

On Modern Feminism

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Theme: [History](#), [Women's Rights](#)

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*“Other people will call me a rebel, but I just feel like I’m living my life and doing what I want to do. Sometimes people call that rebellion, especially when you’re a woman.” — **Joan Jett***

*“Feminism is not a dirty word. It does not mean you hate men, it does not mean you hate girls that have nice legs and a tan, and it does not mean you are a ‘bitch’ or ‘dyke’; it means you believe in equality.” — **Kate Nash***

*“I’d like every man who doesn’t call himself a feminist to explain to the women in his life why he doesn’t believe in equality for women.” — **Louise Brealey***

The present discussion specifically focuses on

(1) second-wave feminism, also called modern feminism (which emerged in the 1960s and was highlighted by the publication in 1963 of Betty Friedan’s *The Feminine Mystique*) whose principal aim is to end gender discrimination and

(2) post-modern or third-wave feminism (which came out ca. 1990s) whose centerpiece is sexuality as a significant foundation of female empowerment. Antedating these two waves was the pre-modern or first wave (in the 19th century) feminism whose main concern was on woman’s suffrage or right to vote.

One presupposition that stands out though in dealing with this issue is the fact that feminism as an ideology and a movement is unilaterally a western socio-cultural and politico-economic concern. The height of its assertive defiance is in the context of a western industrial society whose fundamental landscape has been dominated by the male species being simply a continuation and perpetuation of patriarchy in the preceding civilizations both ancient and medieval. If however, we find feminist movements in Asian societies, these are almost certainly the more heavily western-influenced ones.

Feminism, in general, is an assertive stance against social prescriptions that undermine the dignity of the woman as a human being.

We find this woman-debasing condition in almost all social institutions where the rules of the game—both implied and expressed—are almost always male-centered, male-promoting and hence absolutely advantageous to the social standing of the man. In this kind of social arrangement, the man is in full control of major concerns such as organizational leadership,

decision-making, rules-formulation and institutional administration among others. In this state of affairs, it is the man who calls the shots, so to speak. It is against this pernicious social setting that the woman has rebelled to actively assert her rights, her dignity, her creativity, her competence, her humanity and the distillation of all these is cogently imbued in the ideological framework of feminism.

Pushed against the male-dominated social wall, the prejudiced woman of the modern western industrial society has seen her disparaged condition and resolved once and for all to rise up and subvert the imbalanced system. With an unwavering will power that even surpassed that of a man's heart, she has moved onward traversing old and seemingly secured cultural frontiers to claim territories society bestowed on her male counterpart since time immemorial. In this particular instance, feminism is not only an ideology but a movement. Along the rugged socio-cultural terrain, the woman succeeds in demonstrating not only to the man but likewise to the docile segment of her species the reality that she is perfectly able to dabble and accomplish a lot of endeavors culturally assigned to the man without necessarily losing her femininity.

We've seen her as an accomplished engineer directing an army of construction workers in a high-rise building project smack at the center of the metropolis.

We've witnessed her mettle operating a bulldozer in a highway construction project. Right in the busy inner-city streets, we have boarded countless times the bus or the taxi she drives, or the subway train she operates. Nowadays, she is no longer as defiant and angry as in the past several decades ago hollering invectives against the system in mass mobilizations.

With the total confidence of a seasoned performer, she soberly does her job today with a high sense of achievement while reminiscing the past when such kind of a job was specifically categorized within the exclusive domain of the male species. Neither is her competence being challenged by anybody anymore for her place in society being equal to that of the man is already established and secure. These are among the many positive gains of feminism.

However, the struggle is not over yet. Conservative fundamentalist religions which are mainly of so-called Christian rootage in western societies are still around asserting their irrational dogmatism and freak stubbornness despite obvious irrelevance. Suffused with their counterfeit spirituality, these so-called conservative fundamentalists have formulated self-serving moral guidelines to perpetuate the notion that the woman ought to be subjected to the headship of the man. More repugnant than this general mandate is the particular injunction that the woman has no "god-given" right over her body. In other words, she has no choice at all to determine what she thinks is best for her condition in physical terms. The loudest voices from which this notion emanates are those of the fundamentalists—both catholic and evangelical—whose nauseating slogan is "All life is sacred."

In the light of this imminent concern, post-modern or third-wave feminism is here yet to stay until the moral legitimacy of feminine sexuality is fully achieved over and against the distorted morality of religious fundamentalism and when total woman empowerment is finally an unconditional reality.

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