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Comparative Analysis of Feminist Theories
(Liberal, Socialist, and Radical Feminism)

Feminism is not one story. It is a part of millions of female voices. Each speaks for the same goal which is gender equality, but they differ in how to achieve it. Among the strongest are liberal, socialist, and radical feminism. Each of these answered the struggles women faced then.

Liberal feminism came first in the 18th century. Mary Wollstonecraft argued that women deserve the same education as men. John Stuart Mill stood in Parliament, demanding women’s right to vote. Their call was simple; women should share the same rights and freedoms as men. Changes they believed, could come through reason and law, not rebellion. The Philippines had its own version of this fight. In the early 1900s, women’s groups pushed for the right to vote. It took years of petitions and speeches before they won. In 1937, a national plebiscite granted Filipino women suffrage (Philippine Commission on Women, n.d.). It made the country the first in Asia to do so. That victory captured the liberal feminist spirit, change through reform, not destruction (*The Politics Shed - Different Types of Feminism*, n.d.)

Liberal feminism centers on fairness. It argues that women should have equal access to education, work, and politics. The goal is a level playing field where success depends on ability, not gender. Early feminists fought for property rights, education, and political representation. Later generations pushed for equal pay and reproductive rights. Their victories changed lives, though the battle for equality continues (Uppal, 2023)

Socialist feminism took a different path. It rose in the 1960s and 70s, when the world was questioning authority and capitalism. Socialist feminists asked a more objective question. What if women’s oppression comes not just from discrimination, but from the economic system itself? They drew from the ideas of Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels. Engels wrote that the family, tied to inheritance, kept women in a cycle of dependence (MasterClass, 2020; *The Politics Shed - Different Types of Feminism*, n.d.; Uppal, 2023).

To socialist feminists, capitalism and patriarchy work together. Women perform unpaid or underpaid labor that keeps both systems alive. They care for children, maintain households, and often earn less at work. This “double burden” traps them economically. True liberation where they argued, requires changing the structure of society itself. It also emphasized that existing laws alone are not enough. They fought for social programs that would lift this weight. Paid maternity leave. State-funded childcare. Fair wages. Recognition that housework is really labor. Many of these ideas still spark debate today. Socialist feminism sees equality as a collective task. It ties freedom to justice, not just opportunity (MasterClass, 2020; *The Politics Shed - Different Types of Feminism*, n.d.).

Radical feminism dug this even deeper. It claims that patriarchy or the male domination” in our society is the oldest and most pervasive system of control, and changing a few laws will not fix it. Radical feminists argue that society itself is built around male power. Every institution, from the family to culture and religion, reinforces that order (Johnson Lewis, 2020).

Writers like Kate Millett and Shulamith Firestone spoke boldly in the late 1960s. Millett showed how patriarchy shaped art, literature, and everyday behavior. Firestone imagined a world where women were freed from biological limits through technology. They did not want adjustment; they wanted transformation.

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Radical feminism challenged the assumptions that everyone took for granted. Why should women raise children alone? Why should men dominate in politics, business, or religion? Their goal is clear as daylight in the noon, to free women, and that patriarchy must fall (Uppal, 2023).

Each feminist school offers a different answer to inequality. Liberal feminism says the problem is unequal rights. Socialist feminism says it is economic exploitation. Radical feminism says it is patriarchal power. Yet they all share one belief: gender inequality is unjust and must end. Their paths cross in practice. For example, all three would support paid parental leave. But for different reasons. Liberals see it as fairness. Socialists see it as workers' justice. Radicals see it as a challenge to gender roles.

Each has its strength. Liberal feminism achieved visible progress. Women gained voting rights, access to education, and protection under the law. Yet it sometimes stops short. It focuses on equality before the law while ignoring deeper economic and cultural roots (Guy-Evans, 2024). Socialist feminism connects gender and class. It explains why poor women face barriers wealthier women do not. It pushes for broad social reform. Still, critics call it too idealistic or abstract. Its vision of communal living or shared labor can seem far from everyday life. Radical feminism shook the world. It forced people to talk about violence, sexuality, and power. It made patriarchy visible. Yet it can sound too absolute. Some say it ignores differences of race, class, and sexuality. Others find its vision too extreme or utopian. These debates continue. But their ideas shape how we understand gender today (*The Politics Shed - Different Types of Feminism*, n.d.)

Considering a recent issue, girls' education during the COVID-19 pandemic were affected as schools closed and many girls stopped studying. The main reasons were not just weak internet or lack of gadgets. Many were kept at home for chores or childcare (Briggs et al., 2020).

In this issue, a liberal feminist would focus on fairness. She would call for equal access to education. That the government should provide laptops, internet, and scholarships so girls can study like boys. A socialist feminist on the other table would dig deeper. She would link the problem to poverty and unpaid domestic work. She would argue for public childcare, financial aid, and jobs that pay living wages. Her solution is to fix the system that makes girls' labor necessary at home; and a radical feminist on the side would go to its root. She would ask why girls, not boys, are expected to do housework. She would challenge parents and culture to share domestic duties equally. Her focus is changing beliefs, not just policies.

The same problem looks different through each lens. Liberal feminism sees a lack of access. Socialist feminism sees economic injustice. Radical feminism sees patriarchy within the family. None are wrong. Together they reveal how deep inequality runs. That is the value of feminist theory. It gives us tools to see what others miss. Liberal feminism reminds us to fight for equal rights. Socialist feminism reminds us to question economic systems. Radical feminism reminds us to confront power and culture.

Feminism continues to evolve. It lives in debates about pay, education, and politics. It also lives in quiet choices, who washes the dishes, who speaks first, who gets heard. Each feminist perspective adds to a larger understanding of freedom. Equality is not one goal reached once and for all. It is a process, a constant effort to rethink how society works. Feminism, in all its forms, keeps that conversation alive.

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Aspect	Liberal Feminism	Socialist Feminism	Radical Feminism
<i>Historical Background</i>	Emerged during the 18 th -20 th centuries (“first wave”). Key figures include Mary Wollstonecraft and John Stuart Mill. In the Philippines, early women’s groups fought for suffrage (granted in 1937).	Rose in the 1960s-70s women’s movement, inspired by Marxist ideas. Built on Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels’ critique of capitalism.	Also grew in the late 1960s-70s during the women’s liberation movement. Led by theorists like Kate Millett and Shulamith Firestone.
<i>Main Belief</i>	Men and women deserve equal rights and opportunities under the law.	Gender inequality is tied to class and capitalism; women’s labor is exploited in both home and workplace.	Patriarchy (male domination) is the root of women’s oppression in all social institutions.
<i>Primary Goal</i>	Reform laws and policies to create equal opportunities for women (“level playing field”).	Restructure the economic system to end both class and gender exploitation.	Eliminate patriarchy entirely and transform cultural, social, and family systems.
<i>View of Oppression</i>	Caused by discrimination and unfair social attitudes that can be changed through legal reform.	Caused by “capitalist patriarchy,” where women’s unpaid and underpaid labor sustains capitalism.	Caused by patriarchy as a deep cultural and psychological system of control.
<i>Key Strategies or Methods</i>	Lobbying, advocacy, legal reform, education, equal pay laws, anti-discrimination acts.	Economic and social reforms, paid maternity leave, socialized childcare, recognition of domestic work.	Consciousness-raising, protests, challenging traditional family and gender roles.
<i>Famous Thinkers / Movements</i>	Mary Wollstonecraft, John Stuart Mill, early suffragists.	Karl Marx, Friedrich Engels, Heidi Hartmann, Zillah Eisenstein.	Kate Millett, Shulamith Firestone, Andrea Dworkin.

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<i>Strengths</i>	Achieved concrete legal rights (voting, education, labor protection). Practical and widely accepted.	Links gender with class, exposing economic roots of inequality. Promotes collective solutions.	Exposes deep patriarchal structures often ignored by others. Sparks cultural awareness and activism.
<i>Limitations</i>	Focuses on formal equality but not deeper power structures. May reflect middle-class bias.	Sometimes too theoretical or utopian; may prioritize class over culture.	Can be seen as extreme or exclusionary; may overlook class and race differences.
<i>Modern Application (COVID-19 Girls' Education)</i>	Advocates equal access to education and resources (gadgets, internet, scholarships).	Addresses poverty and unpaid labor, calls for financial aid and public childcare.	Challenges gender norms that assign chores to girls and devalue their schooling.
<i>Main Focus</i>	Legal and institutional reform.	Economic and class transformation.	Cultural and patriarchal transformation.

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