



## Feminism

Feminism is a widely known movement, leaders of which managed to gain many political and social freedoms for women who live in the world of today, so they can feel comfortable with the state of things and their position in the society. Modern girls and women are allowed to lead the life that they find appropriate, but it wasn't the same way two or three centuries ago when the first wave of feminism broke out. Even today, some traditions and customs of some countries do not allow women to pursue careers or be involved in social or political life of their countries. Some customs deprive young women from the right to share what they think or wear their favorite clothes; they are forced to stay at home and wait for their husbands' return. The feminist movement isn't a movement of dissenters who decided to sin against the laws of the society, but rather a successful attempt to show the male population of the planet that women should be equal with men and enjoy the same freedoms and rights as males do.

This proposal aims at reviewing the historical background of the feminist movement from its early years and up till today, recollecting the most well-known leaders of the liberation movement, as well as stating the main concepts and features of the feminism, and how they assisted in changing the world and attitude to women, and tell about the men's role in the liberation movement. These goals are achieved due to extensive historical and social research, data collection and analysis to provide the necessary facts to support the topic of the paper.

When there is domination, oppression, racism, and inequality of any kind in any society that strives for equality of rights for everyone that is hypocrisy at its highest rate. It is the pressure on women that became unbearable at a certain point of time that became the ground zero for the women's rights struggle that was destined to change the world, three times to be exact. Nevertheless, before the women's liberation movement broke out, women were in the position that seemed to be quite normal and acceptable in the society at that time. Before the feminist movement, there were thousands and thousands of women who thought of themselves as abnormal and strange, to say the least, for all the thoughts of injustice and inequality that they had (Hooks 2). However, the majority of them had never even considered arguing against the existed system, least of all, to lead the others. This situation went on without changing up until the late 19th century when women decided that they deserved the right to vote alongside with men. That's when the first wave of feminism began, as women from different backgrounds, cultures, with diverse notions and concepts that they had about their rights united, to get their right to vote.

Time passed and the women's role in the society gradually changed when women won the right to vote, it was obvious that some other changes were necessary to improve statuses and roles of women in their societies. Unfortunately, given all the advancements of the modern world, all the freedoms that women have gained since then, many basic concepts of feminism, as well as its definition, have been lost somewhere along the way. The society is overwhelmed with various multiple problems that the society has to deal with on a daily basis that even women stay away from the notion that brought them the freedom that they have. There are many men who are unaware of true and genuine feminism movement goals and philosophy and who think of modern feminists as about those who hate all male representatives of the human species and consider getting close to one of them as bad luck or worse (Hooks 5). The more disappointing is the fact that some women think the same way as men do, but keep on using those rights and freedoms gained so hard.

As the old proverb goes, 'Many men many minds', and there are many ways that the same concept can be interpreted and understood. This dissertation proposal aims at reminding those who might forget and show to those who know nothing about main concepts, features, and men's role in the feminist movement. Its primary goal is to get acquainted people with those tendencies and freedoms that many of modern women use without giving much thought to how and why they got them, and to help change their mind, visualize and get the notion that any kind of oppression is unfortunate, and it is a fault trait of any society.

## Historical Background of Feminism As We Know It Today

It is not a mystery that the feminist movement in its contemporary form has gone a long way and undergone changes in terms of policy, participants, concepts, and features to gain what feminists wanted to achieve. However, there is always a starting point of every deed, and the feminist movement also started with a very specific purpose that women from different backgrounds wanted to gain for themselves. Women and gender studies experts, as well as historians, acknowledge three waves of the feminist movement:

- First Wave (Suffragists) - 1800 - 1930;
- Second Wave - 1960 - 1980;
- Third Wave - 1990 - 2000;

This is a general division of the feminist movement that was accepted throughout the world by most historians who specialize in women and gender studies. However, some grounds of feminism were seen even in the XVII century, as women wanted to change their way of living at that time as well. Despite this division, it is also worth mentioning that not all women who rebelled against the customs survived to witness these changes since some of them were executed for dissenting and breaching the laws of the society they lived in. That was a high price to pay to gain the right to education and vote in the first place (Covington).

First Wave of Feminism. Many women contributed to enlarging their scope of rights and freedoms, such as Anne Hutchison who taught both male and female children at her home, Abigail Adams who wrote a letter to her husband demanding to include the women's rights in the Constitution or women may form a rebellion, or Deborah Sampson who dressed in her brother's clothes and fought in the Revolutionary War and died in action, and there were many others who tried to attract the attention of the society and change something.

However, everything started with two women who decided to end inequality and gain the right to vote on a par with men who got control over the world at that time. In the late 1800's Susan B. Anthony and Elizabeth C. Stanton started the suffrage movement to acknowledge the women's right to vote, retain ownership and control property that women possessed before the marriage. This movement attracted the attention of many women all around the United States, which resulted in drafting and approving the Declaration of Rights of Sentiments in 1848. This document contained a bill of rights for women that enlarged women's rights in addition to those that were imposed by the 19th-century society. Many women activists of that time were called suffragists, and this movement was acknowledged as the first wave of feminism as a political movement calling for the suffrage of females ("A Brief History of Feminism"). In 1920, the 19th Amendment was adopted, and it included the women's right to vote among the others. At that time, the second generation of the first wave feminists took the leading role, and Carrie Chapman was a head of these feminists. They began different political campaigns aimed at recollecting the most famous first generation feminists, as well as picketing the White House, which resulted in arrests, beatings, and poor workhouse conditions (Covington). The way these women were treated by politicians attracted the attention of the vast public to this burning issue and helped change the state of affairs.

Second Wave of Feminism. The second wave of feminism began long after the first one, in 1960, when the second wave feminists reunited to claim what was theirs. Betty Friedan was the spark that ignited the second wave of movement, and her work "The Feminine Mystique" of 1963 called women for actions to gain social and sexual freedom. Previous years proved that policy was not enough when it comes to getting the scope of freedom and gender equality that was seen by most women as equal enough to have a possibility of approving themselves and making their dreams and social wishes come true outside their houses and families (Dorey-Stein).

However, the feminist movement faced serious problems inside of the feminine groups, and it was disjoint due to class differences. There was a conflict inside the movement, as the working class feminists claimed for some changes in the already existent class division while the radical feminists wanted fundamental changes of the class structure to replace the old model with new ideas of equality and sexual freedom. The conflict wasn't resolved until the very end of the liberation movement, and it worsened when the race differences problem arose. The race equality rights for women, especially for African-American women was one of the main points of the third wave feminists program.

However, despite all the differences in class and race, the second wave of feminism concepts included the right to self-realization, abortion, equal payment, higher education, etc. This wave of feminism was called a social feminism, as this movement program spoke of such important things for females as the right to hold a credit card issued in her name rather than her husband's, the right to equal payment at the same level with men, the right to receive higher education degrees and pursue chosen jobs, the right to participate in politics at the same level as men do, and the right to control their bodies that included the right to abortion and contraception to prevent unwanted pregnancies. In other words, even if you are a brilliant student with a potential to achieve the great heights, you will have no perspectives, and you will be denied this right just because you are a woman. As for the moral aspects of the program, feminists of the second wave wanted to put an end to racism, sexism, oppression, violence, or sexual harassment (Vagabondway 2). Eventually, feminists managed to gain what they claimed, for instance, the Equal Pay Act of 1963 stated that women should receive equal pay with men. Many fiction books and poetry collections were published to get acquainted the rest of the society with the status of black and white working class women, and these books were famous among the majority of feminists. The Second Wave of feminist movement ended in 1980 partially due to political changes and change of the regime and partially due to female activists. Many female participants felt that they gained much, and it was quite acceptable to stop there, and the other reason was that the era of Reagan and Thatcher somewhat opposed to the equality rights. As the result, the majority of African American citizens were deprived of many feminist achievements (Covington).

Third Wave of Feminism. This third stage started in 1980's by heirs of the second wave feminists, but never found any uniform structure, nor did it form any particular social or political program. In the today's women and gender studies, the third wave of feminism is often called as post-feminism as there were no new ideas or concepts suggested that needed fundamental changes in the feminist movement's structure. The third generation of feminists opposed to actions and deeds of the second wave feminists; they reacted differently to the problems that the second generation of feminists faced. First of all, the third wave feminists put black feminism as their major problem and tried to reformulate and reconsider it (Covington). At that time, feminism was an individual notion that was understood by each woman differently. Authors of feminist books, articles, and manifests didn't address all women, but rather each woman individually asking to reconsider her views on a particular issue. The feminist movement attracted attention not only through publications, but also via staged musicals or songs; for example, Bikini Hill wrote and staged "Riot Grrrl Manifesto", the radical feminist musical that quickly became a musical genre. The musical became world famous and brought the attention of its viewers to such issues as violence against women and homophobia

(Covington).

Finally, it is worth adding that the third wave had no definite ending since the movement was overtaken by the next generation that broadened boundaries and enlarged possibilities by entering the World Wide Web. The post-9/11 female generation perceived problems differently, acknowledging the existence of a completely new set of problems to be resolved. Nevertheless, the development of Internet provided female activists with a possibility of attracting attention of a large number of people to their problems, thus gaining the necessary attention of government officials who were able to make some changes at the governmental level (Maddison and Sawyer 120). Despite all the achievements, both past and present, there is much more to accomplish and implement, since women still have little influence in the world that is dominated by men.

## **Main Features and Concepts of Feminism Theory**

A need for theorizing the feminist movement occurred when people realized that all achievements of feminists should be gathered into a guide for future generations and gender studies researchers have a possibility of looking through points that need to be redefined or restructured. Recent works are mainly focused on improving a particular part of the feminist theory by introducing new advancements and discoveries as to what may be necessary change to improve women situation in general or a situation of women of a certain ethnicity or background.

In her book "Fundamental Feminism: Contesting the Core Concepts of Feminist Theory", Judith Grant (4) speaks about the core concepts of feminism that were developed in the early years of the feminist movement. They are:

- Woman;
- Experience;
- Personal Politics.

These concepts were published in the first political pamphlets aimed to attract public attention to different burning female problems and formed the base of the feminist theory in general. This achievement, to a certain extent, allowed further interpretation and advancement of feminist ideas by the next generation of feminists. Grant (18) goes on telling that the theory in its original form was developed by the second wave of feminists who understood a need for tailoring a specific theory in opposition to the radical powers who had no specific theory that supported their program and core ideas. According to Grant (19) second wave feminists had no unique theory at all, nor did they give any specific definition to feminism as a political or social movement.

Nevertheless, it is worth mentioning that different feminist concepts exist along with different types of feminism. For example:

1. Liberal Feminism;
2. Radical Feminism;
3. Marxist/Socialist Feminism;
4. Black Feminism.

These are the types of feminism that were acknowledged by the world, but the new types of feminism were developed later by researchers. There is one of the newly implemented notions related to feminism that is called cyberfeminism. The term was developed in 90's by Sadie Plant, and it defines the interaction between feminist concepts and ideas and the Internet (Mottet 7). Each of these types has its own concepts and features called for convincing an opponent in its credibility and faithful representation (Trueman). Despite striking differences in goals and subject matters of these types of feminism, there are five major concepts that are acknowledged by researchers.

They are:

- **Patriarchy.** This concept was seen as the main one, as the society of the XIX-XX centuries was acknowledged by the first wave of feminists as patriarchal, i.e. the one that was led by males. Males were dominant in the society, and sometimes such dominance took forms of female oppression for the sake of the expansion of male dominance.
- **Discrimination.** Unjust and uneven behavior of men towards women in the society. This concept determines that such injustice was imposed not only by laws but also by men.
- **Gender.** Some stereotypes and misconceptions related to women exist in the society. The most disappointing is the fact that mass media and educational systems followed and implemented them into their structure to form an acknowledged fact.
- **Economic Dependence.** Women are dependent on husbands in terms of money when it comes to taking care of children. Some of them become housewives for life following their husbands' demand to stay at home, take care of children and home.
- **Emotion-Based Work.** When women stay at home or combine their job and housework, they are expected to do a lot of emotional work while trying to take care of their beloved ones and career.

These five concepts partially reveal all major ideas of the feminist movement that are fought by females. However, they may be explained differently when it comes to discussing them at diverse social and political levels (Trueman). For example, one of the critical problems that exists up till today is gender-based harassment and violence imposed on women by men who often take roles of husbands, directors, senior managers, or supervisors, i.e. all those who consider themselves somewhat superior to women. Keeping with the topic, it is worth adding that women are stereotypically considered as inferior to males and some negative effects for women are to be expected. This often involves oppression and discrimination at work, home, as well as in everyday life and personal relationships (Mottet 4). Very often, we witness a situation when a woman lacks her personal and social freedom due to the well-known fact that a man is considered to be a breadwinner while women have to take care of the house. In previous years, it was rather difficult for women to realize themselves staying at home, but now you can become a billionaire without leaving a house. Technological progress opened a whole new world to women who are forced to stay at home for various reasons. One can quickly become famous by writing an autobiography or a women novel. Hughes (73) narrates that despite limitations, oppressions, and doubtful degree of personal freedom, women are free to choose who they want to become: artists, musicians, poets or writers, or designers.

Women decided to become feminists by choice, but that choice was a result of long and hard fighting, and new generations of feminists who decided to defend their rights should not forget about the price that was paid by feminists of the past to get what modern women enjoy on a daily basis.

Summing up the discussion, it is necessary to add that the virtual space may become of a great help in terms of attracting attention of the vast audience to a particular problem, expressing their opinion without being judged in public by people who disagree or do not understand support in the face of young girls and women who perfectly understand her (Scharff 22).

## **The Role of Men in the Feminist Movement**

Despite the fact that feminism is a purely female movement, the male part of the world not only observed how things developed, but also participated in the movement and actively promoted social and political freedoms that women deserved to have. However, it is worth adding that such male representatives were considered weird and even experienced a certain degree of oppression

and violence individually (Tarrant 27).

The history of feminism as a fight for racial and sexual equality has an extremely long history, as it began several thousand years ago. Women of ancient Greece, Rome, and Egypt, fought for their rights to participate in the social life at the same level with men, and some famous men supported them in the fight. Such men as Plato, John Stuart Mill, August Bebel and Friedrich Engels spoke in favor of the feminist movement and certain social, political, and sexual liberation from males. Many years before the first wave of feminist movement outburst, they spoke about such things as birth control, abortions, property ownership, and the right to participate in the political life of the society. Nevertheless, some facts prove that these men who supported feminist activities eventually got some privileges and became famous as philosophers and political critics, while others who supported the liberation movement at different paces of time were intellectuals, artists, social critics, poets, sport commentators, etc. who joined the fight for having the same views on the state of things in the United States as feminists did (Tarrant 37).

The involvement in feminism movement broadened minds of those men who supported it by demonstrating certain drawbacks of political systems at that time. Leaders of the first wave of feminism managed to persuade some white men in credibility of their demands, and such men as Wendell Phillips, Charles Redmond, and Robert Purvis (Okun 29). Notwithstanding the strong opposition to the idea of the right to vote alongside with men, a number of males joined the movement to promote equality of rights and freedoms and fight for ideas of better society. However, the majority of the masculine society who determine the fate of the world opposed to the ideas of equality, as they feared that the acknowledgment of female rights to be someone else than just an obedient wife and proud mother may turn the world upside down. And it did, as many more changes took place in societies and changed the attitude to women in these societies, and these changes paved the way for more political reforms and advancements that male leaders adopted to improve the status of women (Okun 45).

Women learned to question almost every legislative act, resolution, or law adopted or passed by men, as previous experience proved that sometimes a bit of sound criticism can really do some good. Gradually, along with the world development, men's participation in the life of their wives and colleagues increased tremendously, since the male part understood the need of involvement in the life of their better parts assists in self-realization and improves relationships between both sexes. Family psychologists proved that understanding women's needs and desires by men improved men-women interaction and helped males understand their mistakes.

However, it is unfortunate that today both men and women consider feminism as the antimale movement, and many original concepts and ideas are corrupted and deformed by mass media. It is necessary to acknowledge that the participation of men in the feminist movement assisted in promoting some feminist ideas among those men who considered it to be rebelling and irrelevant for the society.

The establishment of the feminist movement proves that a human being is born to be free, whether it is a physical, moral, social, political, or sexual freedom irrespective of the gender. Certainly, even today's society can be called patriarchal since men occupy the most of the world leading places. Nonetheless, there are historical facts that prove that a woman can also be an effective leader of a certain country, for example as Queen Elizabeth who ruled England for nearly fifty years, as well as many other famous personalities (Hanson).

Despite many achievements that feminists managed to gain, there are cases of injustice in the modern society that cannot be left without attention. For instance, Gillian Anderson, a famous actress of the supernatural X-Files series, was paid only a half of her male colleague sum. This resulted in the long and epic battle for equal treatment on the set. Gillian managed to get what she

demanded from the series directors, but the case reappeared soon after the series revival (Lion). The problem of equal wage is truly a crucial one, as many women suffer from underpayment on a daily basis, but this is only a tip of an iceberg. Such problems as domestic and sexual violence, oppression, sexual harassment still exist, and they need to be resolved for the sake of thousands of women who feel unwanted and lonely due to the violent treatment. The USA is the only developed country that has no paid maternity leave (Covington).

Finally, it is necessary to acknowledge that all gains of feminists helped women improve their status and the way men treat them in the society, but there is much more that needs to be done to resolve many burning issues for our children to live in a better world without fear and hatred.

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