

Feminism: Some General Points of Criticism...

Most criticisms of Feminist perspectives have stemmed from Feminists themselves (this is sometimes referred to as an "internal critique" (that is, one that comes from various writers working within the same broad perspective). The following points refer to this kind of internal critique...

1. Liberal Feminism.

a. Liberal Feminists have focused their attention upon "**equality of opportunity**" between males and females. They have largely **ignored** the study of **social structural factors** that other Feminists see as a basic cause of inequality in Capitalist societies (for example, **patriarchy** and the **inequalities** created by Capitalist forms of economic production).

b. Liberal Feminists have been criticised (and variously derided as "**bourgeois / middle-class**" Feminists) for their failure to understand that in any society that is fundamentally **unequal** in its economic and social structure "**equality of opportunity**" is a fairly **meaningless** concept. In a society divided along class lines and driven by economic exploitation, women - like working class men - are at a fundamental economic disadvantage...

2. Radical Feminism.

a. There is no real **evidence** that women constitute a "**sex class**", since it is clear that, apart from a common biology, women may have no real shared interests "as a class apart from men". It is difficult to see, for example, what "common interests" are shared by upper class and working class women - aside from the fact that they are women. The experiences and life chances of upper class females are significantly different to those of working class females (where the position of the former may be closer to that of men than to their working class counterparts)

b. The primary importance attached to patriarchy downgrades the importance of concepts like social class and ethnicity. For Marxist Feminists, patriarchy itself stems from the way in which women are generally exploited economically.

c. To view women as a "sex class" whose basic interest involves emancipation from men would leave unresolved the problem of economic exploitation.

d. Radical Feminism tends to overlook the fact that the general position of women in society has changed over time and this can only be explained in terms of wider economic and political changes in society.

e. Socialist Feminists do not see women as a "sex class", nor do they see all men as "the class enemy". Not all male / female relationships are characterised by oppression and exploitation, for example. Technological "solutions" to female exploitation are also viewed with suspicion (since control over development and exploitation of technology has traditionally been a male preserve), as is the idea that a matriarchal society is somehow superior and preferable to a patriarchal society.

f. Radical Feminists over-emphasise factors that separate women from men (their biology in particular - over-stating the significance of biological differences - and also unsubstantiated / uncritical assumptions about male and female psychology).

3. Marxist Feminism.

a. Marxist Feminists tend to be criticised for placing **too much emphasis** upon **class relations** in the economic sphere (women considered as part of the working class, for example) and not paying enough attention to female experiences **outside** the labour market (within the family / domestic sphere, for example).

b. Given that the revolutionary **overthrow of Capitalism** does **not seem very likely** to occur, this "solution" to female exploitation tends not to be seen as a particularly useful one to pursue.

c. Radical Feminists have been critical of the emphasis placed upon Capitalist forms of exploitation. The main argument here is that **patriarchal** forms of exploitation have existed in all known societies, not just Capitalist ones. In addition, they argue that patriarchy predates Capitalism which makes it a more significant explanation of female exploitation and oppression.

4. Socialist Feminism.

a. This form of Feminism **underplays** the significance of Capitalist forms of exploitation.

b. Socialist Feminism is criticised for being **neither revolutionary nor radical enough** to create lasting solutions to the problem of female economic and social exploitation.