
Original Research Article

Is Feminism Losing Its True Spirit?

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Abstract: Society needs a hierarchy to function properly. Some need to be at the top to handle the management, while others are subordinate to them. But this hierarchy shall be based on merit and competence, rather than superstitious beliefs. Women have been looked down upon by society for centuries, labeled as passive citizens, dependent on men for their well-being. They were denied the right to education, pursue an occupation, and have an independent presence separate from any men. When women finally got the minimum right to education and occupation, they were not educated beyond basic 8th or 12th grade, not allowed to hold big jobs and could only do petty chores like knitting, sewing, doing laundry, domestic helping, and other basic, low-pay jobs, and they couldn't earn more than their husbands. Their jobs were never acknowledged and were still passively resented by the family. Their primary duty was to raise babies and manage the household. In marriage discussions, a primary demand of the groom's family used to be that the girl stop studying and leave her job to get married. Having a girl child was considered taboo, and so came female feticide and dowry practices. No one acknowledges the fact that managing the household 24/7 without any holiday, keeping up to everyone's individual needs, requirements and expectations, is far more demanding than a 9-to-5 job in an AC office. This article aims to study what feminism is, its types, its evolution through the years and know about some of the most prominent names in the movement.

Keywords: Feminism, Feminist Waves, Gender Equality, Feminist Theory, Social Justice

Introduction

Feminism is a movement that has been going on since the 19th century (Cott, 1987; Offen, 1988; Tong & Botts, 2018). It seeks to attain gender equality on grounds of the right to pursue occupation, study, having a separate identity, and freedom of women from their obsolete gender roles (Wollstonecraft, 1792/1995; Mill, 1869/1988; Hooks, 2000; Tong & Botts, 2018).

The need for feminism is highlighted in the suppression of women by society going on for centuries, and the recent wave of backlash where women's unjustifiable acts are being labeled "feminism". The true spirit of feminism is in attaining equality. If women have the right to pursue an occupation, men should have the right to stay home. If women have the right to abortion, men should have the right to refuse the responsibility of the child. The system can only work if both wheels are equal. If everything is at the privilege of one gender while the other is overloaded with responsibilities and expectations, it's simply an unfair system that is sure to collapse.

Waves of Feminism

First wave- 1848-1950: Legal Rights

The first wave of feminism was defined by the struggle for women's legal and civic rights (Cott, 1987; Offen, 1988). Its central focus was suffrage, property ownership, access to education, and recognition as equal citizens under the law (Cott, 1987; Mill, 1869/1988). This wave established the principle that women must be included in democratic participation and laid the foundation for all later feminist movements by proving that equality begins with legal recognition and political voice (Cott, 1987; Tong & Botts, 2018).

Mary Wollstonecraft, who is universally regarded and recognized as the intellectual mother of modern feminism (Wollstonecraft, 1792/1995; Todd, 2000), is known for her well-known 1792 treatise "*A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*" (Wollstonecraft, 1792/1995), which laid the philosophical foundation for women's equality (Wollstonecraft, 1792/1995; Tong & Botts, 2018). She argued that women were not naturally inferior to men but had been denied education and opportunities, which kept them subordinate (Wollstonecraft, 1792/1995). By insisting that women deserved rational education and civic participation (Wollstonecraft, 1792/1995; Mill, 1869/1988), she challenged the patriarchal structures (Tong & Botts, 2018) of her time and provided the ideological basis for the suffrage (Cott, 1987) and legal rights movements that defined the first wave.

Her work ensured that feminism began as a demand for recognition of women as full citizens, making her the most prominent figure of the first wave (Tong & Botts, 2018) of this movement.

Second wave-1960s–1980s: Social, cultural, and economic equality

The second wave emphasized reproductive rights (Friedan, 1963; Beauvoir, 1949/2011; Tong & Botts, 2018), workplace equality, dismantling patriarchal family structures, and the idea that "the personal is political" (Hanisch, 1970). This wave transformed feminism into a movement that demanded systemic change in institutions and cultural norms, ensuring that women's liberation was not limited to voting but extended to everyday life, relationships, and opportunities, making equality a lived reality rather than just a legal principle (Tong & Botts, 2018).

Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* (1949) became the defining text (Beauvoir, 1949/2011) of second-wave feminism, transforming the movement from a legal struggle into a philosophical and cultural revolution. She exposed how society constructs women as

“the Other” (Beauvoir, 1949/2011), declaring that “One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman” (Beauvoir, 1949/2011, p. 283). This existentialist insight reframed gender (Beauvoir, 1949/2011; Butler, 1990) as a social construct rather than a biological destiny, inspiring campaigns (Tong & Botts, 2018) for reproductive rights, workplace equality, and liberation from patriarchal family structures. Her work gave second-wave feminism its intellectual backbone, ensuring that the movement addressed not only laws but also the deep cultural norms that shaped women’s lives. Beauvoir’s influence was global, making her the single most prominent thinker (Tong & Botts, 2018) of this wave.

Third wave-1990s–2000s: queer feminism

The third wave rejected a singular feminist identity and embraced diversity, individuality, and intersectionality (Walker, 1992; Butler, 1990; Crenshaw, 1989; Tong & Botts, 2018). It critiqued earlier waves for sidelining race, sexuality, and class (Crenshaw, 1989; Collins, 2000; Mohanty, 1988), and instead emphasized inclusivity, body positivity, queer theory, and recognition of overlapping forms of oppression (Butler, 1990; Crenshaw, 1989; Jagose, 1996). This wave reshaped feminism into a plural, flexible movement (Tong & Botts, 2018; Butler, 1990) that acknowledged the complexity of identity, celebrated difference, and insisted that liberation must address all dimensions of discrimination simultaneously.

Judith Butler’s *Gender Trouble* (1990) defined third-wave feminism (Butler, 1990) by introducing the radical theory of gender performativity, the idea that gender is not innate but continuously enacted (Butler, 1990) through social behavior and cultural repetition. This dismantled essentialist notions of identity (Butler, 1990; Scott, 1988) and opened feminism to queer theory (Jagose, 1996; Butler, 1990), intersectionality, and a recognition of diverse experiences across race, sexuality, and class (Crenshaw, 1989; Collins, 2000). Butler’s philosophy reshaped feminism into a plural, flexible movement that celebrated difference (Mohanty, 1988; Butler, 1990) and insisted that liberation must address overlapping forms of oppression. By challenging the very categories of “woman” and “man,” Butler ensured that third-wave feminism was intellectually expansive and inclusive, making her the era’s most prominent and transformative figure (Tong & Botts, 2018).

Fourth wave-2010s–present: Digital activism

The fourth wave is characterized by digital activism, accountability, and global solidarity against gender-based violence (Munro, 2013; Cochrane, 2013). Social media campaigns such as #MeToo amplified marginalized voices (Burke, 2021; Mendes, Ringrose, & Keller, 2018), exposed harassment (Burke, 2021), and demanded transparency across institutions (Mendes et al., 2018). This wave transformed feminism into a networked, global movement (Munro, 2013; Cochrane, 2013) that prioritizes inclusivity, survivor empowerment, and structural justice, making it both the most accessible and far-reaching phase of feminist activism (Munro, 2013) and ensuring that feminism remains relevant in the digital age (Mendes et al., 2018).

Tarana Burke, founder of the *Me-Too* movement in 2006 (Burke, 2021), became the defining voice of fourth-wave feminism by centering survivors of sexual violence and demanding accountability across institutions. When the movement went global in 2017 (Burke, 2021; Mendes et al., 2018), it transformed digital activism (Munro, 2013; Burke, 2021) into a powerful tool against harassment, amplifying marginalized voices (Burke, 2021) and sparking a worldwide reckoning on gendered power dynamics (Burke, 2021; Mendes et al., 2018). Burke's work ensured that feminism in the digital age was not only about inclusivity and intersectionality but also about structural justice (Burke, 2021), transparency, and survivor empowerment. By turning social media into a platform for solidarity and systemic change, she embodied the essence of fourth-wave feminism (Munro, 2013), making her its most prominent leader.

Types of feminism

Liberal feminism

Liberal feminism is rooted in Enlightenment ideals of individual rights and equality before the law (Wollstonecraft, 1792/1995; Mill, 1869/1988; Tong & Botts, 2018). It holds that women's oppression arises from their exclusion (Tong & Botts, 2018) from political, legal, and civil rights, and therefore seek reform through existing democratic institutions (Mill, 1869/1988). Its complete focus is on suffrage (Wollstonecraft, 1792/1995; Mill, 1869/1988), equal pay (Friedan, 1963), reproductive rights (Beauvoir, 1949/2011), workplace equality (Friedan, 1963), and access to education (Wollstonecraft, 1792/1995), achieved by changing laws (Mill, 1869/1988) and policies rather than dismantling systems. By insisting that women must be recognized as equal citizens (Mill, 1869/1988; Tong & Botts, 2018), liberal feminism established the foundation of modern feminist movements, making it the definitive form of reformist feminism.

Mary Wollstonecraft stands as the definitive figure of liberal feminism because her 1792 work *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* established the principle that women are rational beings entitled to the same rights as men. She argued that exclusion from education and civic participation was the root of women's subordination, and her philosophy directly inspired later struggles for suffrage, property rights, and workplace equality. Wollstonecraft's insistence on reforming laws and institutions to integrate women as equal citizens makes her the most prominent embodiment of liberal feminist thought (Wollstonecraft, 1792/1995; Tong & Botts, 2018)

Radical Feminism

Radical feminism identifies patriarchy itself as the root of women's oppression (Firestone, 1970; Millett, 1970; MacKinnon, 1989; Tong & Botts, 2018). It argues that male dominance permeates every social structure, family, sexuality, religion, and culture, and therefore cannot be corrected by reform but must be dismantled entirely (Firestone, 1970; Millett, 1970; MacKinnon, 1989). Its defining principle, "the personal is political" (Carol Hanisch, 1970), links private experiences such as marriage, sexuality, and domestic labor to systemic oppression (Hanisch, 1970; Millett, 1970), making women's everyday lives

central to political struggle (Hanisch, 1970; Tong & Botts, 2018). Radical feminism is complete in its vision (Tong & Botts, 2018): it demands reproductive freedom (Firestone, 1970), critiques sexual violence and pornography (MacKinnon, 1989; Dworkin, 1987), and advocates for women-centered spaces (Tong & Botts, 2018), positioning itself as the uncompromising form of feminist resistance against patriarchy (Tong & Botts, 2018).

Shulamith Firestone is the defining voice of radical feminism (Firestone, 1970), most famously through her book *The Dialectic of Sex* (1970) (Firestone, 1970). She argued that patriarchy is the fundamental system of oppression (Firestone, 1970), rooted in biological reproduction (Firestone, 1970) and family structures, and that true liberation requires dismantling these institutions entirely (Firestone, 1970). Firestone linked private experiences such as sexuality, motherhood, and domestic labor (Firestone, 1970) to systemic oppression, embodying the radical feminist slogan “the personal is political.” (Hanisch, 1970; Firestone, 1970) Her uncompromising critique of patriarchy and vision of a society free from gendered power dynamics make her the single most prominent radical feminist (Tong & Botts, 2018).

Marxist Feminism

Marxist feminism connects women’s oppression directly to class exploitation under capitalism (Engels, 1884/1972; Kollontai, 1920/1977; Hartmann, 1979; Tong & Botts, 2018). It argues that gender inequality cannot be separated from economic inequality (Engels, 1884/1972; Hartmann, 1979), since women’s unpaid domestic labor (Federici, 1975; Engels, 1884/1972) and wage discrimination (Hartmann, 1979) are essential to capitalist exploitation (Engels, 1884/1972; Hartmann, 1979). Its complete agenda (Tong & Botts, 2018) is to restructure economic systems, recognize domestic labor (Federici, 1975) as socially valuable, and eliminate both class and gender oppression through collective ownership (Engels, 1884/1972) and redistribution of resources. By tying feminism to broader socialist struggles, Marxist feminism provides a comprehensive framework for liberation, making it the definitive form of class-based feminist theory (Tong & Botts, 2018).

Alexandra Kollontai, a Russian revolutionary and theorist, is the most prominent figure of Marxist feminism because she directly connected women’s oppression to capitalist exploitation. As a Bolshevik leader, she argued that women’s unpaid domestic labor and economic dependence were central to class inequality, and she championed communal childcare, socialized domestic work, and workplace equality. Kollontai’s vision of restructuring economic systems to eliminate both class and gender oppression made her the definitive representative of Marxist/socialist feminism, ensuring that feminist liberation was inseparable from socialist revolution (Kollontai, 1920/1977; Tong & Botts, 2018)

Cultural Feminism

Cultural feminism celebrates women’s differences from men (Gilligan, 1982; Tong & Botts, 2018) and insists that traits associated with women, empathy, cooperation (Gilligan, 1982), nurturing, and nonviolence, should be valued rather than suppressed

(Gilligan, 1982). It advocates for women-centered spaces (Tong & Botts, 2018), recognition of female creativity (Rich, 1976), and elevation of women's cultural contributions as alternatives to male-dominated values (Gilligan, 1982). Its complete message (Tong & Botts, 2018) is that women's distinctiveness (Gilligan, 1982) is not a weakness but a strength that can reshape society (Gilligan, 1982). While sometimes critiqued for essentializing female traits, cultural feminism remains the definitive form of feminist thought (Tong & Botts, 2018) that affirms and honors women's unique qualities.

Carol Gilligan is the most prominent figure of cultural feminism, best known for her book *In a Different Voice* (1982) (Gilligan, 1982). She argued that women's moral reasoning (Gilligan, 1982), often centered on care, empathy (Gilligan, 1982), and relationships, was distinct from men's justice-based reasoning (Gilligan, 1982) and should be valued rather than dismissed. Gilligan's work celebrated women's differences (Gilligan, 1982) as strengths (Gilligan, 1982), affirming that female traits could reshape society in positive ways. By elevating women's cultural contributions and insisting on their recognition, Gilligan became the definitive voice (Tong & Botts, 2018) of cultural feminism.

Societal feminism

Societal feminism envisions a holistic transformation of society to eliminate systemic inequalities (Gilman, 1898/1998; Fraser, 2013; Tong & Botts, 2018). It sees oppression as multi-layered (Fraser, 2013; Collins, 2000; Crenshaw, 1989) involving law, economy, culture, and social norms, and therefore advocates for collective social change (Gilman, 1898/1998) rather than individual reform. Its complete vision is to restructure institutions (Fraser, 2013), redistribute power, and embed equality (Nussbaum, 2000) into every dimension of life, ensuring that liberation is not partial but total. By addressing both structural and cultural aspects of oppression, societal feminism stands as the definitive form (Tong & Botts, 2018) of feminism that seeks comprehensive social transformation.

Charlotte Perkins Gilman, author of *Women and Economics* (1898), is the most prominent figure of societal feminism because she envisioned a complete transformation of society to eliminate systemic inequalities. She argued that women's economic dependence on men was the root of oppression and advocated for restructuring family, work, and social institutions to embed equality at every level. Gilman's holistic vision of collective social change, combining economic, cultural, and legal reforms, makes her the definitive representative of societal feminism (Gilman, 1898/1998; Tong & Botts, 2018)

Postmodern Feminism

Postmodern feminism rejects universal definitions of "womanhood" and challenges fixed categories of identity (Butler, 1990; Nicholson, 1990; Scott, 1988; Tong & Botts, 2018). Influenced by poststructuralist philosophy, it emphasizes that gender, sexuality, and identity are fluid, socially constructed, and context-dependent (Butler, 1990; Foucault, 1978; Nicholson, 1990). Its complete framework critiques essentialist feminism for assuming a single female experience (Butler, 1990; Nicholson, 1990; Mohanty, 1988),

instead highlighting intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1989; Collins, 2000) and the multiplicity of women's lives across race, class, sexuality, and culture (Crenshaw, 1989; Collins, 2000; Mohanty, 1988). By deconstructing categories and insisting on pluralism (Butler, 1990), postmodern feminism ensures that feminism remains intellectually expansive and inclusive, making it the definitive form of identity-based feminist theory (Tong & Botts, 2018).

Judith Butler is the most prominent figure of postmodern feminism (Butler, 1990), most notably through her book *Gender Trouble* (1990) (Butler, 1990). She introduced the theory of gender performativity (Butler, 1990), arguing that gender is not innate (Butler, 1990) but enacted through repeated social behaviors (Butler, 1990), thereby dismantling fixed categories of identity. Butler's philosophy rejected essentialist feminism (Butler, 1990) and embraced intersectionality (Butler, 1990; Crenshaw, 1989), queer theory (Jagose, 1996), and fluidity of identity (Butler, 1990), ensuring that feminism became plural and inclusive (Tong & Botts, 2018). Her intellectual influence makes her the definitive representative of postmodern feminism.

Queer Feminism

Queer Feminism integrates feminist thought with LGBTQ+ perspectives, dismantling both patriarchy and heteronormativity (Butler, 1990; Jagose, 1996; Warner, 1993). It emerged prominently during the third wave of feminism (Walker, 1992; Jagose, 1996), influenced by postmodern and intersectional approaches (Butler, 1990; Crenshaw, 1989) and insists that liberation cannot be achieved by treating "women" as a single, universal category (Butler, 1990). Instead, it recognizes that gender and sexuality are fluid (Butler, 1990), socially constructed, and context-dependent, and that oppression varies across race, class, sexuality, and culture (Crenshaw, 1989; Collins, 2000). Queer feminism critiques earlier feminist movements (Jagose, 1996; Butler, 1990) for sidelining lesbian, bisexual, and transgender voices (Jagose, 1996) and expands feminism into a broader struggle against all identity-based marginalization (Butler, 1990; Collins, 2000). It dismantles binary notions (Butler, 1990) of male and female and heterosexual and homosexual, exposing how rigid categories themselves function as tools of oppression (Butler, 1990). Its activism embraces inclusivity, body positivity (Gill, 2007), sexual freedom (Rubin, 1984), and trans rights (Stryker, 2008), while its intellectual contribution reshaped feminism into a plural, intersectional movement (Crenshaw, 1989; Butler, 1990) that fully incorporates LGBTQ+ struggles (Jagose, 1996). The complete message of queer feminism is that true equality requires dismantling (Butler, 1990) both patriarchal hierarchies and heteronormative structures, ensuring feminism is inclusive of all identities and experiences (Collins, 2000; Crenshaw, 1989), leaving no dimension of oppression unaddressed.

Judith Butler is the most prominent personality of queer feminism, whose work completely reshaped feminist and LGBTQ+ theory by dismantling fixed categories of gender and sexuality. In her groundbreaking book *Gender Trouble* (1990), Butler introduced the concept of *gender performativity*, arguing that gender is not innate but continuously enacted through repeated social behaviors and cultural norms. This insight

exposed how rigid binaries of male/female and heterosexual/homosexual are themselves tools of oppression, and it opened feminism to queer theory (Jagose, 1996), intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1989), and fluid understandings of identity. Butler's contribution made queer feminism intellectually complete: it rejected essentialist notions of "womanhood," insisted that liberation must include lesbian, bisexual, transgender, and queer voices, and expanded feminism into a plural, inclusive movement that addresses all forms of identity-based marginalization. By bridging feminist thought with LGBTQ+ activism (Jagose, 1996; Warner, 1993), Butler ensured that queer feminism became the definitive framework (Tong & Botts, 2018) for deconstructing oppressive structures and embracing the full spectrum of human identities, leaving no dimension of oppression unaddressed (Butler, 1990).

Pseudo Feminism

Pseudo Feminism is a corrupt, hypocritical system where women exploit sympathy and legal privilege while evading accountability: they weaponize false accusations of abuse, harassment, or rape to blackmail and harass men simply because the law permits. They oppose dowry but demand alimony and child support. The court may deny a DNA test to prove non-paternity (Ashok Kumar v. Raj Gupta, 2022). In some cases, they use child support as leverage without ensuring the child's welfare and enjoy reproductive autonomy through abortion, while a corresponding legal mechanism for men to opt out of fatherhood seems to be missing; when a man commits the slightest of an offence, he is publicly called out and condemned, while women are framed as victims, shielded by law and social bias whenever they commit any offence against men. This isn't what feminism was meant to be. This is selective empowerment, where men are biasedly cornered, and women misuse legal and social protections without consequence.

Ideal Feminism

Ideal Feminism is a utopian concept, where rights and responsibilities are shared fairly between men and women, and justice is balanced, child-centric, and gender-neutral: women's bodily autonomy and protection from abuse coexist with men's right to fairness in divorce, custody, and reproductive responsibility; false allegations are condemned with strict accountability, DNA evidence is recognized in paternity disputes, and emotional, financial, and domestic contributions are valued equally regardless of gender; no one is destroyed by bias, and dignity, compassion, and responsibility apply to all. It's not about women dominating or men suffering, but about a just equilibrium where hypocrisy is eliminated, and equality is complete, leaving no scope for exploitation, imbalance, or doubt.

Conclusion

Feminism, at its core, is the pursuit of equality, justice, and dignity between men and women, ensuring that rights and responsibilities are shared fairly without any bias or hypocrisy.

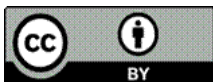
Yet, alongside genuine progress, pseudo feminism has emerged as a distortion, where sympathy and legal privilege are exploited, false accusations weaponized, and accountability evaded, leaving men destroyed emotionally, financially, and socially, and women shielded by law and social bias. This imbalance undermines the true spirit of feminism, which was never meant to be selective empowerment but a balanced system of justice. Ideal feminism, therefore, is not about women dominating over men or men suffering because of women's arbitrary standards and expectations, but about a just equilibrium where hypocrisy is eliminated, equality is complete, and no one is destroyed due to gender bias. In this holistic framework, feminism becomes the philosophy of shared humanity, ensuring that both genders stand as equal partners in rights, duties, and opportunities, leaving no scope for exploitation, imbalance, or doubt, and fulfilling the promise of justice that society requires to function fairly and sustainably.

Women's bodily autonomy and protection from abuse, for instance, should coexist with men's right to fairness in divorce, custody, and reproductive responsibility; false allegations by and against anyone should be condemned, and contributions of both genders must be valued equally regardless of gender, where dignity, compassion, and accountability apply to all.

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