

Chapter Feminism

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Origins and development

As a political term, ‘feminism’ was a twentieth-century invention and has only been a familiar part of everyday language since the 1960s. (‘Feminist’ was first used in the nineteenth century as a medical term to describe either the feminization of men or the masculinization of women.) In modern usage, feminism is invariably linked to the women's movement and the attempt to advance the social role of women. As such, it is associated with two basic beliefs: that women are disadvantaged because of their sex; and that this disadvantage can and should be overthrown. In this way, feminists have highlighted what they see as a political relationship between the sexes, the supremacy of men and the subjection of women in most, if not all, societies. Nevertheless, feminism has also been characterized by a diversity of views and political positions. The women's movement, for instance, has pursued goals that range from the achievement of female suffrage, the establishment of equal access to education and an increase in the number of women in elite positions in public life, to the legalization of abortion, the ending of female circumcision and the abolition of restrictive or demeaning dress codes. Similarly, feminists have embraced both revolutionary and reformist political strategies, and feminist theory has at times drawn upon quite different political traditions and values.

Until the 1960s, gender divisions were rarely considered to be politically interesting or important. If the very different social, economic and political roles of men and women were considered at all, they were usually regarded as ‘natural’ and therefore inevitable. For example, men, and probably most women, accepted that some kind of male–female division of labour in society was dictated by the simple facts of biology: women are suited to a domestic and household existence by the fact that they can bear and suckle children, while the greater physical strength of men suits them to the outdoor and public world of work. Conventional political theory played its part in upholding such beliefs, usually by ignoring gender divisions altogether. Indeed, feminism can be said to have exposed a ‘mobilization of bias’ that traditionally operated within political theory, by which generations of male thinkers, unwilling to examine the privileges and power that their sex had enjoyed, succeeded in keeping the role of women off the political agenda.

Although the term ‘feminism’ may be of recent origin, feminist views have been expressed in many different cultures and can be traced back as far as the ancient civilizations of Greece and China. Christine de Pisan's *Book of the City of Ladies*, published in Italy in 1405, foreshadowed many of the ideas of modern feminism in recording the deeds of famous women of the past and advocating women's right to education and political influence. Nevertheless, it was not until the nineteenth century that an organized women's movement developed. The first text of modern

feminism is usually taken to be Mary Wollstonecraft's (see p. 252) *Vindication of the Rights of Women* ([1792] 1967), written against the backdrop of the French Revolution. By the mid-nineteenth century the women's movement had acquired a central focus: the campaign for female suffrage, the right to vote, which drew inspiration from the progressive extension of the franchise to men. This period is usually referred to as the 'first wave' of feminism, and was characterized by the demand that women should enjoy the same legal and political rights as men. Female suffrage was its principal goal because it was believed that if women could vote all other forms of sexual discrimination or prejudice would quickly disappear.

The women's movement was strongest in those countries where political democracy was most advanced; women demanded rights that in many cases were already enjoyed by their husbands and sons. In the USA, a women's movement emerged during the 1840s, inspired in part by the campaign to abolish slavery. The famous Seneca Falls convention, held in 1848, marked the birth of the US women's rights movement. It adopted a Declaration of Sentiments, written by Elizabeth Cady Stanton (1815–1902), which deliberately drew upon the language and principles of the Declaration of Independence and called, amongst other things, for female suffrage. The National Women's Suffrage Association, led by Stanton and Susan B. Anthony (1820–1906), was set up in 1869 and merged with the more conservative American Women's Suffrage Association in 1890. Similar movements developed in other western countries. In the UK, an organized movement developed during the 1850s, and in 1867 the House of Commons defeated the first proposal for female suffrage, an amendment to the Second Reform Act proposed by John Stuart Mill (see p. 31). The British suffrage movement adopted increasingly militant tactics after the formation in 1903 of the Women's Social and Political Union, led by Emmeline Pankhurst (1858–1928) and her daughter Christabel (1880–1958). From their underground base in Paris, the Pankhursts coordinated a campaign of direct action in which 'suffragettes' carried out wholesale attacks upon property and mounted a series of well-publicized public demonstrations.

'First-wave' feminism ended with the achievement of female suffrage, introduced first in New Zealand in 1893. The Nineteenth Amendment of the US Constitution granted the vote to American women in 1920. The franchise was extended to women in the UK in 1918, but they did not achieve equal voting rights with men for a further decade. Ironically, in many ways, winning the right to vote weakened and undermined the women's movement. The struggle for female suffrage had united and inspired the movement, giving it a clear goal and a coherent structure. Furthermore, many activists naïvely believed that in winning suffrage rights, women had achieved full emancipation. It was not until the 1960s that the women's movement was regenerated with the emergence of feminism's 'second wave'.

The publication in 1963 of Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique* did much to relaunch feminist thought. Friedan set out to explore what she called 'the problem with no name', the frustration and unhappiness many women experienced as a result of being confined to the roles of housewife and mother. 'Second-wave' feminism acknowledged that the achievement of political and legal rights had not solved the 'women's question'. Indeed, feminist ideas and arguments became increasingly radical, and at times revolutionary. Books such as Kate Millet's *Sexual Politics* (1970) and Germaine Greer's *The Female Eunuch* (1970) pushed back the borders of what had previously been considered to be 'political' by focusing attention upon the

personal, psychological and sexual aspects of female oppression. The goal of 'second-wave' feminism was not merely political emancipation but 'women's liberation', reflected in the ideas of the growing Women's Liberation Movement. Such a goal could not be achieved by political reforms or legal changes alone, but demanded, modern feminists argued, a radical and perhaps revolutionary process of social change.

Since the first flowering of radical feminist thought in the late 1960s and early 1970s, feminism has developed into a distinctive and established ideology, whose ideas and values challenge the most basic assumptions of conventional political thought. Feminism has succeeded in establishing gender and gender perspectives as important themes in a range of academic disciplines and in raising consciousness about gender issues in public life in general. By the 1990s, feminist organisations existed in all western countries and most parts of the developing world. However, two processes have accompanied these developments. The first is a process of deradicalization, whereby there has been a retreat from the sometimes uncompromising positions that characterized feminism in the early 1970s. This has Betty Friedan (born 1921)

US feminist and political activist, sometimes seen as the 'mother' of women's liberation. Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique* (1963) is often credited with having stimulated the emergence of 'second-wave' feminism. In 1966, she helped found the National Organization of Women (NOW) and became its first president.

Friedan attacked the cultural myths that sustained female domesticity, highlighting the sense of frustration and despair that afflicted suburban American women confined to the role of housewife and mother. She aimed at broadening educational and career opportunities for women, and has been criticized by radical feminists for focusing on the needs of middle-class women and ignoring patriarchal structures in the 'private' sphere. In *The Second Stage* (1983) Friedan drew attention to the danger that the pursuit of 'personhood' might encourage women to deny the importance of children, the home and the family.

led to the popularity of the idea of 'post-feminism', which suggests that, as feminist goals have been largely achieved, the women's movement has moved 'beyond feminism'. The second process is one of fragmentation. Instead of simply losing its radical or critical edge, feminist thinking has gone through a process of radical diversification, making it difficult, and perhaps impossible, any longer to identify 'common ground' within feminism. In addition to the 'core' feminist traditions – liberal, socialist/Marxist and radical feminism – must now be added postmodern feminism, psychoanalytical feminism, black feminism, lesbian feminism and so on.

The politics of the personal – central themes

Until the 1960s, the idea that feminism should be regarded as an ideology in its own right would have been highly questionable. Feminism would, more likely, have been viewed as a sub-set of liberalism and socialism, the point at which the basic values and theories of these two ideologies can be applied to gender issues. The rise of radical feminism changed this, in that radical feminists proclaimed the central political importance of gender divisions, something that no conventional ideology could accept. Conventional ideologies were therefore viewed as inadequate vehicles for advancing the social role of women, and even, at times, criticized for

harbouring patriarchal attitudes and assumptions. However, the emergent ideology of feminism was a cross-cutting ideology, encompassing, from the outset, three broad traditions: liberal feminism, Marxist or socialist feminism and radical feminism. In addition, the 'core' feminist traditions each contain rival tendencies and have spawned hybrid or 'dual-system' feminisms (such as the attempt to blend radical feminism with certain Marxist ideas), and new feminist traditions have emerged, particularly since the 1980s. It is thus easy to dismiss feminism as hopelessly fragmented, to argue that feminism is characterized more by disagreement than by agreement. A range of 'common ground' themes can nevertheless be identified within feminism. The most important of these are the following:

- The public/private divide
- Patriarchy
- Sex and gender
- Equality and difference

The public/private divide

Traditional notions of what is 'political' locate politics in the arena of public rather than private life. Politics has usually been understood as an activity that takes place within a 'public sphere' of government institutions, political parties, pressure groups and public debate. Family life and personal relationships have normally been thought to be part of a 'private sphere', and therefore to be 'non-political'. Modern feminists, on the other hand, insist that politics is an activity that takes place within all social groups and is not merely confined to the affairs of government or other public bodies. Politics exists whenever and wherever social conflict is found. Millett (1970), for example, defined politics as 'power-structured relationships, arrangements whereby one group of persons is controlled by another'. The relationship between government and its citizens is therefore clearly political, but so is the relationship between employers and workers within a firm, and also relationships in the family, between husbands and wives, and between parents and children.

The definition of what is 'political' is not merely of academic interest. Feminists argue that sexual inequality has been preserved precisely because the sexual division of labour that runs through society has been thought of as 'natural' rather than 'political'. This is highlighted in the title of Jean B. Elshtain's *Public Man, Private Woman* (1981). Traditionally, the public sphere of life, encompassing politics, work, art and literature, has been the preserve of men, while women have been confined to an essentially private existence, centred upon the family and domestic responsibilities. If politics takes place only within the public sphere, the role of women and the question of sexual equality are issues of little or no political importance. Women, restricted to the private role of housewife and mother, are in effect excluded from politics.

Feminists have therefore sought to break down the divide between 'public man' and 'private woman'. However, they have not always agreed about what it means to break down the public/private divide, about how it can be achieved, or about how far it is desirable. Radical feminists have been the keenest opponents of the idea that politics stops at the front door, proclaiming, instead, that 'the personal is the political'. Female oppression is thus thought to operate in all walks of life and in many respects originates in the family itself. Radical feminists

have therefore been concerned to analyse what can be called ‘the politics of everyday life’. This includes the process of conditioning in the family, the distribution of housework and other domestic responsibilities, and the politics of personal and sexual conduct. For some feminists, breaking down the public/private divide implies transferring the responsibilities of private life to the state or other public bodies. For example, the burden of child-rearing upon women could be relieved by more generous welfare support for families or the provision of nursery schools or crèches at work. Liberal feminists, however, object to the public/private divide on the grounds that it restricts women's access to the public sphere of education, work and political life, but warn against the dangers of politicizing the private sphere, which, according to liberal theory, is a realm of personal choice and individual freedom.

Patriarchy

Feminists believe that gender, like social class, race or religion, is a significant social cleavage. Indeed, radical feminists argue that gender is the deepest and most politically important of social divisions. Feminists have therefore advanced a theory of ‘sexual politics’, in much the same way that socialists have preached the idea of ‘class politics’. They also refer to ‘sexism’ as a form of oppression, drawing a conscious parallel with ‘racism’ or racial oppression. However, conventional political theory has traditionally ignored sexual oppression and failed to recognize gender as a politically significant category. As a result, feminists have been forced to develop new concepts and theories to convey the idea that society is based upon a system of sexual inequality and oppression.

Feminists use the concept of ‘patriarchy’ to describe the power relationship between men and women. The term literally means ‘rule by the father’ (pater meaning father in Latin), and can refer narrowly to the supremacy of the husband–father within the family, and therefore to the subordination of his wife and his children. Some feminists employ patriarchy only in this specific and limited sense, to describe the structure of the family and the dominance of the father within it, preferring to use broader terms such as ‘male supremacy’ or ‘male dominance’ to describe gender relations in society at large. However, feminists believe that the dominance of the father within the family symbolizes male supremacy in all other institutions. Many would argue, moreover, that the patriarchal family lies at the heart of a systematic process of male domination, in that it reproduces male dominance in all other walks of life: in education, at work and in politics. Patriarchy is therefore commonly used in a broader sense to mean quite simply ‘rule by men’, both within the family and outside. Millett (1970, p. 25), for instance, described ‘patriarchal government’ as an institution whereby ‘that half of the populace which is female is controlled by that half which is male’. She suggested that patriarchy contains two principles: ‘male shall dominate female, elder male shall dominate younger’. A patriarchy is therefore an hierarchic society, characterized by both sexual and generational oppression.

The concept of patriarchy is nevertheless broad. Feminists may believe that men have dominated women in all societies, but accept that the form and degree of oppression has varied considerably in different cultures and at different times. At least in western countries, the social position of women significantly improved during the twentieth century as a result of the achievement of the vote and broader access to education, changes in marriage and divorce law, the legalization of abortion and so on. However, in parts of the developing world patriarchy still assumes a cruel,

even gruesome form: 80 million women, mainly in Africa, are subject to the practice of circumcision; bride murders still occur in India, and the persistence of the dowry system ensures that female children are often unwanted and sometimes allowed to die.

Feminists do not therefore have a single or simple analysis of patriarchy, however. Liberal feminists, to the extent that they use the term, use it to draw attention to the unequal distribution to rights and entitlements in society at large. The face of patriarchy they highlight is therefore the under-representation of women in senior positions in politics, business, the professions and public life. Socialist feminists tend to emphasize the economic aspects of patriarchy. In their view, patriarchy operates in tandem with capitalism, gender subordination and class inequality being interlinked systems of oppression. Some socialist feminists, indeed, reject the term altogether, on the grounds that gender inequality is merely a consequence of the class system: capitalism not patriarchy is the issue. Radical feminists, on the other hand, place considerable stress upon patriarchy. They see it as a systematic, institutionalized and pervasive form of male power that is rooted in the family. Patriarchy thus expresses the belief that the pattern of male domination and female subordination that characterizes society at large is, essentially, a reflection of the power structures that operate within domestic life.

Sex and gender

The most common of all anti-feminist arguments, most commonly advanced by conservatives, asserts that gender divisions in society are 'natural': women and men merely fulfil the social roles that nature designed them for. A woman's physical and anatomical make-up thus suits her to a subordinate and domestic role in society; in short, 'biology is destiny'. In practice, all such biological arguments are hollow. A woman's brain may be, as male chauvinists point out, smaller than a man's, but in proportion to her body it is relatively larger, which is usually a more accurate indication of intelligence. Women are generally physically less powerful than men, with less developed musculatures. To some extent, this simply reflects social factors: men have been encouraged to undertake physical and outdoor work, to participate in sport and to conform to a stereotypical 'masculine' physique. However, although physical strength is important in agricultural or industrializing societies, it has little value in developed societies where tools and machinery are far more efficient than human strength. Indeed, the heavily muscled male may simply be redundant in a technological world of robots and microchips. In any case, physical hard work, for which the male body may be better suited, has traditionally been undertaken by people of low status, not by those in authority.

The biological factor that is most frequently linked to women's social position is their capacity to bear children. Without doubt, childbearing is unique to the female sex, together with the fact that women menstruate and have the capacity to suckle babies. However, in no way do such biological facts necessarily disadvantage women nor determine their social destiny. Women may be mothers, but they need not accept the responsibilities of motherhood: nurturing, educating and raising children by devoting themselves to home and family. The link between childbearing and child-rearing is cultural rather than biological: women are expected to stay at home, bring up their children and look after the house because of the structure of traditional family life. Domestic responsibilities could be undertaken by the husband, or they could be shared equally between husband and wife in so-called 'symmetrical families'. Moreover, child-rearing could be

carried out by the community or the state, or it could be undertaken by relatives, as in ‘extended families’.

Feminists have traditionally challenged the idea that biology is destiny by drawing a sharp distinction between sex and gender. ‘Sex’, in this sense, refers to biological differences between females and males; these differences are natural and therefore are unalterable. The most important sex differences are those that are linked to reproduction. ‘Gender’, on the other hand, is a cultural term; it refers to the different roles that society ascribes to men and women. Gender differences are typically imposed through contrasting stereotypes of ‘masculinity’ and ‘femininity’. As Simone de Beauvoir (see p. 258) pointed out, ‘Women are made, they are not born’. Patriarchal ideas blur the distinction between sex and gender, and assume that all social distinctions between men and women are rooted in biology or anatomy. Feminists, in contrast, usually deny that there is a necessary or logical link between sex and gender, and emphasize that gender differences are socially, or even politically, constructed.

Most feminists believe that sex differences between men and women are relatively minor and neither explain nor justify gender distinctions. As a result, human nature is thought to be androgynous, incorporating the characteristics of both sexes. All human beings, regardless of sex, possess the genetic inheritance of a mother and a father, and therefore embody a blend of either female and male attributes or traits. Such a view accepts that sex differences are biological facts of life but insists that they have no social, political or economic significance. Women and men should not be judged by their sex, but as individuals, as ‘persons’. The goal of feminism is therefore the achievement of genderless ‘personhood’. Establishing a concept of gender that is divorced from biological sex had crucial significance for feminist theory. Not only did it highlight the possibility of social change – socially constructed identities can be reconstructed or even demolished – but it also drew attention to the processes through which women had been ‘engendered’ and therefore oppressed.

Although most feminists have regarded the sex/gender distinction as empowering, others have attacked it. These attacks have been launched from two main directions. The first, advanced by so-called ‘difference feminists’, suggests that there are essential differences between women and men. From this ‘essentialist’ perspective, social and cultural characteristics are seen to reflect deeper biological differences. However, such a view differs from conservative anti-feminism, in that it takes ‘womanly qualities’ to include positive attributes, such as a capacity for nurturing, cooperation and intuition, rather than negative ones associated with submission and subordination. The second attack on the sex/gender distinction challenges the categories themselves. Postmodern feminists have questioned whether ‘sex’ is as clear-cut a biological distinction as is usually assumed. For example, the features of ‘biological womanhood’ do not apply to many who are classified as women: some women cannot bear children, some women are not sexually attracted to men, and so on. If there is a biology–culture continuum rather than a fixed biological/cultural divide, the categories ‘female’ and ‘male’ become more or less arbitrary, and the concepts of sex and gender become hopelessly entangled.

Perspectives on ...

Gender

Liberals have traditionally regarded differences between women and men as being of entirely private or personal significance. In public and political life all people are considered as individuals, gender being as irrelevant as ethnicity or social class. In this sense, individualism is 'gender-blind'.

Conservatives have traditionally emphasised the social and political significance of gender divisions, arguing that they imply that the sexual division of labour between women and men is natural and inevitable. Gender is thus one of the factors that gives society its organic and hierarchical character.

Socialists, like liberals, have rarely treated gender as a politically significant category. When gender divisions are significant it is usually because they reflect and are sustained by deeper economic and class inequalities.

Fascists view gender as a fundamental division within humankind. Men naturally monopolize leadership and decision-making, while women are suited to an entirely domestic, supportive and subordinate role.

Feminists usually see gender as a cultural or political distinction, in contrast to biological and ineradicable sexual differences. Gender divisions are therefore a manifestation of male power. Difference feminists may nevertheless believe that gender differences reflect a psycho-biological gulf between female and male attributes and sensibilities.

Religious fundamentalists usually regard gender as a God-given division, and thus as one that is crucial to social and political organization. Patriarchal structures and the leadership of males therefore tend to be regarded as natural and desirable.

Equality and difference

Although the goal of feminism is the overthrow of patriarchy and the ending of sexist oppression, feminists have sometimes been uncertain about what this means in practice and how it can be brought about. Traditionally, women have demanded equality with men, even to the extent that feminism is often characterized as a movement for the achievement of sexual equality. However, the issue of equality has also exposed major faultlines within feminism: feminists have embraced contrasting notions of equality and some have entirely rejected equality in favour of the idea of difference. Liberal feminists champion legal and political equality with men. They have supported an equal rights agenda, which would enable women to compete in public life on equal terms with men, regardless of sex. Equality thus means equal access to the public realm. Socialist feminists, in contrast, argue that equal rights may be meaningless unless women also enjoy social equality. Equality, in this sense, has to apply in terms of economic power, and so must address issues such as the ownership of wealth, pay differentials and the distinction between waged and unwaged labour. Radical feminists, for their part, are primarily

concerned about equality in family and personal life. Equality must therefore operate, for example, in terms of childcare and other domestic responsibilities, the control of one's own body, and sexual expression and fulfilment.

Despite tensions between them, these egalitarian positions are united in viewing gender differences in a negative light. Egalitarian forms of feminism link 'difference' to patriarchy, seeing it as a manifestation of oppression or subordination. From this viewpoint, the feminist project is defined by the desire to liberate women from 'difference'. However, other feminists champion difference rather than equality. Difference feminists regard the very notion of equality as either misguided or simply undesirable. To want to be equal to a man implies that women are 'male identified', in that they define their goals in terms of what men are or what men have. The demand for equality thus embodies a desire to be 'like men'. Although feminists seek to overthrow patriarchy, many warn against the danger of modelling themselves upon men, which would require them, for example, to adopt the competitive and aggressive behaviour that characterizes male society. For many feminists, liberation means the desire to develop and achieve fulfilment as women; in other words, to be 'woman identified'.

Difference feminists thus subscribe to a 'pro-woman' position, which holds that sex differences do have political and social importance. This is based upon the essentialist belief that women and men are fundamentally different at a psycho-biological level. The aggressive and competitive nature of men and the creative and empathetic character of women are thought to reflect hormonal and other genetic differences, rather than simply the structure of society. To idealize androgyny or personhood and ignore sex differences is therefore a mistake. Women should recognize and celebrate the distinctive characteristics of the female sex; they should seek liberation not as sexless 'persons' but as developed and fulfilled women. In the form of cultural feminism, this has led to an emphasis upon women's crafts, art and literature, and upon experiences that are unique to women and promote a sense of 'sisterhood', such as childbirth, motherhood and menstruation.

Tensions within		Feminism (1)	
Egalitarian feminism	v.	Difference feminism	
androgyny	-	essentialism	
personhood	-	sisterhood	
human rights	-	women's rights	
gender equality	-	sexual liberation	
reduce difference	-	celebrate difference	
sex/gender divide	-	sex equals gender	
transcend biology	-	embrace biology	
pro-human	-	pro-woman	
men are redeemable	-	men are 'the problem'	
engagement with men	-	feminist separatism	

Sex and politics

Feminism is a cross-cutting ideology. The rival traditions of feminism have largely emerged out of established ideologies or theories, most obviously liberalism and socialism, but also, more recently, ideas such as postmodernism (see p. 323) and psychoanalysis. Such ideologies and theories have served as vehicles for advancing the social role of women because they are generally sympathetic towards equality. Hierarchical or elitist ideologies or theories, in contrast, are more commonly associated with anti-feminism. For instance, traditional conservatism holds that the patriarchal structure of society and the sexual division of labour between 'public' man and 'private' woman is natural and inevitable. Women are born to be housewives and mothers, and rebellion against this fate is both pointless and wrong. At best, conservatives can argue that they support sexual equality on the ground that women's family responsibilities are every bit as important as men's public duties. Men and women are therefore 'equal but different'.

Forms of reactionary feminism have also developed in certain circumstances. This has occurred when the traditional status and position of women has been threatened by rapid social or cultural change. So-called Islamic feminism has this character. In Islamic states, such as Iran, Pakistan and Sudan, the imposition of Shari'a law and the return to traditional moral and religious principles have sometimes been portrayed as a means of enhancing the status of women, threatened by the spread of western attitudes and values. From this perspective, the veil and of other dress codes and the exclusion of women from public life have been viewed by some Moslem women as symbols of liberation. However, from the perspective of conventional feminism, reactionary feminism is simply a contradiction in terms, reflecting the misguided belief that traditional public/private divide genuinely afforded women status and protection. Indeed, it provides evidence of the cultural strength of patriarchy and its capacity to recruit women into their own oppression. The major traditions within feminism are the following:

- Liberal feminism
- Socialist feminism
- Radical feminism
- New feminist traditions

Liberal feminism

Early feminism, particularly the 'first wave' of the women's movement, was deeply influenced by the ideas and values of liberalism. The first major feminist text, Wollstonecraft's *Vindication of the Rights of Women* ([1792] 1967), argued that women should be entitled to the same rights and privileges as men on the ground that they are 'human beings'. She claimed that the 'distinction of sex' would become unimportant in political and social life if women gained access to education and were regarded as rational creatures in their own right. John Stuart Mill's *On the Subjection of Women* ([1869] 1970), written in collaboration with Harriet Taylor, proposed that society should be organized according to the principle of 'reason' and that 'accidents of birth' such as sex should be irrelevant. Women would therefore be entitled to the rights and liberties enjoyed by men and in particular the right to vote.

Mary Wollstonecraft (1759–97)

UK social theorist and feminist. Drawn into radical politics by the French Revolution, Wollstonecraft was part of a creative and intellectual circle that included her husband, the anarchist William Godwin (see p. 194). She died giving birth to her daughter Mary, who later married the poet Shelley and wrote *Frankenstein*.

Wollstonecraft's feminism drew upon an Enlightenment liberal belief in reason and a radical humanist commitment to equality. She stressed the equal rights of women, especially in education, on the basis of the notion of 'personhood'. However, her work developed a more complex analysis of women as the objects and subjects of desire, and also presented the domestic sphere as a model of community and social order.

'Second-wave' feminism also has a significant liberal component. Liberal feminism has dominated the women's movement in the United States; its major spokesperson has been Betty Friedan, whose *The Feminine Mystique* marked the resurgence of feminist thought in the 1960s. The 'feminine mystique' to which Friedan referred is the cultural myth that women seek security and fulfilment in domestic life and 'feminine' behaviour, a myth that serves to discourage women from entering employment, politics and public life in general. She highlighted what she called 'the problem with no name', by which she meant the sense of despair and deep unhappiness many women experience because they are confined to a domestic existence, unable to gain fulfilment in a career or through political life. In 1966, Friedan helped to found and became the first leader of the National Organization of Women (NOW), which has developed into a powerful pressure group and the largest women's organization in the world.

The philosophical basis of liberal feminism lies in the principle of individualism (p. 30), the belief that the human individual is all important and therefore that all individuals are of equal moral worth. Individuals are entitled to equal treatment, regardless of their sex, race, colour, creed or religion. If individuals are to be judged, it should be on rational grounds, on the content of their character, their talents, or their personal worth. Liberals express this belief in the demand for equal rights: all individuals are entitled to participate in, or gain access to, public or political life. Any form of discrimination against women in this respect should clearly be prohibited. Wollstonecraft, for example, insisted that education, in her day the province of men, should be opened up to women. J. S. Mill argued in favour of equal citizenship and political rights. Indeed, the entire suffrage movement was based upon liberal individualism and the conviction that female emancipation would be brought about once women enjoy equal voting rights with men. Similarly, Friedan's work and the activities of groups such as NOW have aimed at breaking down the remaining legal and social pressures that restrict women from pursuing careers and being politically active. Organizations such as NOW and Emily's List have campaigned, in particular, to increase the representation of women in senior positions in public and political life.

Liberal feminism is essentially reformist: it seeks to open up public life to equal competition between women and men, rather than to challenge what many feminists see as the patriarchal structure of society itself. In particular, liberal feminists generally do not wish to abolish the distinction between the public and private spheres of life. Reform is necessary, they argue, but only to ensure the establishment of equal rights in the public sphere: the right to education, the

right to vote, the right to pursue a career and so on. Significant reforms have undoubtedly been achieved in the industrialized West, notably the extension of the franchise, the 'liberalization' of divorce law and abortion, equal pay and so forth. Nevertheless, far less attention has been given to the private sphere, the sexual division of labour and distribution of power within the family.

Liberal feminists have usually assumed that men and women have different natures and inclinations, and therefore accept that, at least in part, women's leaning towards family and domestic life is influenced by natural impulses and so reflects a willing choice. This certainly applied in the case of nineteenth-century feminists, who regarded the traditional structure of family life as 'natural', but it is also evident in the work of modern liberal feminists such as Friedan. In *The Second Stage* (1983) Friedan discussed the problem of reconciling the achievement of 'personhood', made possible by opening up broader opportunities for women in work and public life, with the need for love, represented by children, home and the family. Friedan's emphasis upon the continuing and central importance of the family in women's life has been criticized by more radical feminists as contributing to a 'mystique of motherhood'.

At a deeper level, radical feminists have drawn attention to the limitations of individualism as the basis for gender politics. In the first place, an individualist perspective draws attention away from the structural character of patriarchy, in which women are subordinated not as individuals who happen to be denied rights or opportunities, but as a sex that is subject to systematic and pervasive oppression. Second, the stress in individualism upon 'personhood' may make it more difficult for women to think and act collectively on the basis of their common gender identity, their 'sisterhood'. Third, liberal individualism may only appear to rise above gender differences. In viewing human beings as individuals, liberalism seems to transcend gender and other social identities, enabling people to be valued on the basis of personal talents and achievements. However, this may at best depoliticize sexual relations by, in effect, making gender invisible, and at worst it may foist male attributes and aspirations on women, because the allegedly sexless 'individual' invariably embodies concealed male norms. Treating people equally may thus mean treating women like men.

Finally, the demand for equal rights, which lies at the core of liberal feminism, has principally attracted those women whose education and social background equip them to take advantage of wider educational and career opportunities. For example, nineteenth-century feminists and the leaders of the suffrage movement were usually educated, middle-class women who had the opportunity to benefit from the right to vote, pursue a career or enter public life. The demand for equal rights assumes that all women would have the opportunity to take advantage of, for example, better educational and economic opportunities. In reality, women are judged not only by their talents and abilities, but also by social and economic factors. If emancipation simply means the achievement of equal rights and opportunities for women and men, other forms of social disadvantage – for example, those linked to social class and race – are ignored. Liberal feminism may therefore reflect the interests of white, middle-class women in developed societies, but fail to address the problems of working-class women, black women and women in the developing world.

Socialist feminism

Although some early feminists subscribed to socialist ideas, socialist feminism only became prominent in the second half of the twentieth century. In contrast to their liberal counterparts, socialist feminists do not believe that women simply face political or legal disadvantages that can be remedied by equal legal rights or the achievement of equal opportunities. Rather, socialist feminists argue that the relationship between the sexes is rooted in the social and economic structure itself, and that nothing short of profound social change, some would say a social revolution, can offer women the prospect of genuine emancipation. As a United Nations report pointed out in 1980: 'While women represent 50 per cent of the world population, they perform nearly two thirds of all working hours, receive one-tenth of world income and own less than 1 per cent of world property.'

The central theme of socialist feminism is that patriarchy can only be understood in the light of social and economic factors. The classic statement of this argument was developed in Friedrich Engels' *The Origins of the Family, Private Property and the State* ([1884] 1976). Engels (1820–95), the lifelong friend and collaborator of Karl Marx (see p. 126), suggested that the position of women in society had fundamentally changed with the development of capitalism and the institution of private property. In pre-capitalist societies, family life had been communistic, and 'mother right' – the inheritance of property and social position through the female line – was widely observed. Capitalism, however, being based upon the ownership of private property by men, had overthrown 'mother right' and brought about what Engels called 'the world historical defeat of the female sex'. Like many subsequent socialist feminists, Engels believed that female oppression operates through the institution of the family. The 'bourgeois family' is patriarchal and oppressive because men wish to ensure that their property will be passed on only to their sons. Men achieve undisputed paternity by insisting upon monogamous marriage, a restriction that is rigorously applied to wives, depriving them of other sexual partners, but, as Engels noted, is routinely ignored by their husbands. Women are compensated for this repression by the development of a 'cult of femininity', which extols the attractions of romantic love but in reality is an organized hypocrisy designed to protect male privileges and property. Engels believed that in a socialist society marriage should be dissolvable, and that once private property is abolished its patriarchal features, and perhaps also monogamy, will disappear. Other socialist feminists have proposed that the traditional, patriarchal family should be replaced by a system of communal living and 'free love', as advocated by early utopian socialists such as Fourier and Owen.

Most socialist feminists agree that the confinement of women to a domestic sphere of housework and motherhood serves the economic interests of capitalism. Some have argued that women constitute a 'reserve army of labour', which can be recruited into the workforce when there is a need to increase production, but easily shed and returned to domestic life during a depression, without imposing a burden upon employers or the state. In addition, as temporary workers women are conditioned to accept poorly paid, low-status jobs, which has the advantage of helping to depress wage rates without posing a threat to 'men's jobs'. At the same time, women's domestic labour is vital to the health and efficiency of the economy. In bearing and rearing children, women are producing labour power for the next generation and thus guaranteeing

future production. Women are also responsible for socializing, conditioning and even educating children, thereby ensuring that they develop into disciplined and obedient workers.

Similarly, in their role as housewives, women relieve men of the burden of housework and child-rearing, allowing them to concentrate their time and energy upon paid and productive employment. In that sense, the sexual division of labour between men, who undertake waged labour in factories or offices, and women, who carry out unwaged domestic work, promotes economic efficiency. Furthermore, housewives are responsible for getting their husbands to work on time, properly dressed and well fed, ready for a hard day's work. The traditional family provides the worker with a powerful incentive to find and keep a job because he has a wife and children to support. In addition the family provides the worker with a necessary cushion against the alienation and frustrations of life as a 'wage slave'. Indeed, conventional family life provides the husband-father with considerable compensations: he enjoys the status of being the 'breadwinner' and is granted leisure and relaxation at home, while the housewife-mother is employed in 'trivial' domestic labour.

Some feminists have argued that it is the unwaged nature of domestic work that accounts for its low social status and leaves women financially dependent upon their husbands, thus establishing systematic social inequality. The campaign for 'wages for housework', associated in the UK with Costa and James (1972), suggested that women would gain economic independence and enjoy enhanced social status if their labour, like that of men, is recognized as productive and worthwhile by being paid. This argument has also been used to suggest that prostitution should be accepted as legal and waged employment. However, most socialist feminists argue that emancipation requires that women be afforded a broader range of social and economic opportunities, rather than merely being paid for fulfilling their traditional social roles as housewives or sex objects.

Although socialist feminists agree that the 'women's question' cannot be separated from social and economic life, they are profoundly divided about the nature of that link. Gender divisions clearly cut across class cleavages, creating tension within socialist feminist analysis about the relative importance of gender and social class, and raising particularly difficult questions for Marxist feminists. Orthodox Marxists insist upon the primacy of class politics over sexual politics. Engels, for example, believed that the 'bourgeois family', which had subordinated women, arose as a consequence of private property and was therefore a by-product of capitalism. This suggests that class exploitation is a deeper and more significant process than sexual oppression. Women are oppressed not by men, but by the institution of private property, by capitalism. It also suggests that women's emancipation will be a by-product of a social revolution in which capitalism is overthrown and replaced by socialism. Women seeking liberation should therefore recognize that the 'class war' is more important than the idea of a 'sex war'. Hence, feminists should devote their energies to the labour movement rather than support a separate and divisive women's movement.

However, modern socialist feminists have found it increasingly difficult to accept the primacy of class politics over sexual politics. In part, this was a consequence of the disappointing progress made by women in state-socialist societies such as the Soviet Union, suggesting that socialism does not, in itself, end patriarchy. For modern socialist feminists, sexual oppression is every bit

as important as class exploitation. Many of them subscribe to modern Marxism, which accepts the interplay of economic, social, political and cultural forces in society, rather than orthodox Marxism, which insists upon the primacy of material or economic factors. They therefore refuse to analyse the position of women in simple economic terms and have, instead, given attention to the cultural and ideological roots of patriarchy. For example, the UK socialist feminist, Juliet Mitchell (1971), suggested that women fulfil four social functions: (1) they are members of the workforce and are active in production; (2) they bear children and thus reproduce the human species; (3) they are responsible for socializing children; and (4) they are sex objects. From this perspective, liberation requires that women achieve emancipation in each of these areas, and not merely that the capitalist class system is replaced by socialism.

Radical feminism

One of the distinctive features of ‘second-wave’ feminism is that many feminist writers moved beyond the perspectives of existing political ideologies. Gender differences in society were regarded for the first time as important in themselves, needing to be understood in their own terms. Liberal and socialist ideas had already been adapted to throw light upon the position of women in society, but neither acknowledged that gender is the most fundamental of all social divisions. During the 1960s and 1970s, however, the feminist movement sought to uncover the influence of patriarchy not only in politics, public life and the economy, but in all aspects of social, personal and sexual existence. This trend was evident in the pioneering work of Simone de Beauvoir, and was developed by early radical feminists such as Eva Figes and Germaine Greer (b. 1939).

Figes's *Patriarchal Attitudes* (1970) drew attention not to the more familiar legal or social disadvantages suffered by women, but to the fact that patriarchal values and beliefs pervade the culture, philosophy, morality and religion of society. In all walks of life and learning, women are portrayed as inferior and subordinate to men, a stereotype of ‘femininity’ being imposed upon women by men. In *The Female Eunuch* (1970), Greer suggested that women are conditioned to a passive sexual role, which has repressed their true sexuality as well as the more active and

Simone de Beauvoir (1906–86)

French novelist, playwright and social critic. De Beauvoir taught philosophy at the Sorbonne from 1931 to 1943, and later became an independent writer and social theorist. *The Second Sex* (1949) had a massive influence on the feminist movement by effectively reopening the issue of gender politics and foreshadowing some of the themes later developed by radical feminists. De Beauvoir was a long-time companion of Jean-Paul Sartre (1905–80).

De Beauvoir insisted that women's position was determined by social and not natural factors, and developed a complex critique of patriarchal culture. Her work highlights the extent to which the masculine is represented as the positive or the norm, while the feminine is portrayed as ‘other’. Such ‘otherness’ fundamentally limits women's freedom and prevents them from expressing their full humanity. De Beauvoir placed her faith in rationality and critical analysis as the means of exposing this process and of giving women responsibility for their own lives.

adventurous side of their personalities. In effect, women have been castrated and turned into sexless objects by the cultural stereotype of the 'eternal feminine'. Greer's work was influenced by new-left writers such as Wilhelm Reich (1897–1957) and Herbert Marcuse (see p. 136), who had proclaimed the need for 'sexual liberation' and criticised the repressive nature of conventional society.

However, it was with the work of activists such as the US writer, Kate Millett (b. 1934), and the Canadian author, Shulamith Firestone (b. 1945), that radical feminism developed a systematic theory of sexual oppression that clearly stood apart from established liberal and socialist traditions. The central feature of radical feminism is the belief that sexual oppression is the most fundamental feature of society and that other forms of injustice – class exploitation, racial hatred and so on – are merely secondary. Gender is thought to be the deepest social cleavage and the most politically significant; more important, for example, than social class, race or nation. Radical feminists have therefore insisted that society be understood and described as 'patriarchal' to highlight the central role of sex oppression, just as socialists use the term 'capitalist' to draw attention to the significance of economic exploitation. Patriarchy thus refers to a systematic, institutionalized and pervasive process of gender oppression.

In *Sexual Politics* (1970) Millett described patriarchy as a 'social constant' running through all political, social and economic structures and found in every historical and contemporary society, as well as in all major religions. The different roles of men and women have their origin in a process of 'conditioning': from a very early age boys and girls are encouraged to conform to very specific gender identities. This process takes place largely within the family, 'patriarchy's chief institution', but it is also evident in literature, art, public life and the economy. Millett proposed that patriarchy should be challenged through a process of 'consciousness raising', an idea influenced by the Black Power movement of the 1960s and early 1970s. Through discussion and education women would become increasingly aware of the sexism that pervades and structures their society, and would therefore be better able to challenge it. Women's liberation thus required a revolutionary change: the institution of the family would have to be destroyed and the psychological and sexual oppression of women that operates at all levels of society would have to be overthrown.

Firestone's *The Dialectic of Sex* (1972) attempted a still more ambitious explanation of social and historical processes in terms of sexual divisions. Firestone adapted Marxist theory to the analysis of the role of women by substituting the category of sex for that of social class. According to Firestone, sex differences do not merely arise from social conditioning, but from biology. The basic fact that women bear babies has led to a 'natural division of labour' within what she called 'the biological family'. In bearing children, women are constantly at the mercy of biology, and therefore, like children, are dependent upon men for their physical survival. Nevertheless, Firestone did not accept that patriarchy is either natural or inevitable. Women, she argued, can achieve emancipation by transcending their biological nature and escaping from the 'curse of Eve'. Firestone believed that modern technology had opened up the prospect of genuine sexual equality by relieving women of the burden of pregnancy and childbirth. Pregnancy can be avoided by contraception or be terminated by abortion, but new technology also creates the possibility of avoiding pregnancy by artificial reproduction in test tubes and the transfer of child-rearing responsibilities to social institutions. In other words, the biological process of

reproduction can be carried out in laboratories by use of cybernetics, allowing women, for the first time in history, to escape from the biological family and enter society as the true equals of men.

Although Millett saw the roots of patriarchy in social conditioning, while Firestone located them in biology, they agreed that liberation requires that gender differences between men and women be diminished and eventually abolished. They both believed that the true nature of the sexes is equal and identical, a fact presently concealed either by the influence of patriarchal culture or the misfortune that women are born with wombs. Both accepted that human nature is essentially androgynous. However, radical feminism encompasses a number of divergent elements, some of which emphasize the fundamental and unalterable difference between women and men. An example of this is the 'pro-woman' position, particularly strong in France and the United States. In sharp contrast to Firestone's belief that women need to be liberated from the curse of childbirth and child-rearing, this position extols the positive virtues of fertility and motherhood. Women should not try to be 'more like men'. Instead, they should recognize and embrace their sisterhood, the bonds that link them to all other women. The pro-woman position therefore accepts that women's attitudes and values are different from men's, but implies that in certain respects women are superior, possessing the qualities of creativity, sensitivity and caring, which men can never fully appreciate or develop. Such ideas have been associated in particular with ecofeminism, which is examined in Chapter 9.

The acceptance of unalterable differences between men and women has led some feminists towards cultural feminism, a retreat from the corrupting and aggressive male world of political activism into an apolitical, woman-centred culture and life-style. Conversely, other feminists have become politically assertive and even revolutionary. If sex differences are natural, then the roots of patriarchy lie within the male sex itself. 'All men' are physically and psychologically disposed to oppress 'all women'; in other words, 'men are the enemy'. This clearly leads in the direction of feminist separatism.

Tensions within Feminism (2)	
Radical feminism	v. Liberal feminism
women's liberation	- female emancipation
patriarchy	- gender inequality
sisterhood	- individualism
the personal is political	- conventional politics
transform private realm	- public/private divide
gender equality	- access to public realm
sexual politics	- equal rights/opportunities
revolutionary change	- reform/gradualism
consciousness raising	- political activism

Men constitute an oppressive 'sex-class' dedicated to aggression, domination and destruction; the female 'sex-class' is therefore the 'universal victim'. For example, Susan Brownmiller's *Against Our Will* (1975) emphasized that men dominate women through a process of physical and sexual abuse. Men have created an 'ideology of rape', which amounts to a 'conscious

process of intimidation by which all men keep all women in a state of fear'. Brownmiller argued that men rape because they can, because they have the 'biological capacity to rape', and that even men who do not rape nevertheless benefit from the fear and anxiety that rape provokes amongst all women.

Feminists who have pursued this line of argument also believe that it has profound implications for women's personal and sexual conduct. Sexual equality and harmony is impossible because all relationships between men and women must involve oppression. Heterosexual women are therefore thought to be 'male identified', incapable of fully realizing their true nature and becoming 'woman identified'. This has led to the development of political lesbianism, which holds that sexual preferences are an issue of crucial political importance for women. Only women who remain celibate or choose lesbianism can regard themselves as 'woman-identified women', capable of finally escaping from male oppression. As Ti-Grace Atkinson put it, 'feminism is the theory; lesbianism is the practice'. However, the issues of separatism and lesbianism have deeply divided the women's movement. The majority of feminists see such uncompromising positions as a distorted reflection of the misogyny, or woman-hating, that pervades traditional male society. Instead, they remain faithful to the goal of sexual equality and the belief that it is possible to establish harmony between women and men in a non-sexist society. Hence they believe that sexual preference is strictly a matter of personal choice and not a question of political commitment.

New feminist traditions

Since the 1960s it has become increasingly difficult to analyse feminism simply in terms of the threefold division into liberal, socialist and radical traditions. Divisions within the 'core' traditions have sometimes deepened, and, on other occasions, divisions between the traditions have been blurred. New forms of feminism have also emerged. Although these new feminisms draw upon a wide variety of influences, they reflect a common interest in the issue of difference and, in particular, the desire to apply difference to women and not merely to the relationship between men and women. These new feminist traditions include psychoanalytical feminism, postmodern feminism, black feminism and lesbian feminism. Feminists such as de Beauvoir, Friedan and Millett had been fiercely critical of psychoanalysis in general and Sigmund Freud (1856–1939) in particular, seeing theories such as 'penis envy' and the 'castration complex' as evidence of flagrant misogyny. However, starting with Juliet Mitchell's pioneering *Psychoanalysis and Feminism* (1974), feminists have come to terms with Freud's work, particularly as developed by thinkers such as Jacques Lacan (1901–81). The central feature of psychoanalytical feminism is to see the process through which women and men are engendered and sexual difference is constructed as psychological rather than biological.

Postmodern or poststructural feminists have taken issue with forms of feminism, such as cultural feminism, which proclaim that there are essential differences between women and men. In their view, there is no such thing as a fixed female identity, the notion of 'woman' being nothing more than a fiction. However, in calling the male/female divide into question, postmodern feminism perhaps fatally compromises the very idea of a women's movement. Black feminism has challenged the tendency within feminism to ignore racial differences and to suggest that women endure a common oppression by virtue of their sex. Particularly strong in the USA, black

feminism portrays sexism and racism as interlinked systems of oppression and highlights the particular and complex range of gender, racial and economic disadvantages that confront 'women of colour'. Lesbian feminism has taken a variety of forms. In some cases, lesbianism is viewed as the political expression of radical feminism, that is, a means, available to all women, of escaping from patriarchy and becoming 'woman identified'. Other lesbian feminists, however, stress the difference between the experiences of homosexual women and heterosexual women. Lesbian feminists may therefore regard the struggle against homophobia as every bit as important as the struggle against patriarchy.

Feminism in the twenty-first century

In some respects, feminist theory reached a high-point of creativity and radicalism in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Since that time, the women's movement appears to have undergone a decline, and it has been fashionable to discuss the emergence of 'post-feminism'. Without doubt, feminism has confronted a number of difficulties. In the first place, the women's movement has become increasingly fragmented and incoherent; indeed, some question whether the notion of a women's movement is any longer meaningful. Although united by a common desire to advance the role of women, feminists disagree about how this can be achieved and about what it means in practice. Divisions have long existed – between reformist and revolutionary feminists, between radical and socialist feminists, and over highly controversial issues such as separatism and lesbianism. However, these have now proliferated, with divisions emerging over issues such as prostitution, pornography and censorship, abortion, motherhood, race and ethnicity, the welfare state, and so on. However, such a broad range of concerns and interests be more an indication of feminist strength than a source of feminist weakness. Indeed, it may merely serve to highlight the fact that feminism has developed from a political movement into a political ideology that, like other ideologies, encompasses a range of often-competing traditions.

A further problem is that, particularly in the 1980s and 1980ss, feminism operated in a hostile political environment. In Islamic countries, the advance of fundamentalism was reflected in pressure for the exclusion of women from politics and public life, the abolition of their legal rights and a return to the veil. A conservative backlash against feminism was also evident in the industrialized West. Both the Thatcher and the Reagan administrations in the 1980s, for instance, were openly anti-feminist in their call for the restoration of 'family values' and in their emphasis upon women's traditional role as mother and housewife. The new right tried to reassert 'pro-family' patriarchal values and ideas, not only because they are seen to be 'natural' but also because they are viewed as a guarantee of social order and stability. For example, the rise in crime and vandalism amongst young people was blamed upon working mothers, and in both the USA and the UK single mothers were demonized for threatening the traditional family and increasing the welfare burden. These are examples of what Susan Faludi referred to in *Backlash* (1991) as the 'blame it on feminism' syndrome. At the same time, however, such anti-feminism also paid the women's movement a backhanded compliment. The attempt to reassert conventional social and religious values reflected the success of feminism in encouraging women to question established attitudes and rethink traditional sex roles.

Feminism in the twenty-first century also faces the problem that many of its original goals have been achieved or are being achieved, which is the basis of the post-feminism critique. Just as the

right to vote was won in the early years of the twentieth century, so 'second-wave' feminism successfully campaigned in many countries for the legalization of abortion, equal pay legislation, anti-discrimination laws and wider access to education and political and professional life. Some have even suggested the victory of feminism can be seen in the emergence of a new breed of man, no longer the chauvinist bigot of old, but the 'new man', who has come to terms with the 'feminine' elements of his make-up and is prepared to share domestic and family responsibilities within the 'symmetrical family'. The so-called men's movement has in fact argued that matters have gone further still, that men have become the victims of gender politics and is no longer its beneficiaries. This perspective suggests that the advance of feminism has simply gone 'too far'. Confronted by the decline of traditional 'male' occupations, faced with growing competition from women in the workplace and at home, and deprived of their status as 'breadwinners', there is a danger that men, particularly young men, will retreat into a culture of non-achievement, unable to cope with a future that is female.

In the face of these challenges the women's movement has certainly undergone a process of de-radicalisation. The militant and revolutionary wing of the movement has been increasingly marginalized, and feminist literature reflects clear evidence of revisionism. Friedan's *The Second Stage* (1983) and Greer's *Sex and Destiny* (1985) both celebrated the importance of childbearing and motherhood, and drew criticism from more radical feminists for lending support to traditional gender stereotypes. Moreover, new feminist thinkers are generally more iconoclastic and less politically radical than their counterparts in the 1960s and 1970s. For instance, Camille Paglia (1990) has attacked the image of women as 'victims', and insisted on the need for women to take greater responsibility for their own sexual and personal conduct.

The central illusion of post-feminism is that the most obvious forms of sexist oppression have been overcome, and therefore that society is no longer patriarchal. Without doubt, an increasing number of women go out to work, in many western countries a clear majority of married women. However, despite anxiety about male non-achievement, it is still women who are predominantly employed in poorly paid, low-status and often part-time jobs. Women also have less control of their own bodies than men, thanks to still-powerful stereotypes of femininity and beauty, and continue to play a subordinate role within marriage and to be under-represented in positions of power within society. In *The Whole Woman* (1999), Greer attacked the notion that women are 'having it all', arguing that they have abandoned the goal of liberation and settled for a phoney equality that amounts to assimilation, becoming more like men. This highlights the capacity of patriarchy to reproduce itself generation after generation, subordinating women by creating bogus forms of emancipation. Quite simply, feminism will survive as long as patriarchy persists. However, feminism's chief challenge in the twenty-first century is to establish a viable and coherent 'third wave' that is capable of making sense of the changing nature of gender relations and of exploding the myth of post-feminism.