

Describe and explore one of the following theories: Feminism, Marxism or Social Construction.

This essay is about feminism, from when it first began, to who helped changed it, and to what it is today. The term feminism can be used to describe the social movement that fights for political, economic, cultural and social movements aimed at establishing equal rights for women. Feminism is all about women and men being made equal, and that women deserve the same rights as men. Throughout many years' feminists have fought many different causes such as the right to live free from violence, the right to be able to study, own their own properties, the right to work and the right to vote. Women were seen but not heard years ago, they were forced into marriage, made to have sex with their partners whether they wanted to or not, cooked and cleaned the house and made to stay at home to keep their men happy in the bedroom and bring up the children. They had very little quality of lives and were made to feel like slaves in their own homes. The husband would have control over what his wife did and when she would do it and if ever, she was to leave him with or without children she would be given no money what so ever to live on.

In historical terms, the first wave of feminism began mid to late nineteenth century up to the 1920's. The French Revolution of 1789 is often associated as the beginning in which the first concerted demands for women's rights made. It was the important influence of Mary Wollstonecraft who 'Vindication of the rights of women' published in Britain in 1792 was recognized as the first substantial and systematic feminist treatise. In Britain in the 1840s the spread of feminist ideas and feelings amongst middle class women caused a small group of women based in London to emerge in the mid 1950's called 'The Langham Place Group'. This groups main concerns were improving education and employment rights for women and improving the legal rights of a married women. This group found themselves up against the biggest of barriers, one of the biggest of these barriers was the denial to accept women into education. It was not until 1948 that women were given equal rights and basis when it came to be in accepted

into college. Emily Davies set up Girton College in 1869 with the help of others and Newnham College soon opened after and both were tailored to suit specifically women. Emily Davies was born 20 April 1830. She was an English feminist and suffragist and a pioneering campaigner for women's rights to university access. She was the co-founder and early mistress of Girton College. Although these colleges were attended by women, they could not be awarded their degrees until 1948. What is really wanted in a woman is, that she should be a permanently pleasant companion. So far as education can give or enhance pleasantness, it does so by making the view of life wide, the wit ready, the faculty of comprehension vivid (Davies (1866)). She wrote books and articles for newspapers, a way to get her views and points across to her followers. From the time they first opened until then, there had been two world wars and seventeen prime ministers. British first wave feminism did not just focus on just the suffrage question but the effect it had on women's movement in the post-world war period. During the war women were allowed to work in the munition's factory, in the lab doing scientific lab work to packaging the finished product, at the coal mine, making tyres for motor vehicles, working with asbestos such as making mattresses and line the boilers of battleships, work in the flour mill, manufacturing glucose, baking biscuits, producing glass and many more jobs usually designed for men. After the war women were persuaded to give up their jobs and return to their more traditional roles of cleaning the house and looking after their men and children. The campaign for women's suffrage was a long fight to win the right for women to vote. It took activists and reformers nearly one hundred years to win that right. In 1918 the Representation of the People Act 1918 passed which allowed women over thirty who met the property qualifications to vote but it was not many people who qualified. So, in 1928 the Equal Franchise Act 1928 passed allowing women over twenty-one to vote and gain the same rights as men. Following the granting of the right to vote for women in 1918, the National Union of Womens Suffrage Societies underwent drastic changes and reorganization and changed its name to National Union of Societe's for Equal Citizenship (NUSEC). The NUSEC under the leadership of Eleanor Rathbone shifted its priorities and had finally achieved the belief that the equality of men and women had been achieved. Eleanor Rathbone was born 12 May 1872; she was an independent British Member of Parliament and a long-term campaigner for family allowance and women's rights. One of her quotes was

"continually measuring women's wants by men's achievements seems out of date, ignominious, and intolerably boring. ... Now that we have secured possession of the tools of citizenship, we intend to use them not to copy men's models but to produce our own" (Rathbone, (1936)). She became Honorary Secretary of the Liverpool Womens Suffrage Society Executive Committee. She was then elected an independent member of Liverpool City Council in 1909, she kept her position there until 1935. In 1913 she co-founded the Liverpool Womens Citizen Association to promote women's involvement in political affairs. From 1918 onwards she fought for family allowance to be paid to the mothers instead of the fathers. In 1945, the year before her death she saw the Family Allowance Act pass into law. Since her death her name or a picture has been honored in many ways for the work she put in getting women to have equal rights to men. Feminists now had real women issues to fight for such as birth control, family allowance and ensuring women broadened their views and horizons and look beyond their duties they had at home. By the end of the 1920s, equal right feminists were no longer dominant within the women's movement, but the NUSEC acted with the Six Point Group and the Womens Freedom Group to make sure women's issues were continuously taken to parliament to be looked at and reviewed.

Second wave feminism is said to have started in the 1960's and ended in the 1980's and is known as the broadening the debate. It started at the end of World War II and focused on issues such as the work place, family, reproductive rights and sexuality. Audre Lorde was a big name when it came to sexuality and religion rights. She was born February 18, 1934, she was a librarian until she published her first poetry and led workshops with her young, black, undergraduate students in 1968. Her poetry gave voice to issues such as race, gender and sexuality. She self-described herself as a black, lesbian, mother, warrior, poet who dedicated her life to confronting the injustices within racism, sexism, classism and homophobia. "I am not free while any woman is unfree, even when her shackles are very different from my own" (Lorde (2012)). Another famous quote is "when we are afraid our words will not be heard or welcomed. But when we are silent, we are still afraid. So, it is better to speak" (Lorde (1995)). Her voice and poems helped to change the way people thought and the way they viewed women and their feelings and roles. By the late 1960's increased student activity after the Vietnam War and Civil Rights Movements and the amount of dissatisfied older

women who were fed up with their domestic and workplace restrictions caused for more organizations and political beliefs and parties to cause a new wave of activism. In 1966 the National Organization for Women (NOW) represented and put together one of the largest coalitions to come from the second wave. The Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) had tried but unfortunately failed to stop and prevent sexism in the workplace, they put all their attention into preventing racial discrimination instead. NOW was formed by Betty Friedan and other leading feminists, it was made up of older, middle class, white women and they focused on issues such as gender equality in the work place and reproductive freedom, using law to institute gender reforms. Betty Friedan was born February 4, 1921 in Peoria. In 1963 she published 'The Feminist Mystique' which shows how women explored the idea of women enjoying life beyond their traditional roles. "The feminists had destroyed the old image of woman, but they could not erase the hostility, the prejudice, the discrimination that still remained." (Friedan (1963)). She co-founded NOW in 1966 and served as its first president. Another famous quote she used was continually measuring women's wants by men's achievements seems out of date, ignominious, and intolerably boring. ... Now that we have secured possession of the tools of citizenship, we intend to use them not to copy men's models but to produce our own. (Friedan, (1936)). These quotes along with many more were used to help encourage women to stand up and do more. Private issues such as domestic abuse, abortions, rape and access to child care came to the forefront of feminist platforms. These issues were now public and after the First National Women's Liberation Conference in 1968 took place in Chicago, the first rape crisis hotline was established. In 1970 black feminism fought back against racism and sexism, the second wave was a starting point for them, again with Audre Lorde giving them a voice, and in 1973 the National Black Feminist Organisation was founded. Lesbian feminists soon started up their own groups and organisations after NOW refused to include homosexuality as a part of its platform.

Third wave feminism started from 1990's to the early 2000's focused on the difference in the male and female pay gap and the reproductive rights of a woman. There were more organisations formed like the Radicals, the Liberal Reformers, the Eco Feminists, Cultural Feminists and so on. The Radicals were a loose parliamentary political group based in Britain and Ireland. They began in the early to mid 19<sup>th</sup> century,

and their aims were to lower taxes and the abolition of sinecures. The Radical Party lacked organisation and formal leadership so by 1859 they had joined forces with The Whigs to form the Liberal Reforms. The Liberal Reforms were a series of social legislations that had been passed by the British Liberal Party soon after the 1906 general elections. Eco-feminism is also known as ecological feminism and examines the connections between women and nature. Eco-feminism adds both a commitment to the environment and an awareness of the associations made between women and nature. Cultural Feminism refers to a philosophy that women and men have different approaches to the world around them. In some people's views cultural feminism argues that a women's way of looking at the world is actually more superior to men, and that all women should unit together regardless of their ethnicity, race, class or age. Between all the new groups and organisations, accepting and understanding the term 'feminism' is what this wave is all about. Since the first wave a massive amount of progress has been done and made but there is still more to be done and due to the amount of feminist issues around today it is much harder to label and explain what a feminist looks like. The third waves starting point was from Rebecca Walker and her response to a sexual harassment accusation that was dismissed because men could apparently do whatever they wanted. Rebecca Walker was born November 17, 1969, she was an American writer, activist and feminist. Walker has been regarded as one of the most prominent voices of third wave feminism. She published an article on feminism in Ms magazine in 1992, her teaching, writing and speeches focused on race, gender, politics, power and culture. She helped co-found the Third Wave Foundation, an organisation which supported young women of colour, queer, intersex and trans individuals. She defies third wave feminism at the end of an article by saying "To be a feminist is to integrate an ideology of equality and female empowerment into the very fiber of life. It is to search for personal clarity in the midst of systemic destruction, to join in sisterhood with women when often we are divided, to understand power structures with the intention of challenging them" (Walker (2007)).

Fourth wave feminism is based and has occurred due to the internet and people being online. The internet has created a call out culture, in which all kinds of sexism and misogyny can be made aware of and challenged. Websites such as 'The F Word' and 'The Woman's Room' and campaigns such as 'The Everyday Sexism Project' have attracted

thousands of supporters who find it easier and faster to discuss matters that they feel strongly about. Using the internet does help spread the word and makes it easier to get people to engage or sign petitions but it also causes a divide between young feminists and the older activists as not all of the older generation have access or the understanding to use the internet. The fourth wave due to online access also focuses on labels such as queer, sex positive movement, trans inclusive, anti-misandrist, body positivity and digitally driven people, giving them the chance to get their voices and views heard and being able to join other people in chat forums just like themselves. One of the most famous names when it comes to the fourth wave is called Jessa Crispin. Born in 1978 she is a critic, author and feminist. She published a book in 2017 called 'Why I Am Not A Feminist' and in that book she says "I cannot associate myself with a feminism that focuses dementedly on 'self-empowerment,' whose goals include not the full destruction of corporate culture but merely a higher percentage of female CEOs and military officers; a feminism that requires no thought, no discomfort, and no real change," (Crispin (2017)). She rails against feminism as self-empowerment and is trying to rediscover its true radical potential.

In conclusion it can be easily seen that women and the world have come a long way since the first wave of feminism first began. It started off with women being told what to do and when to do it and that their place was to stay in the home and look after their husbands and children. It slowly moved on so that women were allowed to vote, work outside the walls of their home and gain an education. With the voices and views of many famous women it has now moved into 2019 and the world and society are a very different place than what it was. It has gone from a woman only sleeping with her husband when he wanted it to there being loads of different genders eg, gay, lesbian and bisexual. This is encouraged and made easier by the use of the internet and by people being able to communicate with others so much easier. Men also used to be the main bread winners and were supposed to be men but with all the use of the internet it now seems to have changed so that women can now just as easily go out to work while the husband stays at home to bring up the children. Women now are able to buy their own houses and work and get paid a lot more than they used to. There is still a lot of work that needs doing to make women and men equal though, as even though the statutory pay is the same amount for both, in well paid jobs men still get paid a lot more. The

amount of men in better higher up jobs than women is still an issue too, men will say they earned their role, but women say it is sexism that men are doing better than women in the workplace. Women are now given benefits for the children without any questions being asked, while women now work and look after the children. Feminism means different things to different people and understanding what feminism is, is the biggest problem of them all. There are so many different suggestions as to what it is and how it should be described does anybody know the answer anymore.

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