

## **Evaluate the usefulness of feminist approaches in understanding society.**

There are many approaches when it comes to feminism, some which hold strong views and show aggression such as radical feminism and black feminism, others however, such as liberal feminism share a march of progress view where they believe change is coming about.

Liberal feminists take a natural approach much like functionalist views, they look into value consensus in society and how it is progressing unlike other views. Liberal feminism does not like the idea of revolution yet gradual change, in this context, equal rights progress between men and women can be achieved gradually through reforms in society. Liberal feminists believes that this can be achieved through laws and policies for example, such as the equal pay act which focuses on men and women being paid equally, this can according to liberal feminists obtain equal opportunities for women. Another example of such can be seen with the Sex Discrimination act (1975), which prohibits women to be discriminated because of their sex, if for instance a woman is denied a promotion due to her pregnancy, this issue may be raised within court and be set right, this is also featured in the Equality Act (2010), where women are also protected against sex discrimination anywhere, they go. As a result of such women are protected from discrimination which may be harmful and therefore, is seen as progress in liberal feminism. However, other feminist branches such as the radical would argue that change can only occur through a revolution which is aggressive and men learn their lesson that patriarchy harms women and should be halted to protect them, initially wanting the tables to turn on men.

Liberal feminists, however, do call for cultural change, traditional prejudice, and stereotypes about gender differences according to liberal feminists are barriers to equality. They believe that women are not less rational, and their emotions dominate them, where instincts are used to exclude them from the role which allow to make decisions and have power and are confined to be the 'housewife.' Liberal feminists do not agree with the view that due to women biologically different they are less rational or competent than men. This shows an agreement with radical feminism, showing aggression towards men for thinking that way, where biologically women are disadvantaged when they are really not. Ann Oakley talks about sex and gender, distinguishing the two. Sex makes us biologically different, for example are reproductive role, hormonal, and physical differences. However, gender is something which was constructed culturally where 'masculine' and 'feminine' things had a sex attached to it, and anything which comes out of the norm disproved and looked down upon. The idea is that cultures are able to hold the abilities of what which sex does and what they are capable of, for example how women are said they are not capable of power, but men are, and these ideas are shared through socialisation. Hence, liberal feminists seek to promote appropriate role models in education and the family. Where could only occur through taking the deep-rooted problem of socialisation and changing it, preventing it from occurring, however, until that occurs change will not be seen as it would not be passed on. Such actions, therefore, prevent women from being treated equally, due to constant socialization of women having to be subordinate to their husbands, women's position cannot move effectively. On the contrary, women's position in society has taken place, starting from the suffragettes which argued and fought for the power of women having the right to vote, which in many cultures today can be seen, this therefore is evidence for what liberal feminism talks about, the march of progress.

Although, comparing the liberal feminist view to seeing it as a functionalist view, due to it being optimistic, they do in fact disagree with parson's view, which are the instrumental roles being the domain of men, which prevent women as well as men from leading fulfilling lives, this is because some men would prefer to take an expressive role rather than instrumental. For example, few women are seen as being bosses or CEOs of companies, the number of such compared to men is exceedingly small

and still affects young girls who grow up thinking they cannot be a CEO because the spread of women across that panel is small. Liberal feminism argues that men and women are equally capable of performing roles in both spheres, such as the private ones, like the home, and public ones like work. Women's emancipation (liberation) is a 'win-win' situation from men will gain from also. For example, ending the gender division of labour would allow men to express their 'feminine' nurturing side, which current gender stereotypes force them to suppress.

Liberal feminism has been criticised for over-optimism. Seeing obstacles to liberation (emancipation) as simply prejudices of individuals or irrational laws which can be reformed gradually away by onward 'march of progress,' the possibility that there are deep-rooted structures causing women's oppression, like capitalism or patriarchy is ignored. Walby, argues that liberal feminists do not offer an explanation for the overall structure of gender inequality.

Marxist feminists as well as radical feminists argue that liberal feminism fails to recognise the underlying causes of women's subordination and that it is naïve to believe that changes in the law or attitudes will be enough to bring equality. Instead, they believe that far-reaching, revolutionary changes are needed, this is something that liberal feminism does not like, they do not like lobbying and protesting but gradually changing and looking into law and how women can be empowered and protected in such.

Radical feminists unlike liberal, whom they disagree with, take an aggressive side towards patriarchy and men, they argue that patriarchy is universal where male domination of women exists in every society. Firestone argues that patriarchy's origin lies within women's biological capacity to bear and care for infants as it means they would depend on men. Men are the main enemy, patriarchy is the primary form of inequality, however, Marxist feminist argue that it is capitalism and social classes which cause such inequalities between people in society. According to radical feminists, all men oppress all women, which they benefit from such as the women's unpaid domestic labour and sexual services.

Personal according to radical feminists is also political, they argue that politics mixes with personal life and causes women to be seen as less than by men. Relationships involve power and are political where one partner is seen as the dominant one over the other, this is also known as sexual politics. Millet argues that political relationships between men and women, where the man is the dominating gender, exists in all aspects of everyday life. Patriarchal power is seen usually through sexual or physical violence, even when it is a threat, as it controls women to the pleasure of the man. Brownmiller argues that the fear of rape is a deterrent so powerful which prevent women going out at night causing women to be bound to have less fun or even feel safe.

Radical feminists argue patriarchy is constructing sexuality to satisfy men's desires. For example, women who are portrayed in pornography are seen as passive sex objects and penetration, being a main source of sexual pleasure. Rich argues that men continue to force women into unsatisfying and narrow 'compulsory heterosexuality.' This shows that men yet again gain control over women, where they cannot enjoy themselves, yet be bound to the subordination to a man, like as if they have no free will to decide what they wish to do.

Unlike liberal feminists, radical feminists provide man solutions to make women more powerful and be less bound to patriarchy. One of them is separatism, due to men's oppression of women which is exercised through the process of intimate domestic and sexual relationships, some radical feminists, suggest women living apart from men which would create a new culture of female independence, free

from patriarchy. Greer argues for the creation of all-female or 'matrilocal' households as an alternative to the heterosexual family.

Another solution is consciousness raising by sharing experiences in a women-only consciousness raising group, women may come together and see they are facing the same issues, leading to collective action such as 'SlutWalk' marches. However, these are in place, there are many groups of women even in religion who have their own congregation like in Latin America to prevent them being used by and viewed as objects by 'macho men' and challenge their partners to be different, with small succession rates, this also makes it taboo to speak out, as it is confining such talks to only women, where men are not taught how women should be treated. This means that this solution has not been seen to have wide effects so where radical feminists provide solutions, some are in place and do not change a lot.

Another solution given by radical feminists is political lesbianism, in these heterosexual relationships are argued to be oppressive due to it involving 'sleeping with the enemy,' and the solution is lesbianism as it is the only non-oppressive form of sexuality for women. However, you cannot change someone's sexuality, you cannot force women to all be lesbians to better their conditions and be free of patriarchy, therefore, this solution is not a free-will solution which allows women to live in a patriarchy free society without the need of forcing a type of sexuality on them.

There have been many criticisms of feminist's perspective such as there not being an explanation offered on the reason female subordination is not just in one form in different societies. As well, making assumptions that every woman around the world is in the same position, ignoring class, ethnicity etc. For example, a middle-class woman may have more in common with a middle-class woman than a working-class woman. Showing that radical feminism does not consider individual women who live in a different way, some women also reject feminism in the terms of how they live, some women enjoy being a traditional 'housewife' and being the primary care giver to their children.

Pollert also argues that patriarchy as a concept has very little value, due to it involving a circular argument. Male violence for example is explained as patriarchy, whereas patriarchy is seen as being maintained by male violence, so in this idea patriarchy is maintaining itself. As well as this, the branches of feminism do not agree with each other on every term, also causing a circular argument which does not provide real solutions as it keeps going on and on, instead feminists should reach a solution together where women are benefited.

The theory of abolition of patriarchy is also inadequate. Vague utopian notions of separatism are unlikely to be achieved. Somerville argues heterosexual attraction makes it unlikely that the nuclear family will be replaced by single-sex households.

Liberal feminists argue that patriarchy may already be in decline, due to women's positions which has improved greatly in recently, resulting in social reformation and changing attitudes. (Better education, job opportunities etc. mean that gender equality is beginning to become a reality.) This shows some sort of agreement with liberal feminism, that the change is occurring, and that patriarchy is slowly declining through efforts, however, the aggressive views of feminism are still in conflict and still wish to see immediate change in the way that women are viewed within society.

Radical feminism also in terms of domestic violence against women neglects women's violence against men and violence within lesbian relationships. This shows a narrow and deterministic point of view, not

only do they argue that all men are patriarchal and treat their wives as being nothing, they also do not feature lesbian household who are violent. There are many women in society who are violent and cause damage to their husbands, one of the notoriously violent women was Aileen Wournos, who killed men on a highway. Aileen was not the only woman, Rose West with her husband murdered children, which shows both genders being able to be violent. Violence against men is not nearly as much reported as women's, one of the reasons being that the state has power of giving victims of crime the status of being an actual victim in the criminal justice department, for example the police not filing a report of domestic violence against a man, showing that men are not valued in society.

Another branch of feminism arguing with radical feminism also that social class inequalities are the ones that damage society the most are Marxist feminists. Unlike other feminists they do not look into patriarchy as being the problem of women's oppression, they argue that it is capitalism. Instead, they argue that inequality which is seen through social classes within society is within capitalism which makes patriarchy more intense, as property is inherited down the male line.

According to Marxists feminist, the main way in women is exploited is through the unpaid domestic labour they do within their home for their family. Within this view, women are not paid to even give birth to children which they raise to be another work force, which is seen to Marxist feminists as exploitation by the bourgeoisie, they benefit from such as women are not paid to do any of that yet providing another generation of workers which will work for them.

Hartman argues that the argument of unpaid domestic labour, does not explain why men do not do it but women, Hartman therefore argues that Marxism is 'sex-blind' meaning it does not look into the other sex but just the female sex. This is a limitation as it does not feature the other sex and try to establish the probable causes which would usually be blamed onto capitalism, however, in this case, there is none. This makes the argument reductionist as it does not look into men and only women being the ones which do domestic labour. By not looking into the other sex, the arguments posed by Marxist feminism is seen as being not inclusive to other explanations and taking a male side point. Yet, feminism started due to women having enough of the patriarchy they faced, which excludes men as women were the ones suffering from patriarchy in the first place.

Ansley argues that women's other job is to absorb anger, which would be directed at capitalism, wives according to Ansley, are 'takers of shit,' they soak up the frustrations which their husbands as they feel alienated and exploited, at work, which is an explanation of male domestic violence against women according to Marxist feminism. Due to women being afraid also of alienation and rejection, they will take what is thrown at them, many women suffer in silence and takes year for them to report what happened. However, even after so, the damage which was caused to women through such actions makes them subordinate even more, afraid of what may happen to them just like Brownmiller's argument of women being so afraid of rape they avoid going out late at night, women are also afraid of living adequately, because of the domination they experienced from their partner. However, as Barrett explains they want to fit into the norm.

Barrett, proposes the ideology of familism, arguing that women's consciousness and motivation need more emphasis, to the role of ideology in maintaining their oppression. Barrett means that women living in a conventional nuclear family is what oppresses them, so why are they in it? The answer provided by Barrett is that is the ideology of 'familism,' presenting the nuclear family and sex division of labour is

presented as the norm for women. Therefore, many women go into the ideology where they perform unpaid domestic work as the family is what will help to obtain fulfilment to women, especially motherhood, intimacy, and sexual satisfaction. As a result, women are kept to be subordinated, according to Barret, their beliefs are that there must be an overthrow of the ideology, which is place in society, which would free women from the unequal division labour, the conventional family, initially freeing both sexes from the stereotypes that are forced upon them and making domestic labour be more equally shared.

However, Juliet Mitchell used Freud's psychoanalytic theory to argue that ideas about femininity are so deeply implanted in women's unconscious minds that they are difficult to dislodge. The implication is that even after the overthrow of capitalism, it would still be hard to overcome patriarchal ideology because it is so deeply rooted. This means that to overthrow capitalism there would have to be a new generation of people whose minds are not deeply rooted with the ideologies of capitalism to secure a normal society where capitalism would not be reinforced onto people and both sexes would not be held to their stereotypes.

As a criticism and dissatisfaction, from other feminists' perspectives, black feminism also known as post-structural feminism developed. Black feminism argues that other approaches of feminism are ethnocentric, meaning they do not look at ethnic minorities, where all of experiences that white women experience, do not happen to those of ethnic minority groups, meaning those cannot be related to.

Black feminism stresses that women are in quite various positions to many black women, such as the housewife, which is seen as a white middle class subject. Black feminism argues that black women have fought against domestic violence and developed an alternative family forms where women have autonomy.

Butler argues that the white, Western, middle-class women who dominate the feminist movement have falsely claimed to represent 'universal womanhood.' She concludes that feminists are wrong to believe they can adapt the Enlightenment project so that it somehow includes all women – because women are not a single entity who all share the same 'essence.' With this argument black feminists aim to correct those views and give them a viewpoint and experiences of black women, as they too deserve to be heard. Within the views of Butler, by stressing diversity discourses of other cultures, post-structuralism may recognise and legitimise the diversity of women's lives as well as struggles rather than prioritising some and excluding others.

Another branch of feminism are dual systems feminism, they have combined Marxist and radical feminism in a singular theory. Dual systems feminism looks at an economic system which they see as capitalist, and a sex gender system which they see as patriarchal. Hartman sees capitalism and patriarchy as being put together in a system which forms an entity of 'patriarchal capitalism'. Just like radical feminists, the theories accept patriarchy being universal, however, arguing patriarchy having took a specific form in capitalist societies. From this view, women's subordination may be understood through looking at relationships between their positions within patriarchy such as the divisions of labour and capitalism such as paid work. Walby argues that patriarchy and capitalism collide over the explanations of female labour, as capitalism wants cheap female labour and patriarchy resists such wanting to keep women as being subordinated. Walby's view is seen as useful a reason for this is, due to it showing the two-system interacting with each other, without assuming that as the same time their interests collide. Pollert however, argues that patriarchy is not a system like capitalism, driven by

internal dynamic profit making, she argues that patriarchy is just a term used to describe practices such as male violence and having control over women and their labour.

To conclude, all of the approaches of feminism play a significant part in the role of explaining women's place in society which aids to understand society more. Liberal feminism like radical feminism provides solutions which society should take and implement into the system. Unlike Marxists feminism however, which are outdated and do not provide solid solutions unlike the overthrow of capitalism, do not explain what society could do in order to make women better, but giving an explanation for capitalism being the enemy and cause of women's oppression. However, feminists such as the dual system which are radical feminists and Marxists feminists are able to identify two things which keep women subordinated and why they are subordinated, because of not only patriarchy but also capitalism, using women and not giving them any power, to keep them within the private sphere. Black feminism also shines light into what feminism can do for those who are of ethnic backgrounds as they are not in any way supported, giving feminism something to work on in the future. Feminism must also recognise that not all women are in pain because they live in a nuclear family with their husband and kids, the stereotype of those families also does not create a positive environment for those women, where they could feel very comfortable and still support other women. Therefore, feminism must understand that women have different experiences and these need to be also looked into to provide an accurate picture of how women feel and what family life looks like to them whether, they are a single mother or have a partner. Overall feminism needs to agree on some things, the differences between them are very big and they do not solve anything, as it just provides more debate within the whole of feminism and does not help them establish how society could work together to make it better for women within society, so they are no longer, exploited, alienated, and made to be subordinate by patriarchy.