

Introduction to Feminist Theories

Introduction to Feminist Theories – Study Notes

1. What Is Feminist Theory?

- **Definition:** A set of scholarly perspectives that examine how gender, power, and social structures intersect, with the goal of understanding and challenging gender-based oppression.
 - **Core Question:** *How do social, cultural, political, and economic institutions produce and sustain gender inequalities?*
 - **Methodology:** Interdisciplinary—draws from sociology, philosophy, literature, history, anthropology, law, psychology, and more.
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2. Historical Development (Key Waves & Milestones)

Wave / Period	Timeframe	Main Focus	Representative Thinkers / Works
First Wave	Late 19th–? early 20th?c.	Legal rights: suffrage, property, education	Mary Wollstonecraft – <i>A Vindication of the Rights of Woman</i> (1792); Susan B. Anthony, Elizabeth Cady Stanton
Second Wave	1960s–1980s	Patriarchy, reproductive rights, workplace inequality, consciousness-raising	Simone de Beauvoir – <i>The Second Sex</i> (1949); Betty Friedan – <i>The Feminine Mystique</i> (1963); bell hooks – <i>Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center</i>
Third Wave	1990s–early 2000s	Intersectionality, diversity of experiences, critique of universal womanhood	Judith Butler – <i>Gender Trouble</i> (1990); Kimberlé Crenshaw – “Mapping the Margins” (1991)
Fourth Wave (ongoing)	2010s–present	Digital activism, #MeToo, body autonomy, trans-inclusion, global justice	Laura Bates – <i>Everyday Sexism</i> ; online collectives like #MeToo, #TimesUp

3. Major Branches & Theoretical Approaches

Approach	Key Concepts	Central Concerns	Notable Scholars
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Liberal Feminism	Equality under the law, meritocracy	Reforming institutions to grant equal rights and opportunities	John Stuart Mill, Martha Nussbaum
Radical Feminism	Patriarchy as a fundamental system of domination	Re?structuring society to eliminate male supremacy; focus on sexuality, reproductive control	Andrea Dworkin, Catharine MacKinnon
Marxist / Socialist Feminism	Class + gender = dual exploitation	How capitalism reinforces gender oppression; unpaid labor, reproduction of labor power	Silvia Federici, Angela Davis
Cultural Feminism	Distinctive female values (cooperation, nurturing)	Celebrating “women’s ways of knowing”; critique of male?centric rationalism	Carol Gilligan, Luce Irigaray
Intersectional Feminism	Overlapping identities (race, class, sexuality, disability, etc.)	How multiple oppressions intersect; moving beyond single? axis analysis	Kimberlé Crenshaw, Patricia Hill Collins
Post?structural / Queer Feminism	Gender as performative, fluid	Deconstructing binary categories; linking gender to sexuality, language	Judith Butler, Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick
Eco?feminism	Links between domination of women & nature	Environmental justice, sustainability, critique of anthropocentrism	Vandana Shiva, Maria Mies
Trans?feminism	Inclusion of trans experiences within feminist analysis	Challenging cisnormativity, advocating for trans rights within feminist movements	Susan Stryker, Jack