
Feminism: A Stepping Tool For The Betterment Of Women's Rights

An ideology that you may have heard about recently whether it be on social media, news outlets, or through family and friends is one that dates back to the twentieth century and is still striving to this day. Feminism, often defined by the basic beliefs that women are disadvantaged because of their sex and that this disadvantage can be overthrown. During the course of this paper, we will be discussing the core themes of Feminism, its main strands, and its connection to the philosophy of Liberalism. It is important to notice that any ideology, beliefs or principles will often change as a result of a developing world. Needs or wants will become a necessity for those that believe they are not being treated equally.

Much like any other ideologies that we have discussed throughout the course, the core principles of each philosophy are what makes them unique and different. As stated in our course textbook *Political Ideologies: An Introduction* by Andrew Heywood, A range of common ground themes for Feminism include redefining “the political”, patriarchy, sex and gender, and equality and difference (Heywood, 229, 2012). Redefining “the political” is stressed as an idea that politics should be an activity that takes place in both public and private spheres of men's and women's lives. The reason for this is due to the idea that men are more commonly known for society's achievements while women are restricted to the private sphere of life such as housewife, mother, etc. Feminists believe that introducing politics as an activity that takes place in both public and private spheres can eliminate sexual inequality in politics.

Patriarchy is an important pillar in Feminism since it reflects the unequal relationship between men and women. Often defined as rule by the father which perfectly describes the dominance of men and submission of women in society (Heywood, 231, 2012). The concept of patriarchy is used as a means to highlight male supremacy within the private and public spheres of our lives. Overall, the principle of patriarchy is for feminists to describe the unequal amounts of power between man and woman, emphasizing the struggle of sexual oppression.

Sex and gender have long been debated by counter ideologies such as Conservatism, which has long believed that the division between man and woman is natural and should not be infringed upon. While the sex of an individual draws a division between man and woman, feminists believe that their capability to bear children should not disadvantage them nor force them to take the responsibilities of motherhood. Gender is referred to as a culturally or politically constructed term, which supports the idea that gender and sex are not biologically linked (Heywood, 233, 2012). The ideas of gender and sex are widely debated in today's climate, much of the ridicule is aimed toward the creation of new genders and sex changes, much of which comes from the conservative opposition.

Equality and difference have brought about a division within the beliefs of Feminism. Such principles have led to different beliefs of feminists and what they value the most. Equality feminism focuses more on equality in rights, economic power, and at home. While difference feminism argues that too much stress on equality will bring the notion that women must be like men, defining their terms on the basis of what men are and have. Divisions such as these bring issues within followers of Feminism making the goal of overthrowing patriarchy much more

difficult.

By the 1960's a key shift within Feminism emerged, different forms of activism developed due to rapid social or cultural changes within societies. The key shift was responsible for the development of liberal feminism, socialist/Marxist feminism, and radical feminism. All of which incorporate different principles and overall goals into the different strands of feminism. Feminism is connected to the philosophy of Liberalism by incorporating liberal values to one of the main strands of the ideology. Known as the "first wave" of the women's movement in early feminism, the movement was heavily motivated by the principles of liberalism. As stated in the entry "Liberal Feminism" found on the stanford.edu website, "Liberal feminism conceives of freedom as personal autonomy—living a life of one's own choosing—and political autonomy—being co-author of the conditions under which one lives. Liberal feminists hold that the exercise of personal autonomy depends on certain enabling conditions that are insufficiently present in women's lives, or that social arrangements often fail to respect women's personal autonomy and other elements of women's flourishing." We see the incorporation of liberal values within the feminism ideology however, it is often criticized that it does not address social inequalities that exist.

Like any other ideology that we have discussed, Feminism proves to be a stepping tool for the betterment of women's rights and lives across the world. The core principles of redefining "the political", patriarchy, sex and gender, and equality and difference were discussed to explain why these themes are important and useful to women's empowerment. We see that with time these ideologies change due to social and cultural changes in society which can lead to different strands of Feminism developing. Different strands of an ideology can lead to connections with different philosophies, in our case Feminism had heavy roots in Liberalism during the first and second wave of feminism. Although ideologies change certain values or beliefs over time they will often keep the distinct value that makes them unique.