use birth control, or get sterilized
- Evaluating and then breaking down traditional gender roles in private relationships as well as in public policies
- Understanding pornography as an industry and practice leading to harm to women, although some radical feminists disagreed with this position.
- Understanding rape as an expression of patriarchal power, not a seeking of sex.
- Understanding prostitution under patriarchy as the oppression of women, sexually and economically.
- A critique of motherhood, marriage, the nuclear family, and sexuality, questioning how much of our culture is based on patriarchal assumptions.
- A critique of other institutions, including government and religion, as centered historically in patriarchal power.

The phrase "socialist feminism" was increasingly used during the 1970s to describe a mixed theoretical and practical approach to achieving women's equality. Socialist feminist theory analyzed the connection between the oppression of women and other oppressions in society, such as racism and economic injustice. Socialists had fought for decades to create a more equal society that did not exploit the poor and the powerless in the same ways that capitalism did. Like Marxism, socialist feminism recognized the oppressive structure of a capitalist society. Like radical feminism, socialist feminism recognized the fundamental oppression of women, particularly in a patriarchal society. However, socialist feminists did not recognize gender and only gender as the exclusive basis of all oppression. Rather, they held and

continue to hold that class and gender are symbiotic, at least to some degree, and one cannot be addressed without taking the other into consideration. Socialist feminists wanted to integrate the recognition of sex discrimination within their work to achieve justice and equality for women, for working classes, for the poor and all humanity.

Socialist feminism has often been compared to cultural feminism, but they are quite different although there are some similarities. Cultural feminism focuses almost exclusively on the unique traits and accomplishments of the female gender in opposition to those of men. Separatism is a key theme, but socialist feminism opposes this. The goal of socialist feminism is to work with men to achieve a level playing field for both genders. Socialist feminists have referred to cultural feminism as "pretentious." Socialist feminism is distinctly different from liberal feminism, although the concept of liberalism has changed over the early decades of the 21st century. Although liberal feminists seek equality of the sexes, socialist feminists do not believe that is entirely possible within the constraints of current society. The focus of radical feminists is more on the root causes of inequalities that exist. They tend to take the position that sexual discrimination is the sole source of the oppression of women. However, radical feminism may be more closely related than some other forms of feminism are to socialist feminism. Of course, all these types of feminism share similar and often identical concerns, but their remedies and solutions vary.

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