



Department of Political Science  
Major in Politics, Philosophy, and Economics  
Course of Political Sociology

**Why aren't we all feminist?**  
**A critique of modern feminism and the impact of Queer Theory**

Thesis Supervisor: Michele Sorice  
Candidate: Chiara Moni 095292

Academic year: 2023/2024

## Table of Contents

<b>Introduction .....</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Chapter I – What is Feminism? .....</b>	<b>3</b>
1.1 History and development .....	5
1.2 Intersectionality .....	6
1.3 Four types of feminism .....	11
Liberal Feminism .....	11
Radical Feminism .....	13
Marxist Feminism .....	16
Socialist Feminism .....	17
<b>Chapter II – Why aren’t we all feminist? .....</b>	<b>20</b>
2.1 Modern critiques to the movement .....	21
2.2 Social media and political correctness .....	25
<b>Chapter III – The impact of Queer Theory .....</b>	<b>28</b>
3.1 What is Queer Theory? .....	28
3.2 Sex, gender and sexual identity .....	30
3.3 Impact of the queer theory on feminism .....	31
<b>Conclusion .....</b>	<b>33</b>
<b>Bibliography .....</b>	<b>35</b>

## **Introduction**

The question why aren't we all feminist might sound to a naïve audience redundant now in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. So much so, that a large part of today's society still considers the concept of gender equality as something that has been mostly achieved. Furthermore, many see the feminist movement as something futile or a movement that has strongly moved towards a misogynistic narrative that villainizes men. This negative view stems from the excessive highlighting that the media and radical wings of both the left and right parties and activists have put on the faults that the movement has developed throughout its history, downplaying its actual goals. A strong critic of feminism has been queer literature which highlights how the feminist theory has been neglecting and, in some cases, straight up denying the idea that gender might not be a binary concept. However, feminism has to be recognized as something that is needed in today's society because in a lot of sectors even though formal rights might be equal, informal rights are still very much absent. Additionally, particularly in the Western world where the cases of sexual assault and harassment seem to see no end or actual decrease, the feminist movement still remains the main advocate for fighting and defending those victims.

The first chapter of this thesis proposes a thorough conceptualization of feminism and intersectionality. Particularly focusing on the context of modern feminism and delving deep into this movement's history and development throughout the years. In the second chapter, this text digs deep into the many critiques that have arisen against the feminist movement throughout history and their validity and as well analyzing the various impacts that the ever-spreading social media have had on the movement. Finally, the third chapter discusses the impact of the new definition of womanhood that today's society and queer theory have slowly accepted on modern feminism.

## **Chapter I – What is Feminism?**

Feminism is the set of beliefs and ideas that belong to the broad social and political movement to achieve greater gender equality for women. It encompasses the fight against sexist oppression. Feminism serves as its guiding concept and, of course, both shapes and is molded by the women's movement. Women strive for equality in many aspects of life and employ a wide range of tactics to do so. It is a social and political movement with a change-oriented goal. Two statements are associated with being a feminist: the first is moral in nature, asserting that sexism is immoral and that being a woman does not preclude one from enjoying any rights, opportunities, or freedoms. The second assertion is true: women are now oppressed on account of gender inequality. Feminists contend that institutional forces that keep women less free and less safe, offer them fewer chances and less money, and restrict them from possessing or using power and authority shape and constrain the lives of women. Its origins may be traced back to the dawn of civilization. The word "feminism" comes from the Latin word "femina," which signifies woman. The term was coined in the nineteenth century, but the roots of the movement have existed since Ancient Times. The Latin word "femina" (which means woman) is where the word "feminism" first appeared. In addition to strengthening women's rights, the movement aims to challenge the patriarchal systems that support gender inequality and oppression. Patriarchy essentially refers to the system of male dominance that has historically oppressed women and perpetuated gender inequality and operates both on a systemic and individual level. The core concept is gender equality, which means that individuals of all genders should have the same rights and opportunities. In order to do so, it is necessary to confront the pervasive gender inequality and discrimination that women experience in a variety of spheres of their lives, and the goal is to create a more just and equitable society for everyone. Furthermore, it is necessary to advocate for women's rights in areas such as reproductive health and representation in government and positions of leadership. The modern feminist movement was born in the context of the industrial revolution and slave emancipation. Nowadays, albeit in different ways, activism-related feminist theories continue to be acted upon to demand social, political, and economic rights linked to women's lives and all the personalities close to this gender spectrum, even though they belong to the LGBT+ community.

Though it originated in the West, feminism has contributed its conceptual framework to conflicts around the world. The main topics of Western feminism today include gender identity, discrimination, violence, and sexuality. Some people refer to it as "feminism 2.0" since it

spreads via social media. The movement continues to struggle against rape culture and patriarchal society, especially the latter, which the Harvey Wienstein case made more visible. While western feminism today is still the dominant current of this movement, new currents have emerged on the scene to give voice to a growing female audience, such as Black Feminism, Islamic Feminism, and Indigenous Feminism. Black Feminism centers on the experiences of Black women, and argues that sexism, racism, and class oppression are interrelated. Adherents of this movement foreground racism as a condition that must be overcome in order to erase sexism and classism as well<sup>1</sup>. Furthermore, they argue that the liberation of black women entails the freedom of all people, working to end racism, sexism, and classism. It was also argued by some Black feminists, such as Alice Walker, that Western Feminism was itself racist, since it only regarded the issues of privileged white women. Islamic Feminism, instead, focuses on the enhancement of the role of women in Islam, starting from the concept of equal ethics and moving to the sources of Islamic law, which are the Qur'an and Sunna. The movement manifests itself to challenge the patriarchal interpretation of Islamic teachings. The aim is to adapt these teachings to contemporary social developments, thereby making all Muslims equal, regardless of their gender. Islamic feminists fight for the recognition of women's rights, gender equality, and social justice. One of the main exponents of the movement is Zaynab al-Ghazali. The term feminism is not preferred by this movement's adherents, who, instead, use the term "haraka al-nissa'wiyya", in English, "women's movement". It is considered by scholars to be more radical than the Western one. Finally, Indigenous Feminism, also called Native American Feminism, was born in 1974 with the creation of the "Women of All Red Nations (WARN)". The movement focuses on addressing two often overlooked issues. The first regards colonialism propagated by Western nations, while the second concerns heteropatriarchy conveyed through colonialism. Therefore, Indigenous women struggle to free themselves from two burdens: racism and sexism.

## **1.1 History and development**

Feminism began in the nineteenth century. The period before the existence of the feminist movement where people and activists discussed women's equality is called profeminism. Profeminists, in particular, are all those women who, with their lives and their behavior,

---

<sup>1</sup> The National Black Feminist Organization (NFBO). It was founded in 1973 by Florence Kennedy, Margaret Sloan Hunter and Doris Wright. It has inspired the creation of the Combahee River Collective.

inspired the movements of the late nineteenth century. These are personalities that, through the ideas they manifested, could have been protagonists of modern feminist demonstrations. Opposing patriarchal culture in their own way, figures such as Hypatia of Alexandria or Mary Wollstonecraft are prime examples of proto feminists. The former was a mathematician, astronomer and philosopher, who, at only thirty one years old, assumed the leadership of the Neoplatonic School of Alexandria. However, her discoveries and career attracted the hatred of the Christians, who resented the pagan dimension of the school. She was killed under the order of Bishop Cyril, but her legacy remains very strong today. Another example of a protofeminist is Santa Chiara d'Assisi, who was for many centuries considered a rebellious religious. She became the founder of the monastic order of "Clarisse" and renounced getting married.

The development of the movement is divided into three waves, or phases, which correspond to a new generation of women who decided to fight for the recognition of their rights. The first wave spans the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries, and corresponds with the suffragette movement, which was committed to the recognition of their right to vote. This wave is concerned with eliminating legal disparities. Countries such as the United States and the United Kingdom saw the rise of organizations such as the National American Woman Suffrage Association (NAWSA) and the British Suffragettes who fought to gain voting rights for women. In the past, voting was restricted to men exclusively, while women were limited to the house and had no access to the outside world. Fifty years passed between the start and creation of suffragettes' movements and parity in family law for men and women. Finland was the first country in Europe to grant women the right to vote in 1906, while in Italy women started to vote only in 1945.

The second wave begins in the 1960s. After the war, the United States experienced an economic boom that was even bigger than in Europe. Prosperity helped to wear down the old social structures that had already been challenged during the conflict, when women had replaced the men engaged at the front in the factories. This wave is in charge of expanding the discussion to cover societal standards, gender roles, and cultural disparities. The issues dear to second-wave feminists are new, and often scandalous for the time. The focus is on sexuality, rape, and domestic violence, together with reproductive rights, and gender equality in the workplace. In 1961, birth control was, for the first time, put on the market in the US, allowing women to control their fertility easily, discretely and, above all, autonomously. In Italy the feminist

movement takes form and assumes, for the first time, mass dimensions. Italian women flooded squares fighting for rights that were still not granted, such as the right to divorce or to terminate unwanted pregnancy. They also fought to modernize family law, such as the removal of the “delitto d’onore”, which ensured reduced penalties for men who murdered their adulterous lives.

The third wave covers the 1990s, which saw the blossoming of a new era, where men and women have, on paper, equal rights and opportunities. Discrimination has not yet disappeared, though, especially in the work field. Third wave feminists fight against wage gap and point out the obstacles female workers face when applying for promotions and advancements in their careers. The movement also revises previous feminist positions on topics such as prostitution and pornography. While in the 1980s feminists considered themselves against any exploitation of the female body, third wave feminists do not exclude the idea that sex work can be sold with free will. Feminism begins to develop into a network of different feminisms such as Islamic feminism, and intersectionality gains more and more importance, since many women of color criticized that the movement only looked to the needs of white middle-class women.

## **1.2 Intersectionality**

The term intersectionality indicates the acknowledgment of the interplay between gender and other forms of discrimination, like race, age, class, socioeconomic status, physical or mental ability, gender or sexual identity, and religion or ethnicity. Women aren’t just exposed to sexism; other things, such as racism, are intrinsically linked to how they experience inequality. A middle-class woman living in the United States does not experience the same difficulties as a lesbian woman living in Iran.

It is the idea that all oppression is connected. According to the Oxford Dictionary, the term signifies “*the interconnected nature of social categorizations such as race, class, and gender, regarded as creating overlapping and interdependent systems of discrimination or disadvantage*”. Everyone has their own unique experiences of discrimination and oppression, and we must consider everything and anything that can marginalize people.

In recent years, the notion has gained traction in academic and policy circles. Perspectives that explore the linkages between social gaps and the complex social processes to which they relate are referred to in many ways: oppression interrelationships, multiple social gaps, mutual determination, hybridizations, multiple oppressions, and multiplicities. The term

intersectionality has been employed in a variety of contexts, including the development and mutual building of relatively fixed social categories, as well as the overcoming of social categories themselves. The word can apply to identity issues or, more broadly, to minor or major organizational, social, and international processes and structures; alternatively, it can be used to dispute such differences.

Approaches to intersectionality vary from those that prioritize one dominant social division to those that use dual or triple categories of power and those based on multiplicity that include race, disability, sexuality, or multifactor models. According to McCall L. (2002), some of these approaches deal with constructs that analyze relationships between shared and rather fixed categories; others emphasize a perspective that employs provisional categories such as "people whose identity crosses the boundaries of traditionally constituted groups"; and still others advocate for category deconstruction.

The term was first coined by Kimberlé W. Crenshaw in 1989 to address the specific oppression faced by women of African American descent in the United States, and it has subsequently generated a very heightened debate outside of those boundaries. According to McCall (2002), despite controversies around the term, its popularity led some experts to declare it "the most important contribution that women's studies has made so far". In order to fully comprehend how women's oppression operates, it is important to look at how a number of different elements interact with one another in order to maintain and perpetuate women's inferior status. This is what is meant by the term "intersectionality." Once we have such an intersectional lens, we can see the specific kind of oppression that intersections cause, which varies depending on the environment and social group. Black feminists and women of color condemned the "academization" of the notion and attempted to re-appropriate its original critical motivation. Feminists have used the phrase to signify many kinds of intersections as well as the complexity of identities in general. Crenshaw coined the term to address a problem she saw in the 1980s context of US discrimination laws: while they recognized harms done on the basis of gender and those done on the basis of race discrimination, they did not recognize "Black women" discrimination as a distinct category. Crenshaw (1989) contended that, in the case of Black women, race and gender interact in such a manner that they produce a condition that is distinct and cannot be reduced to the sum of its parts. According to Crenshaw, this is due to the fact that human experience is not additive, but rather temporally dense with the simultaneous crossing of several socio-historical identity categories: Black women see discrimination as a



combination of harm done to them as "women" and harm done to them as "Black." Black women can face prejudice in ways that are both comparable and unlike to those faced by white women and Black males, respectively.

Crenshaw argues in a pair of writings published in 1989 and 1991 that it is vital to understand the junction of many types of oppression. That is how she came up with a theory of intersectionality. She begins by discussing how discrimination cases in law have failed Black women, and then explores three significant instances that, in various ways, fail to grasp the complexities of the confluence of race and gender, resulting in the marginalization of Black women. The first case she examines is "DeGraffenreid v General Motors" (1976), in which five Black women filed a lawsuit against General Motors, alleging discrimination in promotion procedures. The court persisted in searching for sex discrimination and race discrimination separately, concluding that women had been employed and promoted, so there was no sex discrimination, and Black people had also been hired and promoted, so there was no racial discrimination. The fact that all of the Black persons employed or promoted were men was overlooked, therefore, discrimination against Black women was not upheld. This instance exemplifies the need of intersectionality: a Black woman suffering discrimination may not confront the same level of racism as Black males, nor the same level of sexism as white women. A Black woman's experience with this combo should be deemed discriminatory.

"Moore v Hughes Helicopter, Inc." (1983) is Crenshaw's second lawsuit. Moore filed a race and gender discrimination case against her employer. The court refused to recognize her as the class representative because she had been discriminated against as a Black woman and so could not adequately represent white women. Crenshaw claims that the court assumed she was discriminated against not as a woman, but exclusively as a Black woman, and speculates that this logic implies that the broad category "woman" is tacitly considered to be white. Hence, race privilege is taken for granted. Moore was only allowed to utilize statistics on Black women to substantiate her claim of racial and sexist discrimination in this case, but the sample she was given was too tiny for her to make the argument successfully, and the court found that there was no proof of prejudice. This instance demonstrates the problem of believing that sexism must be judged independently of other oppressions. This strategy undermines Black and white women's unity. As Crenshaw points out, there is a disincentive to joining together as long as the sole possible redress for unfair treatment includes being authorized to represent just their

own small group. In fact, they will end up in competition, trying to protect the limited privileges they have, and this helps stabilize the unjust system, according to Crenshaw.

Finally, the third case she discusses points out that Black women have also been prevented from representing Black men in discrimination suits. This case is “Payne v Travenol” (1976). The plaintiff, a Black woman, was not allowed to represent Black men, only women. She won the case for female employees, but despite the court’s finding of general discrimination, Black men were denied compensation. Black women were again forced to choose between solidarity and their own interests. The complications that resulted from the lack of intersectionality in court rulings are exemplified by these three cases: in the first, the court declines to acknowledge that Black women experience compounded discrimination as a result of the intersection of race and sex; in the other two, the court insists that Black women must be treated as a special case. These issues are what prompted Crenshaw to create her hypothesis. Continuing to insist that sex and racial discrimination exist independently obscures their combined impact on Black women. At the same time, it is difficult to assert that Black women experience suffering that is distinct from that of white women and Black males while ignoring the similarities between each group. This is the core of her theory.

Nowadays, there are various misunderstandings about what intersectionality really is. First of all, intersectionality is not the same as inclusivity. The confusion arises from the fact that feminism should be inclusive, and a part of inclusivity is recognizing that there are many different sub-groups of women, and that different women experience oppression in different ways. One important reason that oppression is different for different women is that women can be members of oppressed groups as well as being women. Consequently, intersectionality is not the action of including different groups, it is the theoretical move of working to understand the interaction of different group memberships.

Another confusing question concerns whether intersectionality is a theory of subjective identity, meaning a theory about how people do or should identify themselves. Brittany Cooper, a tenured professor of gender studies, author and activist, argues that intersectionality should be understood as being about identity only in a structural sense. This signifies that the sort of identity at issue is the identity recognized by the oppressive system. “*The law conceptualizes people through the structural identities of gender, race, sexual orientation, or national origin. These kinds of identities are different from personal identities of the sort that refer to personal taste, personality traits, gender performativity, or intimate and filial relationships*” affirms Cooper (Cooper, Disch & Hawkesworth 2016: 390). She criticized Crenshaw’s account of

intersectionality by suggesting that it is bound to fail if understood as an account of subjective identity, an account of what we take ourselves to be. Crenshaw, though, makes it very clear that that is not what intersectionality is. It is merely an account of how the world positions people according to perceived categories, and it makes no attempt to make sense of how people position themselves.

As a theoretical framework, the theory is not limited to describing the experience of American Black women. Patricia Hill Collins (1998), a Black American academic, argues that the application of intersectionality extends to any relevant oppression and to exploring the complexities of global feminism. The worry of some Black feminists is that the spread of the theory will undermine its power as a tool for understanding the oppression of Black women. One issue here is that one of the classic moves in an oppressive society is to conveniently forget the cultural and intellectual contributions of oppressed groups, or to reattribute their contributions to white men. Sirma Bilge, an expert in the department of Gender Studies, notes that as the notion of intersectionality becomes more mainstream, it is more and more often referred to as the brainchild of feminism instead of the brainchild of Black feminism. Despite this, the worry that intersectionality's roots in Black feminism will be occluded is a valid one. Furthermore, the worry that the focus will shift from the intersectional oppressions Black women face to the intersectional oppressions faced by people who are overall much more privileged is also valid. But these worries do not suggest limits on intersectionality as a theoretical framework. According to Sara Barnstein (2019), intersectionality should not only be thought about through the metaphor of traffic intersections but also through contemporary "analytic metaphysics" as a way to show that as certain strands of anglophone analytic philosophy have argued, it is not the conjuncts that explain the conjunction, but the conjunction that explains the conjuncts.

The final related issue is that it may appear that any intersection is a fascinating location for brand-new oppressive practices. There are some categories that do not lead to the development of new forms of injustice, even when race and gender cross and are mixed with other kinds of oppression, like class. For instance, hair color is not a factor that establishes a new type of injustice when combined with gender or class. We "*must not accept the new myth of equivalent oppressions,*" says Collins (1998: 206). Occasionally, it just concerns little inconveniences, and the upper limit is determined by the larger system of which they are a part. Therefore, it is

essential to use intuition while formulating theories regarding oppression. Intersectionality does not explicitly mean that all axes of oppression are equally essential and harsh.

In conclusion, seeing things through intersectional lenses has the drawback of making group solidarity more difficult. Insisting on acknowledging the unique circumstances of Black women may cause them to become estranged from both their gender and race. Recognizing it is still crucial, though. True solidarity necessitates a comprehensive understanding of both similarities and differences, which is not always easy. It means acknowledging one's own privileges, and being prepared to give them up. Finally, it entails engaging with others who are different from oneself and attempting to break through ingrained preconceptions.

### **1.3 Four types of feminism**

In modern society, there are four different kinds of feminism: liberal feminism, socialist feminism, radical feminism, and Marxist feminism.

#### **Liberal Feminism**

Liberal feminism developed between the 1960s and 1970s during the second wave of feminism. Generally, liberalism emphasizes the natural state of freedom of the individual, and asserts that a just state guarantees people their civil and political rights. The liberal tradition promotes access to education and the job market as essential means of encouraging the values of equality and individual freedom, which enable the full realization of each person's potential. Liberal feminists uphold this ideal, this state function, and demand women's liberation. It includes various approaches that aim at the removal of legal and social constraints that entrap women, and it assiduously fights for the creation of conditions that guarantee gender equality. For liberal feminists, it is thus understood that gender differences are rooted in the social and legal framework that relegates women to a position of subordination. Given the lack of a real difference between men and women, this movement proposes a gradual change in the socio-political and economic system such that women have equal access to education and the labor market, equal pay, and equal access to positions of power. Given the debate over what constitutes freedom, liberal feminism is divided into two strands: classic liberal feminism and egalitarian liberal feminism. The difference lies in the two positions on the role played by the state as the guarantor of civil and political rights for women. Classic liberal feminism defines freedom as freedom from coercive interference. According to Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, it is also defined as old liberalism, since the view they embrace is historically prior.

Classical liberal feminists perceive the state as an obstacle to gender equality, with laws that amplify the unequal treatment of men and women and fuel socio-political constraints that prevent the realization of women's full potential. Thus, it supports a vision of a non-intrusive state. Instead, egalitarian liberal feminism defines freedom as both personal and political autonomy. Egalitarian liberal feminists are defined by some historians as "new liberals". They frequently see the government as a potential partner in the struggle for women's political and personal freedom as they fight to achieve equality within the confines of a liberal democratic society. The state participates in this through initiatives like anti-discrimination legislation and social programs. According to their beliefs, there is a lot that can be done to assist women's personal and political autonomy as well as to attain parity in democratic self-governance processes in liberal cultures like the United States. They support policies like anti-discrimination laws, affirmative action, and welfare state programs, as well as initiatives to transform the culture and ensure equity in participation in democratic self-governance, because they view the state as a possible ally in the achievement of these aims. On the left side of the political spectrum, liberal egalitarian feminism is found. Classical liberal Feminism, instead, assumes that the movement's political task concerns opposing laws according to which men and women are treated differently.

Classical-liberal feminists, by contrast, tend to hold that feminism's political task is limited to opposing laws that treat women differently from men, a task that they hold has been largely accomplished in societies like the United States. They tend to support the consequences of mostly unrestricted economic and associational arrangements while opposing anti-discrimination legislation, affirmative action, and welfare state programs, for example. These characteristics position classical-liberalism on the political right. Some classical-liberal feminists, however, believe that the goal of liberalizing culture remains on the liberal feminist agenda, even though they regard it as a non-political duty and oppose the use of state power to achieve it. Culturally, such classical-liberal feminists are on the left. Other classical-liberal feminists oppose the idea of cultural liberalization and are culturally correct.

Liberal feminism has received various criticisms over the decades, mostly from radical feminism, which criticizes their approach based on seeking equality and change in existing political and social institutions as hopelessly polluted by a hetero-patriarchal system of thought. According to the radicalistic view, the state would be an efficient perpetrator of systematic patriarchal oppression and, as such, should be reconstructed from its foundations rather than being used as a tool for seeking equality. However, other critiques stress the Western and

bourgeois nature of liberal feminism as a factor that would make it distant from issues affecting women who do not fall into that category, such as Black or Latina. Furthermore, its nature is distant from the logics characterizing communitarian societies, in which purely Western concepts such as the autonomy of the individual do not have wide appeal.

### **Radical Feminism**

Radical feminism places a strong emphasis on the patriarchal causes of gender inequality, particularly the societal dominance of men over women. It focuses on the causes of gender inequality and the abolition of oppressive structures that support it. As the name says, it is a very radical approach that aims at transforming the foundations of society to ensure equality. They argue that a patriarchal society makes it difficult for there to be real gender equality. It emerged in the latter half of the 1960s, when the feminist movement grew in significance. The larger radical current movement served as the foundation for radical feminism. Despite the movement's core objective of empowerment, women who took part in anti-war political activities felt denied access to equal influence by men inside the movement.

While certain forms of feminism, such as liberal feminism, place a strong emphasis on equal rights and opportunities, radical feminism frequently views these demands as futile and insufficient since they do not address the societal structures associated with patriarchy. The term "radical" refers to the movement's supporters' determination to get to the core of a problem. Radical feminists take a more confrontational stance since they want to overturn the current legal framework rather than merely alter it. They believe that a truly emancipatory reform is possible only through a radical reordering of society that eliminates male supremacy. However, as men and patriarchy are now sometimes mistakenly considered as being intertwined, radical feminism is frequently seen as a movement that despises men. For them, patriarchy, not men, is the enemy. For radical feminists, socialist feminism is not enough, since it reduces oppression to a class issue.

Radical feminism is considered more of a revolutionary movement than reformatory, especially for groups such as "The Feminists" and "The New York Radical Women (NYRW)". The latter's motto was "The personal is political", because they talked about stories from their own lives to illustrate the challenges faced by women in a patriarchal society. The NYRW is a prime illustration of this movement's radicalism. As a result of its members' perception that the 1968 Jeanette Rankin Brigade peace march was merely a protest against the patriarchal American

government, the organization declined to participate. They also protested in the Miss Americana Pageant in the same year, tossing bras and girdles, as well as Playboy magazines and other items representing women's oppression, in the trash can.

Furthermore, radical feminists insist on analyzing traditional gender roles and differences. They question social expectations about male and female behaviors and reject gender stereotypes that favor oppression. Their goal is a society in which every individual can feel free to express his or her gender identity without fear of discrimination. According to ThoughtCo, the movement employs "consciousness-raising groups" to spread awareness of women's oppression. Small groups of women met and discussed their own stories. Women in the 1960s and 1970s learned that their ostensibly unique experiences were widely shared by women from a variety of backgrounds in these groups. The experiences of a wife whose husband refused to help out around the home and a female student whose professor offered her excellent marks if she had sex with him, for instance, was linked to the anguish of a woman who had been raped or forced to have an illegal abortion. Their main concerns center on women's reproductive rights, such as the freedom to access abortion, birth control, or sterilization, rape as a manifestation of patriarchal power, a critique of motherhood and marriage, and the foundation and primacy of patriarchal power and assumptions in institutions like religion and governments. In addition, they perceive pornography as an industry that harms women and perceive prostitution in patriarchal societies as the economic and sexual subjugation of women. Radical feminists are split into two groups, the radical-libertarian feminists and the radical-cultural feminists. According to the former, women's ability to evolve into fully realized human beings may be constrained by a gender identity that is purely feminine, represented by their reproductive capabilities and sexual roles. Consequently, they urged women to become androgynous. This would help them escape from the chains of motherhood and childbirth. Tong, in her book *"Feminist thought: a more comprehensive introduction"*, suggests that *"As we shall see, radical-libertarian feminists are convinced the less women are involved in the reproductive process, the more time and energy they will have to engage in society's productive processes"* (Tong 2018: 71). Some of the main exponents of this movement include Joreen Freeman, who suggests that, instead of limiting herself to becoming a nice girl with little strength, the androgynous woman embraces as part of her gender identity whatever features allow her to live life on her own terms. Radical-cultural feminism, instead, opposes androgyny as a feminist goal. It views femaleness as powerful and thinks that women should embrace traditional feminine values such as community, sharing, and body, to mention a few. This sort

of feminist sees women's ability to produce new life as the ultimate source of power and believes that procreating organically is in women's best interests. According to their argument, men's desire to dominate women through modern reproductive technology and their envy of their skills, rather than the biology of women, are the real causes of women's oppression.

The two branches of the radical feminist movement also disagree regarding the topics of sexuality, pornography, prostitution, and reproduction. Because patriarchal sexuality's standards stigmatize sexual minorities and keep the majority pure and in check, radical-libertarian feminists see sexual practices as being defined by repression. Feminists should thus reject any laws that stigmatize sexual diversity and regain control of women's sexuality by demanding the freedom to engage in whatever they find pleasurable and satisfying. For them, an ideal sexual relationship entails completely consenting, equal individuals who work together to enhance their respective levels of sexual fulfillment. Radical-cultural feminists, on the other hand, believe heterosexual relationships are defined by a sexual objectification ideology that views men as masters and women as slaves and encourages sexual violence against women. This viewpoint holds that feminists should reject any sexual behavior that encourages or normalizes male sexual assault and should take back control of women's sexuality by developing sexual priorities that are different from those of men, placing more value on intimacy and less on performance.

In terms of pornography, radical-libertarian feminists advise women to utilize it to get over their sex-related phobias and to fuel their desires. They contend that all forms of pornography, even violent ones, should be acceptable for women to see and enjoy. Because a real rape differs from a rape dream, some of them even asked women to participate in rape fantasies where men had their way. They contend that feminists should examine it with a totally open mind and without bias. Radical-cultural feminists, on the other hand, hold that sexuality and gender are outcomes of the same repressive social forces. Tong asserts that “*there is no distinction between the sexual objectification of women in the bedroom and gender discrimination against women in the boardroom*” (Tong 2018: 72). Pornography, in the eyes of radical-cultural feminists, is nothing more than patriarchal propaganda about women's allegedly appropriate place as men's servants, where men are the subjects and women the objects. They argue that pornographers should be seen as perpetrators of sexual discrimination because they consistently portray women as less completely human and less deserving of respect and good treatment than men. Therefore, if a woman is forced into a pornographic performance on behalf of all women, she should be given legal grounds to sue that pornographer. Some radical-cultural feminists, such



as Dworkin, tried and initially succeeded in having antipornography ordinances pass in cities such as Minneapolis, but FACT, the Feminist Anti-Censorship Taskforce<sup>2</sup>, worked against them and, as a consequence, the US Supreme Court, declared the ordinances unconstitutional. Consequently, radical-libertarians were accused of false consciousness. The latter later accused radical-cultural feminists of “*presenting vanilla sex-gentle, touchy-feely, side-by-side (no one on top or bottom) sex-as the only kind of sex good for women*” (Tong 2018: 72).

Another issue concerning sexuality revolves around prostitution, in particular whether it is a respectable profession or an example of women’s sexual oppression. Radical-cultural feminists, such as Dworkin, see prostitution as one of the main means of sexist sexual oppression, since they believe it to be a “live enactment of pornography” (Tong 2018: 73) instead, radical-libertarian feminists see it simply as sex work, a liberating labor that undermines those traditional patriarchal moral values that prevent women from expressing their sexuality freely.

### **Marxist Feminism**

Marxist Feminism was founded on the theories of Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, and it addresses the intersections of social class and gender by recognizing that patriarchy and capitalism are closely intertwined. The movement acknowledges that patriarchy is a dominant system linked with capitalism. The ways in which patriarchy oppresses and exploits women are influenced by social class. Both as employees in the capitalist economic system and as moms and partners in the family unit, women face oppression. Women's earnings are kept low and their prospects for career growth are constrained by patriarchy, which seeks to exploit and dominate the female labor force. Marxist feminists contend that social change and class conflict are the only ways to liberate women. The working class has the ability to destroy capitalism and establish a socialist society in which class distinctions are eliminated, according to Engels and Marx. The study of the movement includes women's liberation, making the case that the fight for gender justice should be a crucial component of the fight for working class emancipation. A key idea in Marxist feminism is the connection between household work and social reproduction. This view contends that although playing a crucial role in sustaining the labor force and society at large, home labor is not recognized as productive labor within the capitalist system. Due to the large quantity of unpaid household labor performed by women, they are exposed to double exploitation in both the public and private realms. To achieve

---

<sup>2</sup> a coalition of radical-libertarian and liberal feminists

women's true independence, Marxist feminism advocates for the redistribution of domestic labor and the socialization of caregiving obligations. The need of a cultural revolution in releasing women from patriarchal restrictions is acknowledged by Marxist feminism. Marxist feminism advocates challenging the gender norms and prejudices that continue to oppress women in addition to economic and political change. Gender relations must be redefined in order to achieve this, and cultural and social conventions around gender must also be revised. Marxist feminism provides a crucial analytical framework for comprehending the intricate relationships between capitalism, social class, and patriarchy. It acknowledges that social change and class conflict are necessary for the emancipation of women. Marxist feminism encourages in-depth meditation on the linkages of economic exploitation and gender oppression via critical examination of domestic work, social reproduction, and cultural norms. Eliminating capitalism and patriarchy at the same time is necessary for the fight for a fair and just world, since this will provide the groundwork for a society where women are free to reach their full potential.

### **Socialist Feminism**

Socialist Feminism is one of the most radical types of feminism, since its main goal is restructuring society completely and rebuilding a more equally inclusive society for all genders. It emphasizes the importance of class struggle in addressing social inequalities. The movement asserts that pre-existing political, cultural, and economic structures need to be challenged to create a fairer society. It is an intersection between feminism and socialism, which is a political and economic doctrine that believes in the ability of a community to regulate the means of production. Socialist feminists highlight patriarchy and racism as persistently repressive mechanisms that cause structural gendered inequities for women and gender variant people. They claim capitalism is the driving force behind all of these repressive systems. They highlight how the latter exacerbates the negative effects of patriarchal institutions and feeds the harmful effects of capitalism on gender. Socialist feminists contend that, in order to address gender disparity, capitalism must be opposed and replaced with a socialist economic system. Socialist feminism emerged in the early 1970s with the goal of elaborating a different understanding of the root causes of women's oppression, reflecting the debate then taking place within the feminist community. Within the latter two factors were coming to clash: Marxist feminism and radical feminism. Marxist feminism, appealing directly to the theories developed by Marx and Engels, places the causes of female debasement within the framework of power relations between social classes. According to this logic, oppression is the result of the unequal

distribution of the means of production in a capitalist society, in which the bourgeoisie holds full dominion over these means, reserving for the proletarian class the sole possession of its own labor power. But not only that, such labor power is earmarked for the creation of surplus value, from which profit is derived. Within this framework, female oppression is located within the bourgeois family, where women are valued only for their reproductive capacities. For Marx, then, female oppression is perceived as a side effect of more general class oppression, the result of the broader capitalist division of labor that also reverberates within the family unit through a split between male productive activity and female reproductive activity. Radical feminism, on the other hand, sees the biological male/female pair as the starting point of the mechanism of female subordination in a patriarchal society. Social roles, work, and the individual's power of self-determination are aspects closely related to one or another biological group of belonging. The oppression of women, therefore, is directly linked to an inherent biological component of them, rather than to a particular economic structure, with a social structure acting as a backdrop by granting preeminence and economic power primarily to men. The idea of "patriarchy" as a male hierarchical structure shaping the entire social order is born. Socialist feminism, the starting point of the entire discourse, proposes a synthesis between the two positions listed above. A first relevant contribution in this regard dates back to 1970, when Christine Delphy, in her essay entitled "The Main Enemy," first presented a version of "radical feminism based on Marxist principles," identifying men as the main source of women's oppression. Accordingly, the conclusion was that, even in a post-capitalist society, women would still be relegated to performing only domestic work, taking as an emblematic example the status of women under the Stalinist regime.

In light of this and rejecting the biological determinism typical of radical feminism, socialist feminism views capitalism and patriarchy as two mutually autonomous forces, coexisting and equally influential on women's living conditions. This is also reflected in a redefinition of the concepts of "oppression" and "exploitation," which are no longer interchangeable as Marx originally conceived them. In fact, the word "exploitation" takes on a connotation closely linked to the economic sphere, while "oppression" refers to the condition of women subject to a reality dominated by patriarchal relations. According to one of the most influential figures in socialist feminism, Zillah R. Eisenstein, patriarchy precedes capitalism as a force of female oppression in that men have, throughout history, consistently instrumentalized women's reproductive capacity in order to relegate them to the family sphere alone.

However, even within the same current of socialist feminism, there has been no unanimity regarding the definition of a number of key concepts belonging to feminist ideology, chief

among them the definition of "patriarchy." At a general level, it is commonly recognized as a set of principles underlying the social order common to different types of societies that constitute the mainstay of women's oppression. Yet, multiple interpretations branch off from the main one, as do the considerations made with respect to the ways in which capitalism and patriarchy are intertwined and affect women's lives.

The hard attempt to create a synthesis was thus widely received-both by the radical feminist and Marxist currents, with great perplexity, precisely because of the lack of a solid and unified ideological structure that could coherently encapsulate the two theories. Ultimately, probably because of the lack of coherence in its postulates, the socialist current soon lost its structure as a political movement, unable to formulate a program capable of triggering genuine social struggle.

## Chapter II – Why aren't we all feminist?

Antifeminism is a controversial countermovement opposed to feminism and its ideologies. It arose in the nineteenth century, namely when women started to question the traditional roles that society had set for them. The movement has a cultural and religious root, and found justification in the defense of tradition and integrated itself in the political and the artistic fields. In fact, the father of anarchism, Proudhon, revealed himself to be a supporter of the male tradition, and the Italian futurists in their Manifesto wrote that they “*wanted to glorify war and the contempt of women*” (Bard 2020). Over time, people who felt threatened by the growing influence of women in society had unfavorable feelings about feminism. Moreover, changes were seen as a danger for the social order and the nature of humanity. They were united by a differentialist discourse on sexes, whose social functions were prescribed by nature or God's will. The existence of gender inequalities is denied leading to a denial concerning issues faced by women, such as wage gap and gender-based violence. The central idea of this movement was to reduce feminism to a derogatory concept, and feminists were frequently represented as frustrated, anti-male women who wanted to overthrow established gender roles. Antifeminists also embrace patriarchy and masculine dominance. In fact, they oppose women's access to positions of power and protect conventional gender roles by criticizing laws that support or advance gender equality. In the early twentieth century, antifeminists opposed policies regarding the right to vote and educational opportunities, as well as access to birth control. The movement perpetuates damaging stereotypes and encourages hatred and prejudice against women, making the world a hostile place for them.

Nowadays, many people consider themselves as antifeminists, viewing the movement outdated and useless. The survey, conducted by Ipsos Uk and the Global Institute for Women's Leadership at King's College London, involved more than 22,000 people with ages between sixteen and seventy-four from thirtytwo different countries. This survey revealed that antifeminism is still happening today, only it's younger people who identify as such. Fifty two percent of Generation Z and fifty three percent of millennials argued that gender equality has now been achieved and that the problem is now casually about “discrimination against men” (Scharff 2019). These young people are not against gender equality, but believe that feminism has had its day and it is now run out of steam. Many female influencers on social media sites like TikTok assert that it was preferable for women to be advised to stay at home and take care of the children. The "stay at home girlfriend" is quickly gaining popularity, and with it, the number of those who blame feminism for making things tougher for women. In fact, more

women than men agree that being at home and earning a little wage than in an office is preferable. Many are the reasons for these results, but most of them can be attributed to two factors: the feminist movement has many points of critique, and there is still a lot of ignorance and prejudice concerning this topic nowadays.

## **2.1 Modern critiques to the movement**

Feminist theory has engaged in debates with mainstream theory, offering alternative explanatory theories for gender differences in power resulting from economic, political, and social structures and processes as well as critiques of theories, concepts, and epistemologies (Chafetz 1997). Creating models and coming up with plans to promote gender parity has a normative component to it. However, postmodernism has led to a major critique of techniques that presume gendered coherent identities and interests in feminist thinking. There are various aspects that have been criticized about modern feminism. The main argument regards the loss of sight on the fundamentals on which feminism was developed. That is to say, modern feminism has been criticized for focusing excessively on gender specific issues, such as inclusive language and political correctness, rather than focusing on broader issues such as economic inequality and sexual harassment. Other critics charge that the feminist movement has been commercialized and transformed into a consumer commodity, with firms utilizing the image of feminism for marketing purposes while failing to adhere to gender equality. Many feminist public figures, such as influencers, have been chastised for focusing on minor and virtually irrelevant concerns, such as body hair, rather than spreading messages and raising awareness about far more serious and significant matters, such as sexual abuse instances, often motivated by wanting to have a bigger following or promoting products. Language, media portrayal, and power dynamics are just a few examples of how gender issues are relevant in today's social and cultural contexts. These worries may seem unduly sensitive or hypersensitive to some people. But, concern over these matters could be motivated by a want to advance an atmosphere that is fairer and welcoming to everybody. However, many criticize modern feminism for promoting a culture of offense rather than educating others on what feminism really is about. Many people believe that modern feminists tend to see sexism and oppression even when there isn't, causing a general loss in confidence in the values of the whole movement. Furthermore, it is argued that modern feminism has fueled conflict between the sexes instead of promoting equality. Modern feminists are accused of painting a negative image

of masculinity, rather than eliminating gender-based inequalities. Promoting respectful and open conversation is critical if we are to address common concerns about gender equality. This requires thinking critically about how one's actions and words may influence others, as well as accepting that sensitivity and empathy may help create a fairer and more inclusive atmosphere for all.

Liberal feminism has been challenged because the logical, free, and independent self preferred by liberals is not gender neutral, but rather a masculine self. According to Allison Jaggar, liberal feminists' adherence to normative dualism is problematic because it typically breeds political skepticism and solipsism, which sees rational, autonomous people as essentially isolated and having needs and interests that are distinct from those of every other person. Normative dualism also results in a devaluation of bodily activities and functions (Tong 2018). Liberal feminism emphasizes individuality at the expense of knowledge of privilege structures. Many opponents contend that liberal feminism ignores systemic concerns of power and class and racial inequality in favor of concentrating on women's individual liberty. According to others, this emphasis on the individual may divert attention away from communal concerns and the structural underpinnings of gender inequality. Political scholar Jean Bethke Elshtain argues that liberals are mistaken for prioritizing individual interests, rights, and personal freedom over the collective good and social responsibility because “*there is no way to create real communities out of an aggregate of freely choosing adults*” (Elshtain 1981: 252). Elshtain identifies three major flaws concerning liberal feminism: the latter claims that women can, want, and should become like men and aspire to masculine values. Male and female differences are the products of biology rather than culture, something that liberal feminists fail to see. For this reason, liberal feminists have come, according to Elshtain “*excessive environmentalists*” (Elshtain 1981: 252), indicating that they believe that gender identities are an exclusive socialization product that may be changed at the discretion of society. Liberal feminists tend to tell women to follow and absorb traditional masculine values. Examples are articles written for women on “how to dress for success” (Tong 2018). Women, according to Elshtain, should work for a society in which men and women have equal time for family and business, rather than pushing one another to emulate successful men's conventional conduct. Liberal feminism has been chastised for not just valorizing an individualistic politics, that is, a focus on the rights of individuals rather than groups, but also for focusing solely on the concerns of upper-middle-class, heterosexual white women. Liberal feminism does not take into account the experiences

and voices of marginalized women, such as women of color, women with disabilities, and LGBTQ+ women.

It has a history of ignoring the struggles of African American women, and is permeated with classism. For example, Angela Davis, an African American political theorist, claimed that numerous women of African descent see the housewife role as liberating rather than oppressive (Davis 1971).

Furthermore, Some critics of liberal feminism charge that it is too in sync with capitalism and consumerism. They contend that liberal feminism may encourage women to seek empowerment via economic success and material consumption rather than opposing the economic and social systems that perpetuate gender inequality. The movement lacks a transformative and radical view. It is content with superficial reforms, such as promoting formal equality, without addressing deeper roots of gender inequality. This leads to limits to the movement's potential to provoke a systematic change. Finally, liberal feminism has been accused of reducing women's sexuality to a mere act of individual choice, ignoring the border context of feminine sexuality and issues tied with body culture and women sexualization.

Radical feminism is the most criticized kind of feminism, often accused of being too extremist. Gender essentialism is one of the most common objections leveled towards radical feminism. Some opponents believe that this tendency emphasizes gender differences too much, risking the formation of too rigid stereotypes based on biological differences between men and women. This emphasis on the essence of women may be perceived as restrictive for them, since it may imply that their lives and desires are intrinsically set and predetermined. Elshtain asserts that radical feminists incorrectly infer that men and women are two distinct species, "*the men corrupt and the women innocent*" (Tong, 2018, Critique One: Woman's Nature Is Not Necessarily the Root of Her "Goodness" section), since such biology contradicts the personality and history of real men and women.

Moreover, a focus point in the criticism of radical feminism is its understanding of patriarchy. According to Elshtain, radical feminists, such as s Daly, talked about patriarchy metaphorically rather than historically. She asserts that "*as a metaphorical term, patriarchy is a useful analytical tool for women who are just beginning to rethink their political and personal experiences of oppression. But beyond that, it becomes a blunt instrument*". (Tong, 2018, Critique One: Woman's Nature Is Not Necessarily the Root of Her "Goodness" section). In the words of Elshtain, the uncompromising rejection of patriarchy is an act of defensiveness, since radical feminists are afraid that women may share some characteristics with males and are



reluctant to embrace their own masculinity. This drives radical feminists to a utopian vision of a community of all women: “men encompass evil, women encompass good” (Tong, 2018, Critique One: Woman’s Nature Is Not Necessarily the Root of Her “Goodness” section). Consequently, radical feminism has been criticized for promoting hatred towards men. It is crucial to highlight, however, that this viewpoint does not reflect the whole radical feminist movement, which frequently distinguishes between criticism of patriarchal power systems and hate of people.

Moreover, criticism of radical feminism comprehends the belief that the movement has a negative attitude toward sexuality and pornography. Sexuality, whether perceived as emotional or bodily pleasure, is viewed as “*the same for all women*” (Tong, 2018, Critique Three: Radical Feminists Often Dichotomize in Ways That Are Unhelpful to the Overall Feminist Agenda section). Pornography is viewed as a manifestation of sexual oppression by certain radical feminists, who demand for its prohibition. However, within the feminist movement, this viewpoint has been challenged, as many women consider pornography as a form of consensual sexual expression and oppose the concept of restriction. The excessive criticism of radical feminists towards maternity is also viewed as a crucial point from critics. Motherhood is viewed as a patriarchal institution that exploits women by some radical feminist thinkers, while others feel that women should have the choice to choose whether or not to be mothers without judgment or condemnation. These opposing viewpoints within radical feminism have sparked a discussion over parenting within the movement. Furthermore, radical feminists focus too much on issues such as egg donation, and surrogacy, instead of focusing on other issues that concern most women, such as contraception and sterilization.

Finally, radical feminism has frequently been blamed for historically excluding transgender women. Some radical feminist thinkers claim that a person's gender identification is inextricably related to biology, hence barring transgender women from the feminist cause. Transgender movements and transgender feminists have argued that transgender women should be fully acknowledged as women and as members of the feminist movement.

Socialist and Marxist feminisms face criticism for reducing gender concerns to economic struggles. They acknowledge that gender disparities are related to class inequalities, which may lead to a reduction of women's unique experiences and difficulties. As a result of this mentality, gender issues may be overshadowed in favor of class issues, making women's special concerns less prominent. Moreover, these two kinds of feminism often fail to take into consideration intersectional issues, leading to a lack of representation and inclusivity within the feminist

movement and to the marginalization of minorities. These theories These ideas fail to account for women's distinct experiences and forms of gender oppression. For example, some Marxist views attribute gender oppression to the capitalist economic framework, ignoring other kinds of patriarchy and discrimination.

Marxist feminists, in particular, think that the demise of capitalism will result in gender equality. Feminist opponents argue that women's entry into the labor force did not result in economic independence. For example, following the Communist Russian Revolution of 1917, Russian women discovered at the workplace arduous work that was less respected than men's work (Tong 2018)

Instead, socialist feminism has been blamed for not being materialistic enough. It fails to consider the tangible and particular practical ways in which women are oppressed, and hence fails to persuade those outside of the intellectual bastions of academia to seek equality with men as a right. According to Stevi Jackson, socialist feminism should return to materialism to avoid neglect: *“We live our lives now within a global system characterized by extremely stark material inequalities. The continued vitality of approaches which deal with such inequalities is crucial for feminist politics and theory”* (Tong, 2018, Critique Two: Socialist Feminism Needs to Be More “Materialistic ” Section).

## **2.2 Social media and political correctness**

Social media have had an enormous and profound impact on the development of modern feminism. Together with other kinds of media, such as televisions, these platforms have also become significant actors in political, social, and cultural spheres, shaping our discussions and influencing our decisions. The creation and diffusion of apps such as Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter have opened up new opportunities for the movement, enabling greater visibility, mobilization, and discussion of issues related to gender equality.

These platforms allow the rapid spread of all speech and these messages spread around the world, and *“redirect and reimagine what ‘empowerment’ means for girls and women”* (Banet-Weiser 2018: 17) As a consequence, users can spread any kind of information online, and this can be considered both an advantage and a disadvantage.

Social media have provided feminists with a greater visibility to women’s rights issues and with much facilitated communication, educating others on gender-based discrimination and

inspiring people to become activists to promote gender equality. They have become a means to spread awareness on issues such as gender-based violence, pay gap, and sexism. Women and gender minorities that were previously ignored or silenced now have a voice thanks to social media. Feminists from many groups may now express their distinct viewpoints and difficulties, bringing intersectionality to the forefront of feminist debate. As a result, feminism has become more inclusive and equal. Social media has made large-scale mobilization possible. Modern feminists utilize social media sites like Twitter and Instagram to organize protests, online petitions, and advocacy campaigns. The #MeToo campaign, which exposed several examples of sexual assault, is a well-known example of how social media has spurred women's activism worldwide. Social media platforms have made it possible to build online communities of feminist women who can exchange ideas, experiences, and methods for solving gender issues. These groups may provide crucial assistance to people attempting to navigate a society still rife with gender prejudice.

Although, social media have great disadvantages, specifically concerning the feminist movement and its critiques. Online abuse and disinformation, continuous self-comparisons and body image concerns generated by cultural beauty standards, and diminished critical thinking all have the potential to undermine the movement.

The issue is that one of the fundamentals of social media is the principle of free speech. It is almost impossible to establish the fine line that divides freedom of expression from spreading messages of violence and hatred. For the feminist movement, this has become an increasingly bigger issue, with more and more women receiving threats and sexist insults, and being cyberbullied.

Moreover, social media have facilitated the creation and spreading of misinformation and extremist feminist ideals online. They have favored the spread of ignorance in the feminist movement, allowing many people to believe that it is centered around the idea of women being superior to men. Through their strengthening of the psychological notion known as the "availability heuristic" (Kamei, J. 2022), social media exacerbates the natural challenge humans already have with discerning the truth amid a sea of deception.

Many individuals on the internet appear to assume that there is just one proper definition of feminism. On networks like Instagram, there is frequently a sense of competitiveness. People "compete" to see who is the better feminist, whose values are "righter," resulting in a harsh and

rigorous reaction culture when someone makes a mistake. Consequently, cancel culture is increasingly frequently connected with feminism. The term "cancel culture" describes a society in which those who are seen to have spoken something morally offensive or spoken incorrectly are shunned and boycotted. Many people feel often entitled to police if someone says the wrong thing, even if it is a simple mistake. As a result, the feminist movement has been widely condemned for advocating suppression of any viewpoint that does not strictly reflect the feminist one. Cancel culture is nowadays often strictly associated with political correctness. Political correctness is defined as the “*excessive attention to the sensibilities of those who are seen as different from the norm (women, gays and lesbians, Black people, the disabled)*” (Mills 2003: 89). It emerged recently, as a response to an increase of verbal discrimination, especially on social media platforms. Its goal is to promote equality and respect, and eliminate offensive terms, harmful stereotypes, and discriminatory behavior, for example by substituting terms such as “short” with “vertically challenged” (Mills 2003). However, this concept has been rapidly exaggerated and is nowadays seen by many as a means to justify censorship. While it is true that cancel culture and political correctness are applied, or should be applied, to those who use social media to spread hate messages and discriminate towards discriminated groups, often they are used to silence and discriminate against anyone who does not share the same opinion as the one considered “correct”. This is one of the main grounds of criticism leveled against the feminist movement. On social media, many users believe it is impossible to discuss feminism without being labeled sexist if they have opposing views on particular issues.

## **Chapter III – The impact of Queer Theory**

### **3.1 What is Queer Theory?**

The rise of queer theory is one of the most exciting developments in modern feminism. Despite the fact that the word "queer" was first used negatively, as in "weird," "odd," or "peculiar" (Tong 2018), it now has a positive, even joyful connotation among people who use it. Queer studies scholars vigorously question gender, sexuality, and human desire, upending long-held beliefs that heterosexuality is the only permissible sexual orientation among people.

Queer theory is a field of study and a critical approach that examines and critiques gender, sexuality, and identity categories, challenging binary and heteronormative social conceptions. This notion emerged in the 1990s as a reaction to the restrictions of existing concepts of sexuality and gender, offering a radical and liberating alternative to prevalent cultural standards. According to queer theory, gender identities and sexual manifestations are socially created rather than fixed or deterministic. It challenges the widely held belief that there are two opposing sexes, male and female, and claims that gender is a social and cultural construct rather than a biological reality. This implies that there are not only two distinct gender categories, but an infinite variety of gender identities and expressions that different people may experience. The assumption that sexual orientation is primarily determined by sexual attraction between persons of the opposite sex is also challenged by queer theory. It asserts that sexual orientation is flexible and subjective, and that people can be attracted to persons of the same or opposite sex, or both, without their identity or value as humans being affected. A critical component of queer theory is the critique of the norms and laws that determine what is "normal" or "deviant" in terms of gender and sexual orientation. These cultural standards, known as heteronormativity, impose a binary view of gender and sexual orientation, limiting the freedom and self-determination of persons who do not fit inside these categories.

The Queer Movement began in the late 1950s in the United States as a series of riots. The first occurred in 1959 at Cooper's Donuts, a New York City café frequented by prostitutes, marketeers, and street queers who had been victims of police provocation.

The original reaction to police harassment was a doughnut toss, which evolved into all-night street battles. Then, in 1966, there was a clash at Compton's Cafeteria, a San Francisco bar that was open all night and frequented by drag queens, prostitutes, young marketeers, social misfits, and locals. The cops were summoned because some drag queens at a table were making too much noise. The officer on the scene took a trans girl by the arm and invited her out, to which she retaliated by hurling her hot coffee in the officer's face. This triggered a general riot both

inside and outside the cafeteria, with a destroyed police car, burning barricades, and bruised policemen.

The Stonewall riot, which occurred in a New York City bar, was the most significant incident in the history of the Queer Movement. On the evening of June 28, 1969, a number of police officers arrived unexpectedly and began arresting those who were undocumented or had violated the transvestic statute by wearing opposite-sex clothing. A throng gathered surrounding the event, and some began insulting the cops. When a lesbian butch woman was placed into the police vehicle, she began trembling and shouting. The mob proceeded to assault the police, hurling bricks, stones, bottles, and rubbish at them. The cops retreated to the pub and barricaded themselves inside. The genuine fights occurred when police troops in riot gear arrived. The clashes lasted all night, resulting in four police officers being injured and thirteen people being arrested, not counting the untold number of injured protesters: the police had been especially brutal in their targeting of trans or genderqueer people, as opposed to those with normative gender presentation. The next day, word of what had transpired traveled rapidly, and by the evening, hundreds of gay and revolutionaries had gathered in front of the Stonewall Inn once more. A few weeks after the protests, queer activists met in New York and started the first radical organization fighting for gay liberation, the Gay Liberation Front, which expanded to 80 active groups in the U.S. and abroad. It connected the struggle against gender and sexuality discrimination with other social struggles of the time, such as the antiwar movement, black struggles and feminism.

The Stonewall uprising was a turning point in the consciousness of those who had always been discriminated against because of their gender identity, sexuality, as well as often marginalized because of their social status or race. Stonewall brought inspiration, love and anger to create a movement that wanted to fight for freedom and justice.

This spawned additional groups and comparable movements in European countries, eventually contributing to the formation of Queer Theory, a critical perspective of sex and gender, in the 1990s. Teresa de Lauretis coined the phrase "queer theory" during a symposium at the University of California in February 1990. This perspective emerged from gay and lesbian studies, gender studies, and feminist philosophy. Following the theses of Michel Foucault, Jacques Derrida, and Julia Kristeva, queer theory rejects the notion that each individual's gender identity, sexual identity, and sexual actions are entirely or partially socially produced. It therefore challenges the common practice of compartmentalizing the description of a person in order to place them in one or more particular defined categories.

### **3.2 Sex, gender and sexual identity**

The terms "gender" and "sex" are frequently misunderstood and used interchangeably. In actuality, there is a significant distinction between the two. In sociology, the term "gender" denotes membership in one of two sexes. However, this is established by taking into account an individual's social and cultural beliefs rather than biology or physical characteristics. This implies that our biological sex does not necessarily correlate to the gender to which we identify. Male and female are the two acknowledged genders in most societies. And who does not identify with one of these groups? They are referred to as nonbinary or genderqueer. The biological (represented by sex) and cultural (represented by gender) spheres collide in the psychological dimension, where each individual constructs his or her identity and self-awareness. This distinction is critical in the intersection of Queer Theory and Feminism, because the former does not recognize the existence of only two genders, whereas the latter focuses on the emancipation of women and equal rights for men and women, thus focusing on only two genders.

Based on morphological, anatomical, and physiological traits, sex is widely regarded as a biological category. Traditionally, sex has been classified as male or female based on traits such as genitalia, sex chromosomes (XX for females and XY for men), and secondary sexual characteristics such as vocalization or body hair.

However, due to a better knowledge of biological variances, the binary concept of sex has been questioned in recent years. Intersex persons are born with sexual features that do not conform to the usual binary definitions of masculinity or femininity. This demonstrates that gender is not always as easy as male or female, and it is critical to acknowledge biological variety.

The social, cultural, and psychological expectations associated with being male or female in a specific society are referred to as gender. While sex is biological, gender is a social construct that varies by culture. Gender is frequently separated into two categories: male and female. Gender expectations might include gender-specific behaviors, social roles, cultural standards, and attitudes.

It is crucial to highlight that gender is not inherently related to biological sex. Transgender persons are one illustration of how gender and sex may differ. Transgender people identify as a gender other than the one given to them at birth based on their biological sex. For example, a person assigned male at birth but who identifies as female is a transgender woman.

Finally, A person's emotional, romantic, and sexual attraction to certain others is referred to as their sexual identity. Sexual identity should not be confused with sexual orientation, which

relates to a person's preferences for romantic or sexual partners. The focus of sexual identity is on how a person perceives their gender identity. Individual sexual identities might differ greatly. Other sexual identities include pansexual, asexual, queer, and many others. Some people identify as heterosexual, homosexual, bisexual, and many others.

### **3.3 Impact of the queer theory on feminism**

Queer theory and third-wave feminism share many characteristics. They represent intersectional perspectives on individual identity, the human condition, sexuality, information, and politics. Queer theory and third-wave feminism both go beyond conventional male-female divisions. Their examination of the idea of gender is in-depth. Today, gender is more of a "choice" than it once was. We believe it is crucial to consider how gender impacts our unique identities because it is an open-ended category that includes heterosexual, bisexual, gay, transgender, and queer persons. Everything that has previously been believed to be true about the "rightness" of heterosexual behavior and the "wrongness" of gay desire is now called into question by queer theory (Tong 2018).

Queer theory and feminism are both interdisciplinary studies that, in order to challenge the dominant conception of gender, feminism and queer theory both problematize the connection between gender identity, physical sex, and sexual orientation (Fineman 2009). However, there are clear disparities between these subversive methods that question the dominant notions of sex and gender. On the one hand, while feminism *"is linked to a conception of gender identity centered on the idea of a female sex (biologically, culturally, legally, and socially determined), the extent to which sex and sexuality are considered necessarily central or an all-encompassing component of the feminist analytic remains in dispute, with competing feminist approaches visible."* (Piantato 2016: 4). Feminism also established an idea of women as a universal group, a solid block defined as being different from men'. Focusing on women, this approach was exclusionary in terms of 'those who have felt constrained, even obscured, by feminists' injunctions to identify with and as women, over against men and masculinity,' and who felt more represented by anti-assimilative queer theory (Biddy, 1994, p. 105). As a result, feminism is defined by a dichotomy that places male and female genders in perpetual antagonism, and this approach leads to work through a system of established identities and social institutions. Queer theory, on the other hand, is an anti-normative approach that rejects these dichotomies by proposing a more comprehensive explanation of gender and sexuality, and it even goes



beyond the limits of feminism. Gender identity, according to queer theory, cannot be reduced to this dichotomy since it comprises a vast range of subjectivities that are not always recognizable with the terms "man" or "woman." This approach also implies that it is not feasible to define a person's gender based on the fact that such an individual does not belong to the opposite gender; rather, gender must be viewed as a social act that an individual of any sex can do. Furthermore, feminist binary thinking resulted in the formation of further combinations at various levels. On the one hand, conceptualizing gender as two opposing categories helped to the formation of a contrast between feminine and masculine physical sex, so reinforcing the biological assumption of the male/female sex difference. On the other hand, it contributed to the contrast between heterosexual and homosexual orientation by seeing sexuality as an interior and unchanging attribute of an individual. As a result, this binary gender order is inextricably linked with heteronormativity, which places heterosexuality in a hegemonic position in relation to homosexuality, which is perceived as a departure from the norm, and fully precludes any other option of alternative sexuality (Fineman, 2009). The goal of queer theory is to dismantle such specified categories, as well as the dominant structures and ideologies that lead to the continued perception of gender, sex, and sexual identities as permanent and unchangeable.

## **Conclusion**

Feminism is a social and political movement that seeks gender equality, particularly for women, through opposing sexist oppression. It contends that sexism is morally repugnant and that women endure gender-based oppression, such as reduced opportunities, poorer income, and limited influence. While the name "feminism" was coined in the nineteenth century, its origins may be traced back to antiquity. It aims to combat patriarchal structures that promote gender inequity as well as to improve women's rights. Gender equality is the central principle, which advocates for equal rights and opportunities for all genders. Feminism has contributed to worldwide conflicts by providing a framework, with Western feminism focused on issues such as gender identity, discrimination, violence, and sexuality. The movement has developed, with "Feminism 2.0" spreading its message through social media. It is still fighting challenges like rape culture and patriarchal society. Furthermore, new feminisms have evolved to address specific experiences and concerns, such as Black Feminism, Islamic Feminism, and Indigenous Feminism. Black Feminism emphasizes the intersectionality of racism, sexism, and economic oppression, highlighting the interconnectedness of these concerns. It contends that confronting racism is critical to eliminating sexism and classism. Islamic Feminism advocates for gender equality and challenges patriarchal interpretations of Islamic teachings in order to strengthen women's roles in Islam. Indigenous Feminism tackles challenges of colonialism and heteropatriarchy that Indigenous women experience, with the goal of liberating them from racism and sexism.

Many people now regard feminism as an outmoded notion for two reasons. On the one side, feminism is chastised for propagating sexist ideas such as "women are better than men" rather than gender equality and tolerance. On the other side, many argue that because men and women have equal rights in the Western world, feminism is no longer necessary. Furthermore, the growing popularity and growth of the Queer movement is calling into question one of the key assumptions on which classic feminism is founded: the existence of two genders: male and female.

My thesis tries to answer the question "why aren't we all feminist?", investigating the critiques of the movement, and the aspects for which many people refuse to call themselves feminist, and, on the contrary, despise the movement, viewing it a sexist and oppressive. Furthermore, the focus is on the impact of Queer theory on feminism, which has redefined the concept of woman, and, in general, of gender. While both areas are multidisciplinary and attempt to challenge established gender stereotypes, they also differ. Feminism has traditionally been

associated with a definition of gender identity based on the female sex, however there are rival feminist perspectives that do not always place sex and sexuality at the core of their analyses. Some feminist approaches have been chastised for excluding people who do not strongly identify with the category of "woman." Queer theory, on the other hand, opposes binary and conventional gender and sexuality conceptions. It contends that gender identity is multidimensional and cannot be reduced to a binary of male/female. Gender, according to queer theory, is a social construct that anybody, regardless of gender, may perform. It opposes the binary thinking that maintains traditional gender categories, such as masculine/feminine and heterosexual/homosexual, and seeks to demolish these categories as well as the dominating institutions that support them. Queer theory aims to break away from feminism's constraints and broaden our knowledge of gender and sexuality

## Bibliography

- abakode (n.d.). *Sfumature di un'ideologia: il femminismo liberale*. [online] Mondo Internazionale. Available at: <https://mondointernazionale.org/post/sfumature-di-unideologia-il-femminismo-liberale>
- Angela Y. Davis, "Reflections on the Black Woman's Role in the Community of Slaves," *Black Scholar* 3 (1971)
- Baehr, A.R. (2021). *Liberal Feminism*. Spring 2021 ed. [online] Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy. Available at: <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/feminism-liberal/#EgalLibeFemi>.
- Banet-Weiser S (2018) *Empowered: Popular Feminism and Popular Misogyny*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- BARD, Christine, BLAIS, MéliSSa, DUPUIS-DERI, Francis, eds., *Antiféminismes et masculinismes d'hier et d'aujourd'hui* (Paris: Puf, 2019)
- Bernstein, S. (2019). The metaphysics of intersectionality. *Philosophical Studies*, 177(2), pp.321–335. doi:<https://doi.org/10.1007/s11098-019-01394-x>
- Martin, Bidy. "Sexualities without Genders and Other Queer Utopias." *Diacritics*, vol. 24, no. 2/3, 1994, p. 104, <https://doi.org/10.2307/465167>.
- Chafetz, J.S. (1997). Feminist Theory and Sociology: Underutilized Contributions for Mainstream Theory. *Annual Review of Sociology*, 23(1), pp.97–120. doi:<https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.soc.23.1.97>.
- Chambers, C. (2023). *INTACT : a defence of the unmodified body*. S.L.: Penguin Books
- Chanda, I. (2000). Displaying the Modern Woman: Feminism in the Labyrinths of Media Culture. *Social Scientist*, 28(3/4), p.40. doi:<https://doi.org/10.2307/3518189>
- Chiara Bottici (2022). *Anarchafeminism*. London ; New York: Bloomsbury Academic.
- Crenshaw, K. (). *Race, Reform and Retrenchment*
- Crenshaw, K. "Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics," *University of Chicago Legal Forum* (1989)
- Dr Christina Scharff (2019). Why so many young women don't call themselves feminist. *BBC News*. [online] 6 Feb. Available at: <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-politics-47006912>
- Fineman, Martha, et al. *Feminist and Queer Legal Theory : Intimate Encounters, Uncomfortable Conversations*. Farnham, Surrey, England ; Burlington, Vt., Ashgate, 2009.

History.com Editors (2019). Feminism. [online] HISTORY. Available at: <https://www.history.com/topics/womens-history/feminism-womens-history>.

ICADV. (n.d.). *Exploring the history of Black feminism*. [online] Available at: <https://icadvinc.org/exploring-the-history-of-black-feminism/#:~:text=Black%20feminism%2C%20however%2C%20centers%20on>

inGenere. (2017). Di cosa parliamo quando parliamo di intersezionalità. [online] Available at: <https://www.ingenere.it/articoli/di-cosa-parliamo-quando-parliamo-di-intersezionalita>

Jean Bethke Elshtain, “Feminism, Family and Community,” *Dissent* 29 (fall 1982)

Jean Bethke Elshtain, *Public Man, Private Woman: Women in Social and Political Thought* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1981)

Jennifer Christine Nash (2019). *Black feminism reimagined after intersectionality*. Durham London Duke University Press

Johnson Lewis, J. (2020). *What Is Radical Feminism?* [online] ThoughtCo. Available at: <https://www.thoughtco.com/what-is-radical-feminism-3528997>

Kamei, J. (2022). *Social Media: A Double-Edged Sword for the Feminist Movement*. [online] Pulitzer Center. Available at: <https://pulitzercenter.org/stories/social-media-double-edged-sword-feminist-movement>.

Keller J (2015) *Girls' Feminist Blogging in a Postfeminist Age*. London: Routledge

Lisa Jane Disch and Hawkesworth, M.E. (2016). *The Oxford handbook of feminist theory*. Oxford ; New York: Oxford University Press

Leaver T, Highfield T, Abidin C (2020) *Instagram: Visual Social Media Cultures*. Cambridge: Polity Press

Le Bihan-Colleran, C. (n.d.). *Feminist Linguistic Theories and 'Political Correctness' Modifying the Discourse on Women?* [online] Available at: <https://essenglish.org/messenger/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2020/08/29-1-S2020-le-bihan.pdf>.

Marinucci, M. (2010). *Feminism Is Queer. ; The Intimate Connection Between Queer and Feminist Theory*. Zed Books, Limited.

Mason, E. (2021). *Feminist Philosophy*. Routledge

McCall, L. (2002). *Complex Inequality*. Routledge

MILLS, S. (2003). Caught Between Sexism, Anti-sexism and 'Political Correctness': Feminist Women's Negotiations with Naming Practices. *Discourse & Society*, 14(1), pp.87–110. doi:<https://doi.org/10.1177/0957926503014001931>.

Patricia Hill Collins (1998). *Fighting words : Black women and the search for justice*. Minneapolis: University Of Minnesota Press

Piantato, G. "How Has Queer Theory Influenced the Ways We Think about Gender?" *Working Paper of Public Health*, vol. 5, no. 1, 15 June 2016, <https://doi.org/10.4081/wpph.2016.6948>.

Richardson, D., Mclaughlin, J. and Casey, M.E. (2006). *Intersections Between Feminist and Queer Theory*. London Palgrave Macmillan Uk.

Rowe, K.E. (1978). *Feminism and fairy tales*. Cambridge, Mass., Radcliffe College.

Savolainen, L., Uitermark, J. and Boy, J.D. (2020). Filtering feminisms: Emergent feminist visibilities on Instagram. *New Media & Society*, 24(3), p.146144482096007. doi:<https://doi.org/10.1177/1461444820960074>.

Smith, B.G. and Robinson, N. (2022). *The Routledge Global History of Feminism*. Routledge.

Tong, R. and Fernandes, T. (2017). *Feminist thought : a more comprehensive introduction*. New York, Ny: Westview Press.

www.sapere.it. (n.d.). *Cos'è il femminismo: storia ed evoluzione*. [online] Available at: <https://www.sapere.it/sapere/pillole-di-sapere/costume-e-societa/femminismo-storia-significato-evoluzione.html>.

