

# **Examining Historical Feminism Through a Global Lens**

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## **Abstract**

Feminism is a broad term that encompasses a wide range of political organizations, ideas, and revolutionary movements that seek to define, create and bring about gender equality in legal, economic, personal, and social affairs. The core idea of feminism is to encourage women's equality and justice in all parts of life and give the opportunity for women to have equal access to services that are normally only open to men. Over time, feminism has expanded to include a variety of topics, such as the history of feminist thought and strategies, as well as other cultural ideas, making it a complex concept to examine. Nonetheless, this study is an attempt to describe some essential feminism doctrines and retrace the movement's conceptual origins, while examining how western feminism has been set as the global standard for women's issues, thus excluding the activity and voices of non-Western women under the same movement.

## Introduction

Western women have struggled against preconceptions of inferiority that all women have encountered throughout history (Dixon, 2011). Female identity varies by culture and norms, yet many civilizations are similarly based on a background in which men had more power than women. The oppression of women all across the world affects their work, education, sexuality, and bodily autonomy. Western women have worked hard to eliminate stereotypes and attain equality in many cultural centers. In America today, men and women are almost socially equal. Women have the right to vote, own businesses, run for office, and several other benefits. Their biological and societal growth leads to authority dissolution, abortion, and pregnancy prevention (Aneja 2017). They are allowed to wear whatever they want. However, in the media, there exist sexual constructs that portray men and women as stereotypes. In the media, women are depicted as sexual objects which are slim, large-breasted, modest, and faultless. Therefore, even though they hold prominent positions and play essential roles in several social structures, the 'American housewife' remains a dominant paradigm. Western culture imposes positive feminist ideas and opposes negative press depictions of third-world and rising countries. This article will look at how Western culture has influenced feminism and female stereotypes around the world and how it must be conscious of the mass communication it communicates with the rest of the world and the patterns it promotes.

## Feminism Through a Global Lens

The United States has a long experience of being a patriarchal society with severely restricted women's rights. Due to their restricted advantages, women have had the opportunity to seek and accomplish change in the United States, likewise based on freedom and individualism.

Elizabeth B. Anthony, the first feminist, created the Women's Right to Vote Organization in 1869. Even though American women did not get the right to vote until 1919, Anthony was instrumental in achieving this goal. Women having the right to vote are well enough in the United States today, although they are not universally available (Wang 2021). Women have been subjected to a variety of rules and conventions that have dictated and maintained their subordinate position due to their lack of political power and association with fleshly desires. As self-proclaimed rulers of family and public authority, males have referred to and defined women primarily in terms of their sexuality, and have built and maintained the institutions that manage female sexuality. Simone de Beauvoir, a Roman French writer, questioned the prevalent hetero normative description of her gender in the early fifteenth century, announcing that the evil about women by learned men did exist only in men's minds and that, if allowed the opportunity to educate, women could become as righteous and competent as men.

### **Collectivist vs. Individualistic culture**

It is a common belief that individualism fosters gender equality. Women were not forced to work from outside the home and were generally limited to being wives while their husbands earned money. In 1963, Benny Friedan published "The Feminine Mystique," a book in which she examines the issue of American housewives and the unfairness of confining women to certain roles. In June of that year, the Current Legislation was approved by Congress, mandating employers to compensate men and women equally for the same work. Meanwhile, Title VII of the Civil Rights Act outlawed employers from discriminating against employees or gender. (Madsen and Scribner 2017). Even though American women now hold nearly all men's roles formerly in the workplace, the American household narrative remains. Men and women still earn different amounts for the same jobs. Despite progress, pay disparities between men and women

for equal work persist; women make up less than 20% of all state and federal elected representatives and senators (RepresentationWomen, 2020); women are undervalued as professional athletes; and women are largely excluded from the highest levels of most professions, such as company CEOs, technicians, doctors, and architects.

In contrast, focusing on sexual distinctions and highlighting women's distinctiveness may encourage laws and reinforce attitudes that limit women's choices under the guise of honouring their unique needs. This rationale was used for a long time to explain labor rules that barred all women from many outstanding job prospects because they needed infrequent work in the evenings or entailed physically demanding jobs (Agostini and van Zomeren 2021). Women working in dangerous professions have lately been subjected to coercive sterilization or job termination due to their reproductive capabilities. However, denying that women belong to a distinct class based on their gender might restrict them from the help, they may require, such as during pregnancy. Some say that it has the potential to damage the fundamental foundations of a revolutionary group in its identity and purpose.

Religious reform and the expansion of industry and trade are not the only concepts that affected women's lives. Different institutions and concepts affected women's lives and defied previous views of women's "nature" during the early modern era. As a result of political centralization and the advancement of science, women's lives have been altered. According to one modern interpretation, the great witchcraft persecutions of the late Middle Ages were attempts to legitimize political authority by the use of new forms of social control over individual behavior. Since women's physical and socio-economic- limitations made their use of magical properties appear conceivable, and their supposed sexual and emotional neediness predisposed them to devilish temptation, 80 percent of witch-hunt victims were women, often

elderly, unmarried, strange women, without male protection (Aneja 2017). Many sexist ideas about the female body were eventually debunked by science. Despite numerous studies in early embryos supporting Aristotle's view of women's complacency in procreation, which also reinforced perceptions and traditions attempting to deny them establishment in societal structure, scientific understanding in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries finally shifted such ancient and false assumptions.

## **Feminist Theories**

In feminist ideology, gender, sexuality, racism, prejudice, justice, diversity, and freedom are key parts. There appear to be systems and procedures in place that discriminate against persons who share these traits and against fairness. The notion that things have changed drastically in the past necessitates the idea that truths can be found by evaluating present situations in current society. More importantly, this analysis has the potential to raise awareness about repressive institutions while also providing platforms for a diverse variety of voices to speak out. Feminists value notions of interconnection, features that impact social injustice, and structural advancement (Sun 2021). Long-term advances in understanding the variations and changes in gendered labour allocation have been accomplished thanks to feminist research. This viewpoint rejects any distinctions or similarities between men and women, as well as any policies that would exclude men or favor women's interests. By acknowledging and breaking power and oppression, feminist philosophy aspires to promote change and awareness.

Women were given new opportunities due to the advent of Christianity: some were given a role in preaching the new religion, and all were promised spiritual equality. Christianity provided new avenues for women's views to be heard, mainly through enacting consent-based

marriage laws and, in some instances, providing succession and property rights for women (Madsen and Scribner 2017). Although monks and convents provided sanctuary for the poor, they also offered training and alternate occupations for a tiny, often upper-class minority. The first higher education institutions in the Western world were founded in the high Middle Ages. Starting in 1157, Salami, whose renowned 12th law professor, Gratian, integrated Aristotle's dialectic view of women as passive and men as productive in legislation and procreative biology into his author, has conducted. In the Middle Ages, Thomas Aquinas' works strengthened this philosophical dualism, combining his grasp of Plato with the Christian notion of existence to proclaim that woman was a "faulty and wayward" man, assigned by nature to the task of procreation (Wang 2021). The long-standing history of categorizing women as not-men and males in terms of traits they lack and services they provide was renewed as a result of the return of learning. The development of the market economy is likely to have liberated women from all walks of life in both rural and urban areas.

### **Western societies vs. other societies**

Women have grown more visible throughout history. According to new anthropological research, women may have had more equality with males in primitive periods. Households formed societies, and participation was not divided by gender or sex roles. Agricultural society financial systems with comparatively little task distinction permitted more equitable relationship issues within families; homes themselves decreed communities, and involvement was not divided by sexual identity or sex roles (Aneja 2017). As heads of homes, only men were granted property rights and citizenship in the ancient world, which had more wealthy countries, higher wealth, and military. Society was divided into family and polity, and it became a male-dominated realm of good citizenship. Women were relegated to the home, or double standards of sensuality

were established to ensure female submission to patriarchal family interests. The honor of a lady and her family was linked to her virginity. According to Plato, a woman's virtue is obedience. Women's duties varied according to their social level. Still, except for Einstein's philosophical queens, no woman could claim equal treatment in terms of ownership, nationality, matrimony, civil justice, or access to social structures. Women were created to reproduce and serve the needs of males; rights to their offspring were given to men.

Turning the lens away from western feminism, most people know very little about the experience of women in the non-western world, and even less about their experiences, ideas, and standpoint in relation to global feminism. The discourse on non-western women's lives continues to be a source of disagreement among feminist historians. In an incredibly complex culture, generalizations are no longer feasible as some women succeeded, were educated, and exercised authority. Historically, some women, like men, lived in cultures where they made considerable contributions to their family's well-being, as all members of the household pooled their labor in a cooperative effort to generate the material goods necessary for their survival and reproduction. Nonetheless, power structures that are unfairly biased against these women still existed. Feminism has since spread and been adopted in non-western cultures, but is unfortunately often excluded or overshadowed by similar western movements. As argued by (Miike, 2021) any part of the non-western world is expected to be in constant dialogue with the West and to affirm its perceived significance, even though it ignores other regions of the world and simplifies the West. As a result, Eurocentric traditions are regularly projected as worldwide standards. It is important to learn about and recognize the lives and struggles faced by women from every part of the world, as non-western cultures have equally had intellectual and political movements and moments with the same motive and agenda. A collaboration of both western and non-western

feminism approaches is necessary if we hope to truly redefine, create and bring about gender equality in legal, economic, personal, and social affairs across the globe.

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