



INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF CREATIVE RESEARCH THOUGHTS (IJCRT)

An International Open Access, Peer-reviewed, Refereed Journal

Feminism And Its Wave

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ABSTRACT

Feminism is a social and political movement that advocates for the rights and equality of women. Thus, feminism from the start has been a mix of a movement and an ideology that seeks to acquire all kinds of equal rights for women in society. The history of feminism includes early feminist movements, such as the women's suffrage movement, which fought for the right of women to vote in political elections. The women's suffrage movement was a significant part of the broader feminist movement, as it sought to secure basic civil and political rights for women. First-wave feminism, a key part of the women's suffrage movement, focused on gaining political and legal rights for women, such as the right to vote, own property, and access education and employment opportunities. After the suffrage movement ended feminist movement took seat. Second wave feminism marks key aspects in the politics of Marxist and liberal feminist movement. After that, third wave feminism include intersectionality, inclusive, diversity, focusing on individuality and social justice. Fourth wave feminism have digital, inclusive and focusing on online activism, body autonomy and consent. Feminist theory provides framework analysing women oppression, challenging, patriarchal structure, and promoting gender equality. It encompasses various branches, including liberal, radical, Marxist, postcolonial, and intersectional feminism, to understand and address gender-based injustices.

KEYWORDS: - Feminism, rights, equality and social justice.

INTRODUCTION

Feminism is a complex set of ideologies and theories, that at its core seeks to achieve equal social, political, and economic rights for women. Although **feminism** benefits everyone, its aim is to achieve equality for women, because prioritizing those who are most oppressed means freeing everyone else.

The Origin of the Word "Feminism"

While it is common to see the word "feminist" used for figures such as **Mary Wollstonecraft** (1759–1797), the terms feminist and feminism were not used in the modern sense until a century after her 1792 book "**A Vindication of the Rights of Women**" was published.

Feminism affects all of us, but most of all it impacts the rights of women and girls. At its core, feminism is about all genders having equal rights, opportunities, and treatment.

The term first appeared during the 1870s in France as **feminism**—although there has been some speculation that it may have been used before then. At the time, the word referred to women's freedom or emancipation.

In 1882, Hubertine Auklet, a leading French feminist and a campaigner for women's suffrage, used the term **feminists** to describe herself and others working for women's freedom. In 1892, a congress in Paris was described as "feminist." This launched a more widespread adoption of the term in the 1890s, with its use appearing in Great Britain and then America beginning about 1894.

The movement **has its roots right in the earliest eras of human civilization**, working to prioritize the political, economic, and cultural equality of women across every society for thousands of years.

Feminism and Society

Almost all modern societal structures are patriarchal and are constructed in such a way that men are the dominant force in making the majority of political, economic, and cultural decisions. In large part, this is the case due to colonization and imperialism by Europeans. Part of the cultural erasures perpetrated by imperialism involved eliminating the many existing matrilineal societies across the world and instituting Western patriarchy instead. Feminism focuses on the idea that since women comprise one-half of the world population, true social progress can never be achieved without the complete and spontaneous participation of women.

Feminist ideals focus on what culture is like for women as compared to what the world is like for men. Feminist scholars study the ways in which women are not treated equally to men.

Feminist ideology considers in which ways culture can and should be different across genders: Do different genders have different goals, ideals, and visions? There's a great deal of value placed on the importance of moving from point A (the status quo) to point B (female equality) through a statement of commitment to behaviour and action to produce that change.

Feminism in the Workforce

There are many differences within the constellation of feminist ideals, groups, and movements related to workplace unfairness, discrimination, and oppression that result from the real disadvantages women experience. Feminism assumes that **sexism**, which disadvantages and/or oppresses those identified as women, is not desirable and should be eliminated, however, it continues to be an issue in the workplace.

Unequal salaries are still pervasive in the workforce. Despite the Equal Pay Act of 1963, on average, a woman (on average) still earns only 80.5 cents for every dollar a man earns. This varies significantly when race is factored in, however. As of 2018, White women earned about 79 cents for each dollar a man earned, while Asian women earned 90 cents—but Black women earned only 62 cents, Latinx or Hispanic women earned only 54 cents, and Indigenous women earned only 57 cents. According to **data from the U.S. Census Bureau**, women's median annual earnings in 2017 were \$14,910 less than that of their male counterparts.

Feminism and Sexuality

One arena in which women have long been oppressed is with regard to sexuality, which includes behaviour, sexual interactions, posture, and exposure of the body. In patriarchal societies, men are expected to be the commanders, standing tall and allowing their physical presence to represent their role in society, while women are expected to be quieter and more subservient. Under such societal conventions, women are not supposed to take up much space at the table, and most certainly, they should not be seen as a distraction to the men around them.

Feminism seeks to embrace female sexuality and celebrate it, as opposed to so many societal conventions that condemn women who are sexually aware and empowered. The practice of elevating sexually active men while denigrating sexually women creates a double standard across genders.

Women have long been subjected to sexual objectification by men. Many cultures still cling to the notion that women must dress so as to not arouse men, and in many societies, women are required to fully cover their bodies.

On the other hand, in some so-called enlightened societies, female sexuality is routinely exploited in the mass media. Scantly clad women in advertising and full nudity in movies and television are commonplace—and yet, many women are shamed for breastfeeding in public. Sex workers—the majority of whom are women and queer folks—are institutionally disadvantaged and among the most vulnerable, while also being excluded even from some so-called feminist circles. These conflicting views on female sexuality create a confusing landscape of expectations that women and men must navigate on a daily basis.

Waves of feminism

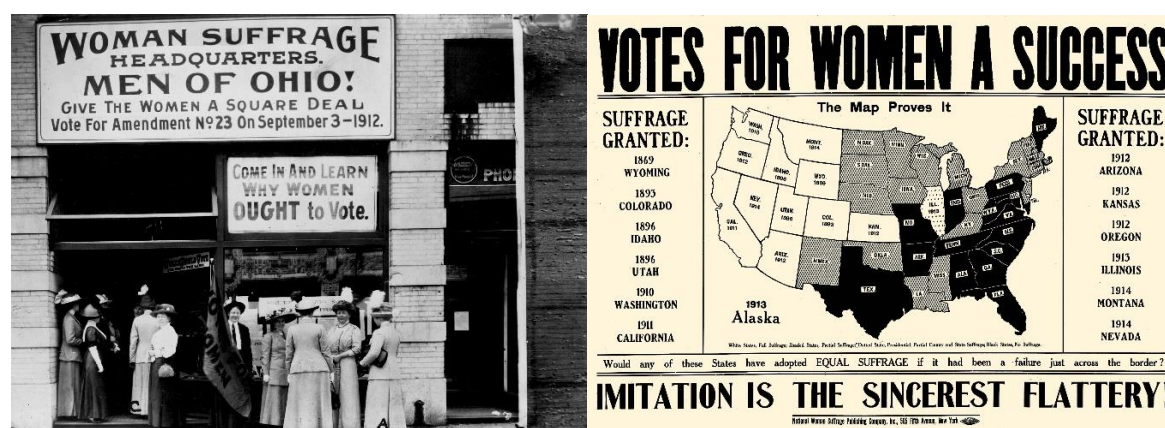
Since the mid-19th century, organized feminist movements in the United States have called for greater political, economic and cultural freedom and equality for women. Yet not all of these movements have pursued the same specific goals, taken the same approaches to activism or included the same groups of women in their rallying cry. Because of these generational differences, it's common to hear feminism divided into four distinct waves, each roughly corresponding to a different time period.

This concept of the “waves of feminism” **first surfaced in the late 1960s** as a way of differentiating the emerging women's movement at the time from the earlier movement for women's rights that originated in 1848 with the **Seneca Falls Convention**. At the same time, the idea of a “second wave” also linked the movement to those earlier activists in a long, worthy struggle for women's rights.

Critics of the “wave” concept argue that it oversimplifies a more complicated history by suggesting that only one distinct type of feminism exists at any one time in history. In reality, each movement includes smaller, overlapping sub-groups, which are often at odds with each other. While the wave concept is certainly imperfect, it remains a helpful tool in outlining and understanding the tumultuous history of feminism in the United States, from its origins at Seneca Falls into the social media-fuelled activism of the #MeToo era.

First Wave: 1848 - 1920

The first organized movement aimed at gaining rights for American women effectively began in July 1848, with the convention organized by **Elizabeth Cady Stanton** and **Lucretia Mott** at **Seneca Falls**, New York. Attendees signed the Declaration of Sentiments, which affirmed women's equality with men, and passed a dozen resolutions calling for various specific rights, including the right to vote.

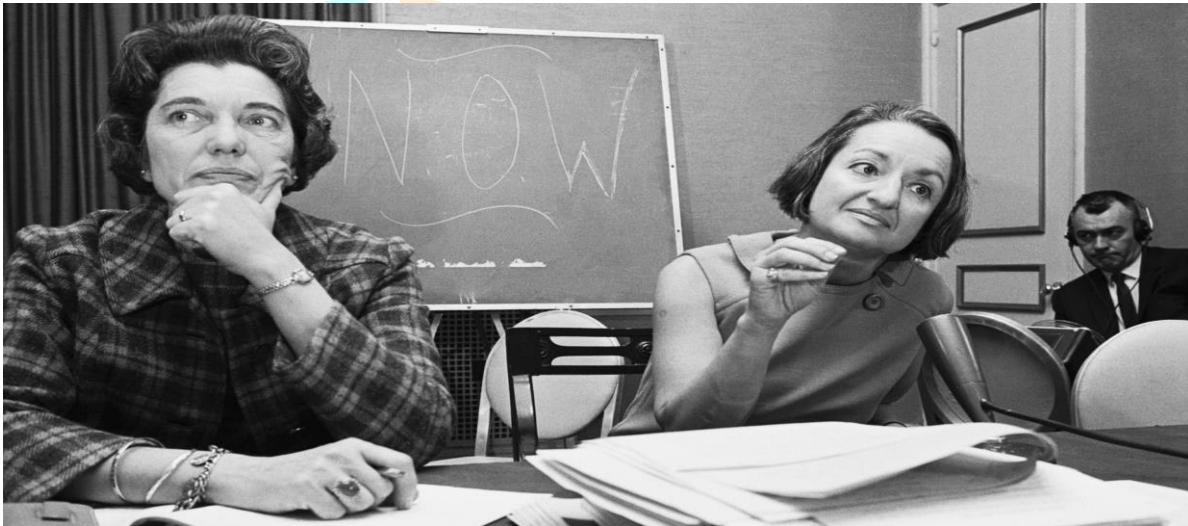


Although the early women's rights movement was linked to abolitionism, passage of the **15th Amendment** in 1870 angered some women's rights leaders who resented Black men being granted suffrage before white women.

Similarly, the **women's suffrage movement** also largely marginalized or excluded Black feminists like **Sojourner Truth** and **Ida B. Wells**. Though ratification of the **19th Amendment** in 1920 fulfilled the principal goal of feminism's first wave—guaranteeing white women the right to vote—Black women and other women of colour **faced continued obstacles** until passage of the **Voting Rights Act of 1965**.

Second Wave: 1963 - 1980s

In 1963, **Betty Friedan** published *The Feminine Mystique*, which argued that women were chafing against the confines of their roles as wives and mothers. The book was a massive success, selling 1.4 million copies in three years and launching what became known as the second wave of feminism. Inspired by the civil rights movement and protests against the Vietnam War, second-wave feminists called for a revaluation of traditional gender roles in society and an end to sexist discrimination.



Feminism—or “women's liberation”—gained strength as a political force in the 1970s, as Friedan, **Gloria Steinem**, Bella Abzug and others founded the National Women's Political Caucus in 1971. High points of the second wave included passage of the **Equal Pay Act** and the landmark Supreme Court decisions in *Griswold v. Connecticut* (1965) and **Roe v. Wade** (1973) related to reproductive freedom. But while Congress passed the Equal Rights Amendment in 1972, a **conservative backlash** ensured it **fell short of the number of states needed for ratification**.

Like the suffrage movement, second-wave feminism drew criticism for cantering privileged white women, and some Black women formed their own feminist organizations, including the National Black Feminist Organization (NBFO). Despite its achievements, the women's liberation movement had begun to lose momentum by 1980, when conservative forces swept **Ronald Reagan** to the White House.

Third Wave: 1990s

While the advances of second-wave feminism had undoubtedly achieved more equality and rights for women, the movement that emerged in the early 1990s focused on tackling problems that still existed, including **sexual harassment in the workplace** and a shortage of women in positions of power. **Rebecca Walker**, the mixed-race daughter of second-wave leader **Alice Walker**, announced the arrival of feminism's “third wave” in 1992, while watching **Anita Hill testify** before the Senate Judiciary Committee about her accusations of sexual harassment against Supreme Court nominee **Clarence Thomas**. That same year, dubbed the “Year of the Woman,” saw an unprecedented number of women elected to Congress.

Embracing the spirit of rebellion instead of reform, third-wave feminists encouraged women to express their sexuality and individuality. Some embraced a more traditionally feminine style of dress and grooming, and even rejected the term “feminist” as a way of distancing themselves from their second-wave predecessors. “Riot girl” groups like Bikini Kill, Boatmobile and Heavens to Betsy **brought their brand of feminism into popular music**, including songs that addressed issues of sexism, patriarchy, abuse, racism and rape.

Third wave feminism also sought to be more inclusive when it came to race and gender. The work of scholar and theorist Kimberle Crenshaw on the concept of “intersectionality,” or how types of oppression (based on race, class, gender, etc.) can overlap, was particularly influential in this area. Third-wave feminists also drew on the work of gender theorist Judith Butler, including support for trans rights in this type of **intersectional feminism**.

Fourth Wave

Though **fourth wave feminism** is relatively difficult to define—as some people argue it’s simply a continuation of the third wave—the emergence of the Internet has certainly led to a new brand of social media-fuelled activism. Launched by Tarani Burke in 2007, the #MeToo movement took off in 2017 in the wake of **revelations** about the sexual misconduct of influential film producer Harvey Weinstein.

In addition to holding powerful men accountable for their actions, fourth-wave feminists are turning their attention to the systems that allow such misconduct to occur. Like their predecessors in the feminist cause, they also continue to grapple with the concept of intersectionality, and how the movement can be inclusive and representative regardless of sexuality, race, class and gender.

CONCLUSION

feminism is a dynamic and evolving movement that seeks to challenge and dismantle the systems of oppression that have historically marginalized and excluded women. Through its various waves and branches, feminism has worked to promote gender equality, challenge patriarchal structures, and empower women to take control of their own lives. Despite the progress that has been made, there is still much work to be done to achieve true gender equality. As we move forward, it is essential that we continue to listen to and amplify the voices of marginalized women, challenge our own biases and assumptions, and work towards creating a more just and equitable world for all.

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