

# Feminist Theories & Practices

## What is Feminism?

- Feminism is a social movement and ideology that fights for the Political, economic and social rights for women.
- Feminist believe that men and women are equal, and women deserve the same rights as men in society.
- The feminist movements / campaigns initiated by number of feminist in order to raise voice against women related issues and also suggested way forward to address these issues in different time period.

## a. Liberal Feminism:

- Is a prominent branch of feminism that aims to advocate for women's legal and political rights.
- It focuses on the principle of liberty, autonomy and individualistic character of women and blames



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institutional constraints for gender inequality.

- The ideas of liberal feminism are rooted in liberalism, that encourages the development of freedom.
- It emphasizes the rights of the individual women and aims to grant access to equal rights and representation through legislation.
- Liberal feminists have fought for women's right to vote, to work, to an education, and to have equal pay.

### Liberal Feminist Thinkers:

- ① Mary Wollstonecraft
- ② John Stuart Mill
- ③ Harriet Taylor (Mill)

### Movements:

Women's Suffrage movement in the US.

### Historical Background of Liberal Feminism:

- Liberal feminism draws its roots from 1<sup>st</sup> wave of feminism back in 1820 when Mary Wollstonecraft



wrote the first feminist masterpiece, "A Vindication of Rights of Woman" (1792). Liberal feminism emerged in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> Century.

This was a period of great social change in western countries alongside the rise of Capitalism.

### i. Mary Wollstonecraft:

- Early feminist scholars drew inspiration from Mary, especially from her notable writing of "A vindication of the Rights of Women", Published in 1792.
- She was a passionate advocate of educational and social equality for women.
- She insisted women make independent decisions and need to be educated just as well as men.

### ii. John Stuart Mill:

- After a century of Mary, John Stuart Mill defended the civic and legal equality of women and their right to vote in his essay titled "On the Subjection of Women".



Published in 1869.

- He argued that women's social and political equality was rooted in liberal principles.

### iii. First Wave of Feminism:

- There was a 'gradual' rise of the liberal feminist movement over time, but the first major advancements in gender equality did not happen until the first wave of feminism hit the 20<sup>th</sup> century in the west.
- The women's suffrage movement fought for the right for women to vote.

### iv. Second Wave of Feminism:

- Second wave of feminism took off in the 1960s, a period marked by the civil rights movements.
- Liberal feminists now demanded the right to equal pay.
- The equal pay Act of 1963 was introduced.
- The Civil Rights Act of 1964 was amended to prevent employers from discriminating on the basis of sex.



## The Principles of Liberal Feminism:

Liberal feminists, better known as egalitarian feminists, believe that women are intellectually capable enough to maintain equality through their actions and choices.

## The Principle of Individualism:

Liberal feminism is individualistic rather than group based.

This means that the rights are granted to individual women who are assumed to be equal and thus equally deserving, rather than granting rights to a whole group.

## The Concept of Sexism:

Liberal feminists are thought to have popularized the concept of 'sexism' to refer to ideas and social practices that keep women in a subordinate role.

They believe that sexism is rooted in the idea of biological determinism.

Sexism, liberal feminists believe, is the fundamental cause of discrimination against women.



### iii. Reforming the System: Institutional Constraints as the root cause of inequality

- Liberal feminists do not necessarily question the system of society as a whole, but, instead, believe in its capacity to reform.
- They believe that gender justice is best achieved by modifying existing social institutions and political systems.
- They rely on the state to gain equality and support affirmative action and legislation which grants equal rights and opportunities to both men and women.

### iv. Equality in Women's Representation:

- They believe that women have the right to be as active in society as men, and thus be equally represented in the workplace, politics, and in the media.
- This means that they would want to be equally represented in higher career positions, political role, and in film and television.



## Equal Possession of Reason and Rationality by men and Women:

- Liberal feminists do not see biological differences as justification for inequalities b/w the sexes.
- Their main Principle is for women to be treated as equals to men.
- This includes having the same social, political, and property rights.

## The Goals of Liberal Feminism:

- The goal of liberal feminism is to achieve gender equality in the public sphere through legal changes.
- Susan B. Anthony said that: "Men, their rights, and nothing more; Women, their rights, and nothing less."

## i. Equality in the Public Sphere:

- Their primary goal is gender equality in the public sphere.
- Includes equal access to education, equal pay, ending job sex segregation.
- Early liberal feminists sought to gain the right to vote and education for women.
- Modern liberal feminists aim to secure



equal social, political, and economic opportunities, equal civil liberties, and sexual freedoms.

## ii. Equality in the Private Sphere:

- They also suggest that gender equality should be present in the home as well as in public life.
- They tend to support marriage as long as it is an equal partnership, in which men and women share the household chores, cooking, house management, and child care as equally as possible.
- They also believe that ending domestic violence and sexual harassment removes obstacles to women achieving on an equal level with men.

## iii. To achieve Equality through Affirmative Action:

- The goal of liberal feminism is to achieve equality through affirmative action policies.
- Includes equal rights amendments, including reproductive rights to equal wages, the right to affordable education and healthcare, and protection against workplace harassment and domestic violence.



## Famous Liberal Feminism Organization:

National Organization For Women

National Women's Political Caucus (related to Political Participation of Women)

Women's Equity Action League

All Pakistan Women Association (APWA)

## Famous Liberal Feminists:

Susan B Anthony (The trial of Susan B Anthony).

Stuart Mill (Subjugation of Women)

Naomi Wolf (Vagina: A New Biography)

Mary Wollstonecraft (A Vindication of Rights of Women).

## Examples of Liberal Feminism

### Today:

Since Liberal Feminism was traditionally focused on legal equality, it could be considered almost fully achieved in some Western countries.

### In The Family:

Feminists are critical of the family as a social institutions.

They believe that the family is a tool of female oppression.



- Liberal feminists argue that families are slowly becoming more equal through changes in law and social attitudes.
- For example, they show how parents are now socializing their children in more gender-neutral ways.

## ii. In the Workplace:

- While there may be more equality in the number of women in the workplace, liberal feminists argue that there are inequalities within.
- Typically, women are over-represented in positions which are traditionally 'feminine' roles such as nursing, teaching, and social care.
- There is still a gender wage gap in many countries where women earn less than a man for the same job.
- Liberal feminists would like to see more women in a position of CEOs, vice-presidents and directors.

## iii - In Politics:

- While there may now be more women involved in politics, there is still an



under-representation in the number of women in political roles.

- ~~Patriarchy~~ Particularly, men still dominate political leadership such as in USA where there has never been a female president; or in the UK where there is only been two female Prime Ministers.
- Liberal feminists would suggest that having more women in positions of power would trigger positive changes to make their views understood.

#### IV. In the Media:

- In film and television, female characters are under-represented or play a smaller role with fewer speaking parts.
- The Bechdel test aims to examine the presence of women in film and highlights the sexism that persists.
- Liberal feminists suggests that having more female directors would allow for more female actors and less female stereotypical characters.



## Strengths of Liberal Feminism:

- ① It is relatively popular branch of feminism.
- ② The goals are ones that support a lot of public opinion.
- ③ It is easy for most people to support equal rights for both men and women to vote and work.
- ④ The major victory of liberal feminists are rarely questioned, i.e. not many would suggest that the vote should be taken away from women.
- ⑤ It helped to bring forward legislature which helps to protect more women.
- ⑥ They cannot be discriminated against on the basis of their sex in the workplace, they have more rights, and they can own property.
- ⑦ Liberal feminism extends its principles into the private sphere so as to protect more women from the forms of oppression specific to this sphere.



## Criticism of other Schools of Thought on Liberal Feminism:

Liberal feminism does not come without criticism from other feminist schools of thought.

## Criticism of Radical Feminism on Liberal Feminism:

Not breaking down the deeper ideologies of society and patriarchy:

Radical feminism believes that liberal feminists want autonomy and liberty, but they acknowledged the fact of a patriarchal society.

They demand the right to vote or reproduce but from a patriarchal state.

## Liberal Feminism as a White Feminism:

It lacks the debate on the rights of coloured women.

Owing to this, a theory of intersectionality is proved as a great hindrance on the way to the liberalist school of thought.

Much of the work of liberal feminism has been carried by white privileged women whose fight has mainly been



for other white women.

## b. Criticism of Marxist Feminism on Liberal Feminism:

### i. Not addressed Power relations:

- Marxist feminism criticizes liberal feminists for not considering power relations and failing to term men as oppressors.

### ii. Ignore the systemic discrimination:

- Liberal feminism does not really consider the root cause of gender inequality.
- Marxist feminists argue that liberal feminists ignore the systemic discrimination that women's oppression coming from the patriarchy and capitalism.

### iii. Blame institutional & legal constraints:

- Liberal feminists blame institutional and legal constraints as one cause of gender inequality.
- The truth is that institutional or legal reforms regarding women are only limited to papers & lack proper implementation in true spirit.

## Conclusion:

- Sexual equality cannot be achieved through



- individual women's will power alone.
- Sexual oppression and social system that perpetuate oppression are morally evil.
- Sexism causes immeasurable harm to women.
- Women owe to liberal feminists many of the civil, educational, occupational and reproductive rights that currently enjoy.
- They owe to liberal feminist the ability to write increasingly at ease in public domain.

### References

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## Radical Feminism:

Radical feminism is a movement that believes patriarchy is the root cause of gender inequality and seeks to fundamentally restructure society to eliminate it.

Radical feminism seeks to dismantle the traditional patriarchal power and gender roles that keep women oppressed.

They believe that the cause of gender inequality is based on men's need or desire to control women.

They aim to address the root cause of oppression through systemic change and activism.

It is argued by some to be the only theory by and for women (Rowland & Klein, 1996).

## The History of Radical Feminism:

Radical feminism mainly developed during the second wave of feminism from the 1960 onwards in primarily western countries.

It is influenced by left-wing social



movements such as the civil rights movement.

- It is constructed in opposition to other feminist movements such as;

### i. Liberal Feminism:

- It only demanded equal rights within the system of society and is criticized for not going far enough to make equal and actual change.

### ii. Marxist Feminism:

- Confined itself to an economic analysis of women's oppression and believes that women's liberation comes from abolishing capitalism.

### iii. Radical Feminism as a Movement:

- As a movement is thought to have emerged in 1968 as a response to deeper understandings of women's oppression (Atkinson, 2014)

### Famous Radical Feminists:

- ① Simone de Beauvoir (The Second Sex).
- ② Kate Millet (Sexual Politics)
- ③ Catherine Macleinnon (Towards a Feminist Theory of State).



④ Andrea Dworkin

⑤ Mary Daly

⑥ Jill Johnston

## Organizations of Radical Feminism:

① Redstockings

② New York Radical Feminists

③ Radical Women

## Movement:

Women's Liberation movement.

## Principles of Radical Feminism:

### i. Patriarchal Institutions:

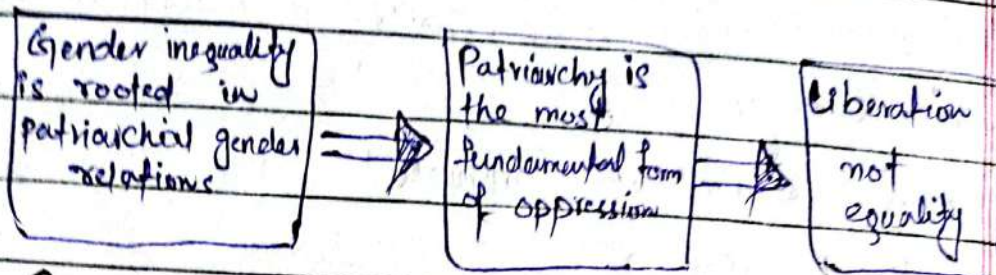
- Radical feminists believe that there are existing political, social and other institutions that are inherently tied to the patriarchy.

- This can include government laws and legislature (restricts <sup>what</sup> women can do with their bodies), and the church (restricted women to the maternal role, reject the idea of non-reproductive sexuality).

- Traditional marriage is also defined as a patriarchal institution according to radical feminists since it makes women part of men's private property.



- Even today, marriage can be seen as an institution perpetuating inequalities through unpaid domestic work.



## ii. Control over Women's Bodies:

- According to radical feminists, Patriarchal systems attempt to gain control over women's body.
- Patriarchal institutions control the laws of reproduction where they determine whether women have the right to an abortion and contraception.
- Thus, women have less autonomy over their own bodies.
- Kathleen Barry stated in her book *Female Sexual Slavery* (1978) that women in marriage are seen to be 'owned' by <sup>their</sup> husband.

## iii. Views on Pornography: Women are objectified:

- Radical feminists believed that pornography is one way of objectifying women by men.



It is a form of slavery & highly abusive in nature. Women are also brutalized in the process of reproduction through such acts.

"Pornography and women's equality are incompatible." (Andrea Dworkin)

Pornography contributes to sexism.

Robin Morgan summarizes, "Pornography is the theory, and rape is the practice."

### Violence against Women: Prostitution:

Radical feminists believe that men force women in prostitution and they do not choose that profession by choice.

They believe that violence is a way for men to gain control, dominate, and perpetuate women's subordination.

They claim there is a rape culture that is enabled and encouraged by a patriarchal society.

Catherine MacKinnon stated that: "If prostitution is a free choice, why are women with the fewest choices the ones most by found doing it."

### Discrimination against Women:

They highlighted discrimination against



women on the basis of beauty.

- They said that the standards of beauty for a woman are defined by patriarchal notions of attractiveness.
- The advertisement and media industry led by men presents women as beautification objects and commodities to the world.
- Simon De Beauvoir said that: "what would Prince Charming have for occupation if he had not awake Sleeping Beauty."

#### vi. Transgender Disagreement:

- There is a disagreement about transgender identity in the radical feminist community.
- Some radical feminists support the rights of transgender people, some are against the existence of transgender individuals, especially transgender women.
- Trans Exclusionary Radical Feminists (TERF) are members of the radical feminist community who do not acknowledge that transgender women are real women and often want to exclude them from 'women-only' groups.



# The Goals of Radical Feminism:

## Structural Change:

- Radical feminists aim to dismantle the entire system of patriarchy, rather than adjust the existing system through legal or social efforts, which they claim does not go far enough.
- They desire this structural change ~~issue~~ since they argue that women's oppression is systemic.
- They believe that institutions such as government and religion are centered in patriarchal power.
- They criticize motherhood, marriage, the nuclear family, and sexuality, the culture on patriarchal assumptions.

## ii. Bodily Autonomy:

- Radical feminists emphasize the theme of the body, specifically on the reappropriation of the body by women & on the freedom of choice.
- They have argued for reproductive rights for women which would give them



the freedom to make choices about whether they want to give birth.

- This also includes having access to safe abortions, birth control, and getting sterilized if this is what a woman wants to do.

### iii. End violence against women:

- Radical feminists aim to shed light on the disproportionate amount of violence that women face at the hands of men.
- They argue that rape and sexual abuse are an expression of patriarchal power and must be stopped.
- They believe that sex work falls under the patriarchal oppression of women.

### iv. Women-centered strategies:

- A main part of radical feminism is that they want strategies to be put in place to help women.
- Include the creation of shelters for abused women and better sex education.
- Many radical feminists strive for establishing women-centered social institutions and women only organizations.



- They may be against having gender neutral public bathrooms as this increase women's risks of being abused by a man.

## Strengths of Radical Feminism:

### i. Dismantle the roots of Women's Oppression:

- It seeks to understand and dismantle the roots of women's oppression.
- It highlights all the issues which are the root cause of women's oppression.

### Stronger than Liberal Feminism:

- It is considered stronger than liberal feminism.
- Liberal feminism only seeks to make changes within the already established system, which is considered not enough to make actual change.

### Many advances during 2<sup>nd</sup> Wave of Feminism:

- Radical feminism has also been responsible for many of the advances made during the second wave of feminism.
- This is particularly true when it comes to women's choice over their bodies



and violence against women.

#### iv. Opposed violence against Women:

- Due to activism of radical feminists, sexual violence such as rape and domestic violence are now considered crimes in most western countries.
- It has also been recognised that violence against women is not a series of isolated cases, but rather a societal phenomenon.

#### v. Socio-economic Equality:

- Radical feminism is successful in breaking down barriers in public & private affairs.
- It helped women to enjoy equality in socio, economic and political spheres particularly in USA.

### Criticism on Radical Feminism:

#### i. Separatism of Women:

- The biggest criticism is that men's feminism believe that both men & women collectively can overcome patriarchy-related issues rather than adopting the separatism of women.



## i. Criticism on TERFs of Radical Feminism:

- A prominent criticism is the transphobia associated with Trans Exclusive Radical Feminists.
- It is not only transphobic but is part of a wider movement which encompasses its feminists stance to partner with Conservatives.

## ii. Lacking an Intersectional Lens:

- It views gender as the most important axis of oppression and sees women as a homogenous group collectively oppressed by men.
- It does not always take into consideration the different experiences of oppression suffered by women with disabilities, women of color, or migrant women for instance.

## iii. Paradoxical views of Bodily Autonomy:

- They promote freedom of choice when it comes to women and what they do with their bodies.
- But they do not support women who choose to engage in sex work.
- They argue that all sex workers



are oppressed, without recognizing that a good number of them use this work to seappropriate their own bodies or even to play on male domination.

#### v. Focused on White and Middle class:

- As with a lot of branches of feminism, radical feminism is often dominated by white women.
- Radical feminism was criticized because it tended to be white and middle-class.

#### vi. Sex-based Discrimination:

- During the early years, radical feminists were criticized for emphasizing sex-based discrimination at the expense of race, and class-based discrimination.

### Conclusion:

- Radical feminism considers patriarchy as the main cause of gender inequality followed by oppression.
- It also calls out men as oppressors.



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# Marxist / Socialist Feminism

## Introduction:

Marxist feminism is a branch of feminist theory which argues that the main cause of women's oppression is capitalism.

Marxist feminism is based on the understandings of Marxism, proposed by Karl Marx and collaborator Friedrich Engels in the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

Social classes were described to explain how one class controls the other as means to produce goods. (high class level of economic → bourgeoisie, low-class level → proletariat (Marx & Engels, 1848))

Marxist feminists regard classism, rather than sexism, as the fundamental cause of women's oppression.

Marxist feminists can still be used to explore how the political economy is gendered in late-stage capitalism. (Armstrong, 2020).



## Historical Background of Marxist Feminism:

- Marxist theory was not initially focused on women's issues, it was realized that under a capitalist system women were exploited by not being paid for the reproductive and emotional labor they were involved in.

### i. Eleanor Marx:

- The daughter of Karl Marx, is thought to be one of Marxist feminism's pioneers in England in the 19<sup>th</sup> century among others such as Rosa Luxemburg.

### ii. Suffrage Movement:

- During the suffrage movement in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, class systems were considered when working-class women forged their own movement for the right to vote alongside white middle-class women.
- It was not until the 1860s and 70s when Marxist feminism became particularly popular.



### iii. Liberal Feminism:

- Marxist feminism is thought to have arisen in reaction to liberal feminism, whose fight failed to go beyond equal rights.

### iv. Contribution of Key Women:

- A few of the key women who contributed to the development of Marxist feminism as a theory are Chizuko Ueno, Anuradha Ghandy, Claudia Jones, and Angela Davis.

### Famous Marxist Feminists:

- ① Alison Jaggar
- ② Clara Fraser

### The Key Issues According to Marxist Feminism:

- The main view of Marxist feminists is that the traditional nuclear family only came about with capitalism.
- Marxist feminists claim that while the proletariat are oppressed through the capitalist system, women are double oppressed through capitalism as well as through the nuclear family.



### i. Women reproduce the Labor Force:

- In a capitalist society, women are expected to reproduce children. These children will then grow up to be the next generation of workers and mothers.
- Women are also socializing the next generation of workers and 'servicing' the current workers (their husbands) with their unpaid domestic labor.
- Thus, women are supporting capitalism through their own means of reproduction, according to Marxist Feminists.

### ii. Unpaid Domestic Labor of Women:

- Marxist feminists claim that there is a division of labor between men and women: men are assigned economic production, whereas women have been assigned reproduction of the workforce.
- Marxist feminists explain that the unpaid labor of women is a way to exploit them.
- Capitalism would not exist without this unpaid labor because workers would not be able to work all day



If they also had to take care of their children and the house. (Cottaris, 2020)

### Women are a reserve of cheap labor:

Since the primary role of women in a capitalist society is in unpaid domestic labor.

Women are taken on temporarily when required by the bourgeois.

When the men were away, many women were enrolled in the work that they would have otherwise not been allowed to do (Grayzel, 2013).

The women would have been paid less than the men and many would have had to return to their unpaid domestic duties once the men returned from war.

### Women take on Emotional Labor:

Marxist feminists claim that women must provide emotional labor under a capitalist society.

The labor involved in keeping family members emotionally stable, so they can work efficiently.



- The partners of the women may be understandably frustrated by the exploitation they experience by the bourgeoisie and women are often expected to absorb this frustration which may result in domestic violence.

## The Goals of Marxist Feminism:

### i. Abolish Capitalism:

- The main goal of Marxist feminists is to abolish capitalism. Through this, they believe that Patriarchy itself can be tackled.
- Overthrowing the existing economic system is thought to liberate women.
- Since Capitalism is at the root of inequality and Patriarchy is a product of Capitalism, removing this system should eliminate gender inequalities.

### ii. A Classless Society:

- Instead of Capitalism, Marxist feminists advocate for a Classless, Communist Society.
- Through a classless society, both the upper-class and working-class people will be treated equally.



- The vision of Marx and Engels was to ensure that there was a collective ownership and the basic dignity of women in society, thus the domestic duties will be shared equally between partners.

### iii. More Women in Public Sphere:

- Since women's exclusion from paid work makes them more oppressed, a way to combat this is to integrate women into paid work and the public sphere.
- Ensuring that women are paid equal wages to men and are offered the same opportunities if they have the necessary qualifications.
- Marxist feminists do not generally seek to exclude men from feminist struggles, in fact, they often want to avoid separation between the sexes for fear of fueling a class division (Cottaris, 2020).

### iv. Valuing Domestic Labor:

- Marxist feminists do not necessarily disagree that domestic labor should be ignored.
- Marxist feminists wish for domestic labor



- to be as valued as reproductive labor.
- Marxist feminists argue that women should be paid for domestic work.
- v. **Control Over reproductive rights:**
- If women have more reproductive rights and more of a choice as to whether to be a parent, they have more choice as to their role in society.
  - Capitalist societies see women's main job as to be a mother and nothing else.
  - So, if women realize they have a choice as to whether to go down this path, they can feel more liberated to do what they want to do.

### Strengths of Marxist Feminism:

- i. **Shed light on the Cause of Women's Oppression:**
- Marxist feminism has shown a light on how women are oppressed by a capitalist society.
  - Attention has been drawn to the intersection of capitalism and patriarchy and the importance of taking both class and gender into consideration in feminists demands.
- ii. **Focus on Working-class Women:**
- Previous feminists movements have been



more focused on the rights of middle-class or upper-class women, with working-class women being ignored or forgotten in history. Marxist feminism can also highlight how working-class women are not only subservient to men, but often to wealthy women.

### Division of Domestic Duties:

There is often an imbalance in the share of household and childcare responsibilities.

This awareness means that couples can discuss and come to agreements as to how to split the duties.

If someone's partner is not willing to take on more of the unpaid labor and this is making them unhappy then they can consider whether this is the person they want to spend their life with.

### Criticisms on Marxist Feminism:

#### Women's Oppression existed Before Capitalism:

A main criticism of Marxist feminism is that women's oppression is thought to have been prevalent in the family



system before capitalism existed.

## ii. Focus on Economic Reasons:

- The criticism of Marxist feminism is that, it only focus on the economic reasons of women's oppression.
- Marxist feminists cannot struggle to change the mindset of the society.

## iii. Criticism on Classless Society:

- It is doubtful whether men would suddenly stop exploiting women in a classless society.
- In fact, sexism and oppression of women can still be found in communist political parties.

## iv. Ignore Sexism:

- As such, viewing Marxism as a condition for women's liberation ignores sexism as a whole and may only deal with a small percentage of the wider issue.

## v. Ignore intersection of race & Sexuality:

- Marxist feminists focused on intersection of class and gender but did not incorporate the intersection of race, sexuality or disability, alongside these issues.



- Angela Davis discusses the intersection of race on Marxist feminism in her book 'Women, race, & class' (1981)

## vi. Not being Relevant in Today's Society:

- Today more women have the opportunity to work and have the choice as to whether to bear children, they are not necessarily restricted to being a traditional housewife, unless this is what they choose to do.

## Conclusion:

- The fundamental goal of these feminist needs to remain constant was to encourage women everywhere women everywhere to unite in whatever ways they can to oppose structure of oppression, inequality and injustice.

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