



LIBERAL FEMINISM IN DIFFERENT PERSPECTIVES: A CONCEPTUAL PAPER

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Abstract: The purpose of this study is to examine the idea of liberal feminism from the perspective of several great thinkers, such as Mary Wollstonecraft, Jojo Moyes, and others. Liberal feminism is one of the main schools of feminist thought, focusing on gender equality through individual freedom, civil rights, and legal reform. It is based on liberal principles such as freedom, justice, and equal rights. Liberal feminism aims to integrate women into society through social, political, and legal change. The results of the study show that liberal feminism made a substantial contribution to increasing women's access to various aspects of social and economic life. However, this approach has been criticized for failing to account for structural issues such as race, social class, and economy, all of which contribute to gender disparity. In conclusion, while liberal feminism has laid a solid foundation for the fight for equality, a more intersectional approach is required to be more inclusive of women's experiences. In broader perspectives, liberal can be more effective in responding to modern societal concerns such as global economic disparity and dynamic social change.

Keywords: liberal feminism, gender equality, individual freedom, women's rights, intersectionality.

Introduction

The idea is that males and females should have equal rights in politics, the economy, and society (Lin, 2019). It includes several political, social, and cultural initiatives to achieve gender equality (Asnani, 2020). Gender inequality is one of the most visible and contentious social concerns which is analyzed through feminist perspectives (Hambur, 2019). Women make up more than half of the global population and, at every level of life, continue to face discrimination, subordination, and secondary status. Many societies fight for the same opportunity rights and respect as men (Raj & Davidson, 2014). Different feminist organizations have arisen in different eras because of the several ways that women are oppressed and subjugated in society. Nonetheless, achieving gender equality is each group's primary objective (Tong, 2009). The topic of feminism inequality is crucial because it allows us to examine this world of patriarchal and male-dominated civilizations in depth (Suhag, 2023).

Several genres have emerged as a result of the growth and evolution process, including liberal feminism, socialist feminism, radical feminism,



postmodern feminism, cultural feminism, environmental feminism, third-world feminism, black feminism, and psychoanalytic feminism (Lin, 2019). Feminism is a system of thinking that seeks to eliminate gender-based disparities in society. Since then, feminism has taken on various forms, each with a different ideology and the goal of eradicating gender inequity. The five primary varieties of feminism are intersectional feminism, radical feminism, Marxist feminism, postcolonial feminism, and liberal feminism. All of these categories shed light on the causes of gender inequality, including capitalism, colonialism, patriarchy, race, and class (Karim, 2019).

Therefore, this paper aims to explore liberal feminism from multiple perspectives by analyzing its basic principles and the philosophical traditions that shape it. This study examines the thoughts of major feminist figures such as Mary Wollstonecraft, John Stuart Mill, and Betty Friedan, as well as how their thoughts contributed to the development of liberal feminism. By highlighting the criticisms and limitations of liberal feminism, this study emphasizes the importance of integrating an intersectional perspective to create a more inclusive approach to achieving gender equality.

Liberal Feminism

The word feminism has been taken from the Latin word *Femina* which means 'woman or females', then was initially used concerning equality and the women's rights movement (Raina, 2020). The idea that males and females should get equal rights in politics, the economy, and society was first expressed in English in 1895 (Lin, 2019). Feminism is a series of diverse ideological, political, and social movements that have a common objective of formulating, building, and realizing equality between men and women in several aspects of life. The key aim of feminism is to fight for the same political, economic, personal, and social rights of women and male the movement seeks to eliminate gender-based discrimination, challenge patriarchal norms, and promote equal opportunities and treatment in various fields, including education, work, and family life. By advocating for justice and equality, feminism serves as a driving force for more inclusive and equitable social change in society (Raina, 2020).

Furthermore, secularism, democracy, press freedom, free speech, religious freedom, property rights, civil and human rights, and the rule of law are all advocated. It is a feminist theory that states that denying females access to civil rights and social services or resources like jobs and education leads to gender inequality (Giddens, 2001). Liberalism, the school of political thought from which liberal feminism has arisen, is currently reconceptualizing, evaluating, and reorganizing itself (Tong, 2009). Every other feminist theory begins with a criticism of liberal feminism. Liberal feminist theory has also been criticized. However liberal feminists usually respond to criticism by widening their collective aims and self-understanding, allowing liberal feminism to develop. Some contend that liberalism's emphasis on the individual prevents it from fully conceptualizing injustice to groups. Some contend that liberalism's concentration on the individual renders it incapable of fully conceptualizing injustice against groups. (Tong, 2009).

In addition, among feminists, liberal feminism is the most well-recognized social and political theory. As a theoretical foundation for fostering the feminist movements, it has emerged (Herouach, 2019). It is a key component of modern feminism that creates social equality for women and men (Maynard, 1995). It "*favors to be picked by mainstream*" (i.e., *middle-class*) females who do not oppose the status quo" (Zhang & Rios, 2021). Liberal feminism is in benefit of equal rights for all citizens, regardless of gender, including equal access to education, political and civil rights, and the ability to vote. More emphasis is placed on topics like political rights, education, and workplace equality (Jaggar, 1983; Hackett & Haslanger, 2006).

Wollstonecraft's Perspective on Equality through Education and Rationality

Mary Wollstonecraft was considered a pioneer in the liberal feminist movement (Tong, 2024). In his view, Wollstonecraft argues that women have the same abilities as men in terms of independence and moral strength. She strongly opposes gender discrimination, especially in the education system, which separates men's and women's education. This practice is not only unfair but also creates a society with an "artificial and weak character. Wollstonecraft uses a



powerful metaphor to describe the condition of women at that time, namely "birds in cages" whose only function is to beautify themselves (Tong, 2024). This condition reflects the expectations of society that prioritizes women's beauty and passivity over their intellectual potential. As a solution, she encourages the same opportunities for education for males and females. She believed that equal education would improve the rational abilities of both sexes and provide great benefits to the progress of society as a whole (Wollstonecraft, 1792).

Wollstonecraft emphasized the importance of education and freedom of thought for women. She maintained that women are not mentally inferior to men, but it is the limitations imposed by society on access to education that cause inequality. Wollstonecraft believed that with equal education, women can contribute significantly to various areas of life, including politics and economics. Wollstonecraft also rejects the traditional view that women are only aesthetic objects or supporters of men (Tong, 2024). In her perspective, women must be seen as individuals who have similar rights and freedoms as males. This idea was very revolutionary in its day and became the basis for the development of liberal feminism, which emphasized legal equality and opportunity for women in modern society. Further, Wollstonecraft's view of individual freedom is closely linked to the values of the Enlightenment, where he believes that reason is the foundation of morality and freedom. She emphasized that only through freedom of thought and action can women reach their full potential and contribute to building a more just and moral society.

John Stuart Mill's Perspectives on Legal Right for Women

John Stuart Mill, a theorist, and political economist, battled for suited economic chance, political rights, and civil liberties for males and females (Tong, 2024). He believed that if women had the same educational and civic chances as males, they would prefer to remain husbands and mothers, building domestic life for the family (Mill, 1869). Mill highlighted that gender inequality is one of the greatest forms of social injustice. He also argues that restrictions on women, especially in terms of legal rights for women and access to education, are not only harmful to women but also impede the advancement of society as a whole. She



emphasized that giving equal rights to women will increase the collective potential of humanity because women can contribute equally in all aspects of life.

Mill also argues that the abolition of prejudice against women is a form of application of classical liberalism principles, such as individual liberty and equality before the law. According to her, women's freedom to choose education, work, and roles in public life is a human right that should be respected and protected by society. In addition, Mill opposes gender stereotypes that consider women more suitable for purely domestic roles. In her view, this role should not be forced by society, but rather a woman's personal choice. Mill's argument reflects a progressive view that encourages women to pursue true equality in all fields without structural or social restrictions

In addition, Mill reaffirmed the meaning of individual freedom. This clarifies Mill's view that women should live their own lives, overcoming the various restrictions imposed by a male-dominated society through the use of language and concepts. Men and women should have equal legal rights. All women are raised from childhood on the assumption that their ideal character is the opposite of that of men, not based on self-will and self-control, but rather submission and submission to the control of others (Mill, 1869). Society expects women to live for the sake of others and sacrifice themselves completely for the sake of self-interest. According to Mill's analysis of the challenge of tyranny, slaves are not treated better than wives, yet no slaves are enslaved in the same way, and in the sense that is entirely like the word "wife" (Mill, 1869).

Betty Friedan's Perspectives on Domestic Roles and Self- Satisfaction

Betty Friedan was known for her writing and discussing "nameless issues," i.e. feelings of femininity that are constantly hampered by limited gender roles. This inspires many women to passionately fight for gender equality (Tong, 2024). Betty Friedan shows that women can only feel satisfied when they give birth to a child. There is no other way for her to imagine herself than as the mother of her children and the wife of her husband (Friedan, 1963). Furthermore, Friedan argues that women, like men, can only find and understand themselves personally through their artistic and intellectual efforts (Friedan, 1963). With this in mind,



Friedan encourages women's awareness of the importance of freedom in determining their way of life. This awareness then became the basis of modern feminism's struggle for gender equality, both in the workplace and in society at large (Tong & Botts, 2024; Friedan, 1963).

In addition, Friedan highlights how social and cultural constructions have shaped women's expectations, which hinders them from exploring their full potential. She criticized the media and social institutions that reinforce women's traditional roles as mothers and wives, without giving them room to develop in other fields, such as education and careers (Friedan, 1963). This idea became the trigger for the second wave of the feminist movement, which focuses on women's rights in social, economic, and political aspects (Tong, 2024). Friedan's thinking also contributed to pushing for more inclusive public policy changes for women, including greater access to education and equal employment opportunities. As such, its intellectual heritage remains relevant in the contemporary struggle for gender equality around the world (Tong, 2024).

Conclusion

The study conceptualized liberal feminism as the main school of feminist thought. The school emphasizes gender equality through individual freedom, legal reform, and social change. Thus some perspectives were discussed from four great thinkers in feminism. They were Mary Wollstonecraft, John Stuart Mill, Harriet Taylor Mill, and Betty Friedan that provided a strong foundation in the struggle for women's rights in the fields of education, law, employment, and domestic and public roles. Wollstonecraft emphasized the importance of education as a key to gender equality by rejecting the notion that women are naturally inferior to men. Mill also emphasized the importance of women's access to education and work as an effort to achieve economic independence. Another thinker, Friedan criticized traditional domestic roles and encouraged women to find identity and self-satisfaction through active involvement in the world of work and public life. However, while liberal feminism has contributed greatly to gender equality, it has also been criticized for overemphasizing individual freedom and legal reform without considering more complex structural injustices, such as race, social class,

and economics, so an intersectional approach is needed for feminist struggles to be more inclusive and responsive to broader social challenges.

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