**Feminist Theory**

Feminist theory is one of the major contemporary sociological theories, which analyzes the status of women and men in society with the purpose of using that knowledge to better women's lives. [Feminist theorists](http://womenshistory.about.com/od/feminism/tp/feminist_theory.01.htm) also question the differences between women, including how race, class, ethnicity, sexuality, nationality, and age intersect with gender. Contemporary sociologist [Patricia Hill Collins](http://sociology.about.com/od/Profiles/fl/Patricia-Hill-Collins-Part-1.htm) is known throughout the field for developing, deploying, and popularizing the concept of [intersectionality](http://sociology.about.com/od/I_Index/fl/Intersectionality.htm) in her theory and research. [Feminist theory](http://womenshistory.about.com/od/feminism/tp/feminist_theory.htm) is most concerned with giving a voice to women and highlighting the various ways women have contributed to society.

There are four main types of feminist theory that attempt to explain the societal differences between men and women:

**1. Radical Feminism**

* Society is patriarchal– it is dominated and ruled by men – men are the ruling class, and women the subject class.
* Blames the exploitation of women on men. It is primarily men who have benefitted from the subordination of women. Women are ‘an oppressed group.
* Rape, violence and pornography are methods through which men have secured and maintained their power over women.

To learn more about how this perspective translates to research and applies to current events, check out these articles:

* + [Why Breastfeeding in Public is Taboo](http://sociology.about.com/od/Current-Events-in-Sociological-Context/fl/Why-Breastfeeding-in-Public-is-Taboo.htm)
  + [Let's Talk about the Orgasm Gap, Baby](http://sociology.about.com/od/Current-Events-in-Sociological-Context/fl/Lets-Talk-About-the-Orgasm-Gap-Baby.htm)

**2. Marxist Feminism**

* Capitalism rather than patriarchy is the principal source of women’s oppression.
* The disadvantaged position of women is because of the emergence of private property and the fact that women do not own the means of production.
* Under Capitalism the nuclear family becomes even more oppressive to women and women’s subordination plays a number of important functions for capitalism:

(1) Women reproduce the labour force for free

(2) Women absorb anger – women keep the husbands going.

(3) Because the husband has to support his wife and children, he is more dependent on his job and less likely to demand wage increases.

**2. Liberal Feminism**

* Nobody benefits from existing inequalities: both men and women are harmed
* The explanation for gender inequality lies not so much in structures and institutions of society but in its culture and values.
* Socialisation into gender roles has the consequence of producing rigid, inflexible expectations of men and women.

**3. Postmodern Feminism**

* Do not see women as a single homogenous group.
* There are differences in the experiences of working class and middle-class women, women from different backgrounds and women of different sexualities.
* They are concerned with language and the relationship between power and knowledge rather than politics and opportunities.