Draft feminism

Throughout history, one big societal concept has existed, the relationship between the oppressor and the oppressed. Both in constant competition and opposition with each other, at war either privately or publicly, the two in constant need of the other. From a macro perspective, this relates to feudal systems with lords and peasants, monarchy and the requiring of servants or a system of dictatorship within government. Within a micro perspective, this depicts a more familial, domestic framework, the biological and gender arrangement within the unit commonly known as family. This assignment will describe and explore the theory of feminism within the context of family. It will compare different aspects of feminism and societal theories and briefly touch on Marxist perspectives and its critics. It will question whether feminism devalues a woman's role in the home, and will question whether clearly defined roles within the traditional family unit are essential or oppressive. The conclusion of this paper will focus on the relevance of feminism within the contemporary family and for modern mothers.

When tracing the foundations of feminism, (Browne, 2015, p.18) defines feminism as the study of society from the perspective of women and their concerns and the long standing inequality of women in society. Feminism began with its first wave of activity during the nineteenth century until the early twentieth century. Famously and formally beginning at the Seneca Falls convention in 1848 it sought to first liberally, then radically overturn political structures denying women the opportunity to vote. The second wave came about post world war two whilst which women had replaced men in the workplace and were quickly realising they were more than capable of just emotional work. Feminism can be defined in many ways, as an umbrella sheltering incompatible beliefs and interests (Cameron, 2018, p.8), as global women facing challenges every single day in whatever context they are tested in (Cairney, 2019, p. Nicolas Book need a page number) or as a movement responsible for examining and maintaining of public/private domains of gendered relationships (Robinson and Diaz, 2005, p.75). Overall when defining the relationship between men and women, feminism is the belief that both sexes should be treated equally.

History depicts many examples of the differences in men and women's labour in society. Pre industrialisation, men took on the heavy roles of ploughing land while women took the planting and harvesting jobs. Children undertook housework and also helped in the fields. The roles may have been different but men and women worked together at this time. The

evolving times however, and the commencement of industrialisation along with the development of towns and cities, came the division of labour and a separation between work place and home life. Labelled the social sphere and the private sphere, this split had a significant impact on family and traditional family life. As women were viewed as weaker physically and emotionally fragile, it was common place for a wife to stay at home and care.

Marxist theory contributed to radical feminist ideology significantly. Classic Marxism is based on the conflict theories of Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels written within the nineteenth century. Marx believed that the class system of capitalism was divided into two parts, a binary them and us approach. According to Marx, those with the mode of production, the bourgeoisie, exploit the workers, the proletariat, to gain profit. The upper class owned the means of production, the land, factories and property. The working class had no choice but to sell their time and agency to the bourgeoisie to survive. Marxist or socialist feminists believe that their subordination is of the same ideology, men outwardly exploiting women exerting power over them violently, financially, sexually and depriving them of equal status. It is believed that Marx neglected familial, mothering and sexual relationships as these were private issues and had nothing to do with the mode of production however, Marxist feminists place a focus on capitalism and its exploitation of the proletariat by the bourgeoisies and compare it to the subordination of women by men. (Giddens and Sutton, 2017, p.636)

Another example of radical feminist theory within motherhood can be seen in the writings of French feminist Christine Delphy. Delphy argues that all women who share the common role of domestic housework and who are oppressed by men share a financial position and therefore create an economic class of their own. She believes that marriage is the only option for these women who need and rely on man to keep them from poverty.
(Christine Delphy 1980 page 35).

In contrast, liberal feminists concentrate on gender stereotyping and the avoidance of raising children in gendered roles, (Browne, 2015, p.279) They also focus on smaller factors of discrimination, building on the establishment and protection of legislation and policy such as the equal pay act 1970, the sex discrimination act 1975 and the 2010 equality act, bringing about change in a gradual but respectful manner. (Giddens and Sutton, 2017, p. 635) And they campaign quietly for parenting to be seen as the responsibility of both parents.

Although the theoretical staring points are different, it can be argued that while those with the means of production oppressed the wage slaves, without the workers the factory owners could not have made money. Within the traditional family structure, man was as dependant on his wife's work as she was on his. All well and good earning money to buy food but without a wife to cook it he would go hungry. One way this can be illustrated is with the functionalist perspective of Talcott Parsons, in 1951. He argued that the two main functions of family were to socialise new members of society and to keep adults stable in mood and personality. His warm bath theory placed value on man working, coming home to a meal prepared to refuel and a bath in which to cleanse. (Giddens and Sutton, 2010, p.106). This would indicate then, that to be a maternal feminist a woman must accept the patriarchal oppressive stance. There is no room in radical feminism for the ideology of marriage being a natural state based on love, respect and the equal, mutually agreed division of labour, money, domesticity and care. Bryson, 1992, p. 198).

Traditionally boy meets girl, they fall in love, they get married and they have children together. Historically women worked while they were single and once married would be expected to give up work and concentrate solely on home building and caring. The emotional labour of women was then restricted to relaying on a small amount of wages contributed by the husband to keep house and to provide him with the comforts he deserved. Liberal feminism in Britain took hold in the nineteen sixties, the introduction of the contraceptive pill, the abolition of the married woman's property act and the campaigning for equal pay in Dagenham's Ford factory all paved the way for what is known as second wave feminism. Whilst first wave feminism had laid the foundation for women's rights, the main focus had been political. It was not until the late sixties that more domestic considerations gained importance. According to The British Library (nd) gaining the right to vote for British women in 1928 gave the worlds women a platform from which to fight and influence the generations still advocating for equality today. However, the opinion of home staying mothers and those who choose to work is subject to considerable scrutiny and has changed much over the course of the twenty first century.

Maternal feminists however are heavily criticised and presumed deviant to the feminist movement. The question of just how much women contribute has never been in doubt but what does change in society is the value given to her role. The theory of Parsons that had

seemed relevant in the forties and fifties though began to unravel in the sixties, when the dark sides of family life were illuminated and domestic violence and rape were all still too common. True feminists were of the opinion that to end patriarchy and oppression, women needed to work outside of the home and alongside men, with the same educational opportunities, the same career progression and the same wage. Only if women were valued the same, would they be equal. It is a societal expectation now that everyone should work. Regardless of family structure, age of children or necessary income needed, the common question amongst mothers is when will you go back to work? Placing an instant societal assumption that women want to work outside of the home. With regard to contemporary structure of family a very different picture now exists, it is common for same sex couples to raise children together, blended families from divorced backgrounds are now socially accepted and single parents be it mothers or fathers are a familiar sight in the playground at home time. The modern family is no longer nuclear or extended, it is no longer confined by geography and aspects of globalisation have crept in to increase choice and individualism. Gone are the metanarratives that define the concept of the traditional family unit, leaving the theory of feminism with one significant elephant in the room. Not all women require the liberation from motherhood, and some women need to raise children to the best of their ability to achieve a sense of achievement as a woman. Rose Kennedy (1995) famously states her love of motherhood in her autobiography when she said

> 'I looked on childrearing not only as a work of love and duty but as a profession that was fully as interesting and challenging as any honourable profession in the world and one that demanded the best that I could bring to it'.

However, the political message of the current decade is that women who wish to stay home and raise a family are the undeserving poor. Of course, it would be as wrong to assume all women are natural mothers as to compare all men with being natural abusers. Men these days are happier to display a more nurturing side and women are happier to admit that procreating is not in her best interests. However, at the 2011 Woman's World Conference in Canada Dr Andrea O'Riley (2011) summed up the feminist mothering stance by offering that women' must take control of the their lives and act according to their own beliefs rather than societies expectations'. Added to that (Rich, (n.d) cited in Hallstein, 2010, p.110) argued that it was the patriarchal notion of motherhood, not the actual experience of mothering that was the source of women's oppression and that mothering could be empowering if were left to define it themselves. These bold statements back up emerging evidence that there is a strong

argument that now women have achieved equal status, they are equally as capable of raising the futures greatest commodity without being reduced to poverty, without being looked upon as lazy but being admired as wanting to create a society of children that do not need to fight for equality or let go of subordination to be a beneficial contribution to society in their own right. However, there are very many mixed opinions and ideologies contributing to feministic approaches to motherhood. (Firestone, (n.d) quoted in Bryson, 1992, p.208) refers to mothering as a 'temporary deformation of the body for the sake of the species' and goes on to offer that women require liberating from pregnancy, birth and rearing of children completely. Furthermore, (Cameron, 2018, p. 63) suggests that domestic labour is 'isolating and unrewarding' and that it should not ever be anyone's fulltime occupation. This is contradicted by the perceptions and experiences of many women who have found joy and fulfilment in motherhood, and those that say that 'motherhood is often perceived to be the essence of what it means to be a woman'. (Cameron and Diaz, 2005, p.80)

Leading into a softer third wave of feminism then, is an existence focused on truth and authenticity. Gone are the argumentative power struggles within structure and conformity, replaced by choice and individualism. In the article, (The Four Waves of Feminism, 2015) Hampton, announces that "most third wavers refuse to identify as feminists, and reject the word as limiting and exclusionary', and continues by saying that most men and women of the third wave have somewhat achieved parity and 'feminism' is no longer required. It would seem that despite women historically being caregivers for children and accepting the 'Family Ethic' (Abramovitch 1988) feministic waves have played a significant part in influencing women from the role and into work with it now being viewed as the norm to have others raise your children. Government funded childcare schemes have emerged all over the U.K. affording all parents a chance to work equally and cohabit equally. It is generally accepted that motherhood is perceived as having a significantly negative impact on a women's life and it could be argued here that the feminist movement for equal wages has tempted some women away from having children and care giving. However, with psychology advances women are now more than ever aware of the benefits of raising children both for themselves, for the child and for societal existence.

Leading the way in to a possible fourth wave then is a strong sense of difference and that the parity in rights women once fought so hard to gain is now influencing the power to choose

and that difference replaces equality in the societal norm. As recorded with the National Office of Statistics (2017), there were nineteen million families with thirty eight percent of them having at least one child. 65.1% of women with children under four were in employment. However, there is a significant amount of women, whose participation in society can be just as active by raising, socialising and providing emotional stability for the futures participants. Elizabeth Broadbent (n.d.) humorously stated 'that here is no glory, no glass ceiling in poo-wiping, or mac and cheese cooking, or alphabet-teaching', but it is a hugely rewarding career choice for those women who feel that they can contribute to building a society of moralistic, ethical and emotionally stable young people. To be a feminist today, regardless of wave or social perspective, needs a thick skin. Battle of Ideas (2019) suggests the older generation of feminists are viewed as outdated and old fashioned, the older generation accusing today' s female youth as devoid of back bone, offended by men's unwanted attention. To be a maternal feminist today again takes a thick skin and a large voice. One that can speak up in defence of their decision to raise children at home. The feminist movement seems to remain harsh and uncomfortable with the idea of a woman being committed to being a stay at home mum and a feminist. (cited in Luxton and Vosko 1998 67) though in Britain this may be changing. Findings published by The British attitudes Survey (2018) which looks at attitudes in social issues such as politics, welfare and gender suggest that 33% of British people should stay home when children are young. This is despite the efforts of the government to provide subsidised childcare and offer welfare assistance to increase more shared parenting.

One area of feminism that does remain consistent and should not be overlooked is the celebrating of women in achievement. Aside from movements and waves and outcry at women without a personal income, feminism has done much for each other in success. Whether it is black women in history, women in business or standing united together to raise awareness, women across the world are able to unite and campaign and celebrate each other. The latest international women's day took action raising awareness of gender balance, a day for motivating others to realise personal bias and to take action. (International Women's Day 2019).

In concluding this essay, it is observed that women can face oppression from women and the feminist movement in its bias towards working mums. It can be seen that greater effort is

needed when determining what women want for their future selves and their children when embarking on raising a family. Current feminism appears to celebrate the diversity amongst modern women but ignores the distinction between workers and carers. This appears to have caused a rift in the movement of feminism which criticises women who don't need professional career success to feel complete. These women require the admiration and recognition that the contribution they are making is valid and valuable. Maternal feminism no longer needs to be neglected, in fact the people who prioritise staying at home and caring for families are a 'grossly undervalued asset to society' and in our contemporary society it could be argued that evidence proves a need to create a nurturing and safe place for women and their families, rather than enforcing the ideologies of the capitalist state. It is the opinion of Alice O'Keiff (2015) that there is nothing more important than this.