

Feminisms and Education

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Introduction

Many people think of feminism as a comparatively recent phenomenon—a rather ‘hippy’ and utopian vision left over from the 1960s and 1970s. Some have even termed the 1980s onwards as a ‘post-feminist’ era in which women can relax at last, safe in the knowledge that all the necessary gains (the vote, equal pay, opportunities in the labour market, sexual freedom and so on) have been safely secured (Rumens 1985).

In fact, feminism has a very long history even though the term is of more recent origin. It derives from the Latin *femina* (woman), feminism initially meaning ‘having the quality of females’, and came into use as a perspective on sexual equality in the 1890s. Rossi (1974) traced its first usage in print to a book review published in *The Athenaeum*, 27 April 1895 although this does not signal the beginning of feminism as a movement since, prior to this ‘womanism’ was more commonly used to describe interest in sex equality issues. According to Tuttle (1986: 349), nineteenth-century usage of the term ‘The Woman Question’ to denote interest in the condition of women signalled ‘a pre-feminist consciousness’ rather than feminism as a political movement, as it is conceived today. To purloin Dale Spender’s book title, indeed, ‘There’s Always Been a Women’s Movement’ (Spender 1983b). As feminist historians have found, if you look hard enough, every era has had its share of women complaining of their lot in relation to their male contemporaries. From Sappho in the seventh century BC, through the middle ages to the modern (and even the post-

modern) period, there has been a distinctive feminist presence in history.

However, different feminisms have prioritized different aspects of women’s struggle against oppressive forces. It has been common in recent years to categorize each feminism according to its particular ideological source in order to show the differences within feminism as well as the shared commitment to women’s advancement. In 1987, Madeleine Arnot and I identified three perspectives on feminism which, we argued, had made the most impact on education: these we termed ‘Equal Rights in Education’ (namely liberal feminism), ‘Patriarchal Relations’ (radical feminism) and ‘Class, Race and Gender: Structures and Ideologies’ (marxist/socialist feminism) (Arnot and Weiner 1987). We were later rightly criticized for rendering as marginal those feminisms on the fringes of our three categories, in particular, black feminism and lesbian feminism. Measor and Sikes catalogue four main strands of feminism in their book on gender and schooling—liberal, radical, socialist and psychoanalytic—(Measor and Sikes 1992), while Tong in her introduction to feminist thought published in 1989, distinguishes liberal, marxist, radical, psychoanalytic, socialist, existentialist and post-modern feminisms, seven in all. As poststructuralism rightly identifies, it is proving ever more difficult to categorize the amoeba-like changes in feminism, due to the shifting nature of terminology, say of ‘woman’ or ‘feminism’ or ‘femininity’ and the discursive frameworks which have helped shape the ‘normalizing’ processes for generations of women. Indeed hooks (1984) argues that feminist thought is always a ‘theory in the mak-

ing’, always open to re-examination and new possibilities. Moreover, if there is any agreement about feminism, as Mitchell points out, it is likely to be of a general and diffuse nature.

If feminism is a concern with issues affecting women, a concern to advance women’s interests, so that therefore anyone who shares this concern is a feminist, whether they acknowledge it or not, then the range of feminism is general and its meaning is equally diffuse. (Mitchell 1986: 12)

However, what has clearly marked out modern feminism has been its emphasis on the need for feminist *consciousness*; that is, the concern to understand what has caused women’s subordination in order to campaign and struggle against it. Because such theoretical understandings (of the causes of women’s oppression) are dependent on ideological and political value positions, however, and also because feminism as ‘theory in the making’ is resistant to any one dominant discourse, any attempts to summarize differences in feminist perspective are necessarily hazardous and vulnerable to criticism. Nevertheless, in this chapter I shall attempt (perhaps unwisely) to consider, as far as it is possible, the various shifts in modern feminist thought and their impact on education, at the same time as emphasizing feminism’s ‘harmonious’ goals of equality and sisterhood, and its discordant tones of difference and identity.

Feminisms and Feminist Thought

We tend to be familiar with the two most recent feminist ‘waves’: the first, in the nineteenth century stretching into the first two decades of the twentieth century, and the second, from the late 1960s onwards.

The ‘first wave’ movement was associated with the emergence of liberal individualism and Protestantism at the time of the Enlightenment (at the end of the eighteenth and beginning of the nineteenth centuries), drawing specifically on ideas about natural rights, justice and democracy. Not surprisingly given its origins, the movement was *liberal, bourgeois* and highly *individualistic*, principally concerned with extending legal, political and employment rights of middle-class women. Whilst different class interests such as Owenites, Chartists, Unitarians and middle-class reformers united in campaigning on ‘The

Woman Question’ (often as part of a pattern of reforms that embraced universal suffrage and a national system of education), improvement of the marriage property laws, greater access to education and the professions, wider employment opportunities and participation of women in government and public life undoubtedly yielded greater benefits for middle-class women.

Liberal feminism, which has arguably been the most enduring and accepted of all the feminisms (visible currently in the campaigns in the UK for more women members of parliament and for the rights of women to become Church of England clerics on an equal basis with men) asserts that individual women should be as free as men to determine their social, political and educational roles, and that any laws, traditions and activities that inhibit equal rights and opportunities should be abolished. Access to education is fundamental to this perspective since it claims that by providing equal education for both sexes, an environment would be created in which individual women’s (and men’s) potential can be encouraged and developed. Liberal feminists also assume that equality for women can be achieved by democratic reforms, without the need for revolutionary changes in economic, political or cultural life, and, in this, their views are in sharp contrast to those of other feminist campaigners.

The ‘second wave’ women’s movement had more dissident origins and aims, although was initially much influenced by the liberal feminism of Betty Friedan whose 1963 publication, *The Feminine Mystique* has been popularly regarded as signalling its beginnings. The Women’s Liberation Movement (WLM, also called the modern or new feminist movement) was born in the USA in the 1960s out of other movements of the political ‘new’ Left, particularly the Civil Rights and anti-Vietnam war movements. A group of women, thoroughly disenchanted with the male domination of political organizations ostensibly committed to democratic/egalitarian practices, began to explore ideas about women-centredness in political organizations and to organize their own autonomous movement for women’s liberation. Though its debt to marxism is clearly evident in the terminology used, for example Shulamith Firestone’s *Dialectic of Sex* (1970) sought to define society in terms of a sex/class system and offered the

case for a feminist revolution, the ideas developed came to be known as those characterizing *radical feminism*.

First, the concept of 'patriarchy' was used to analyse the principles underlying women's oppression. Its original meaning—the rule of the father—was altered to describe the historical dominance of men over women, this being seen as the prototype of all other oppressions and necessary for their continuation.

Male supremacy is the oldest, most basic form of domination. All other forms of exploitation and oppression . . . are extensions of male supremacy . . . All men have oppressed women. (*Redstockings Manifesto*, quoted in Bouchier 1983)

Further, Millett (1971) argued that patriarchy is analytically independent of capitalist or other modes of production and Firestone (1970) defined patriarchy in terms of male control over women's reproduction.

However, whilst the concept of patriarchy has been crucial to modern feminism because as Humm (1989: 159) puts it 'feminism needed a term by which the totality of oppressive and exploitative relations which affect women could be expressed', different feminist discourses produce different versions of how patriarchy is constituted, as we shall see later in this chapter.

Another related assumption of radical feminism is that of the 'universal oppression of women'. It necessarily follows that if all men oppress women, women are *the* oppressed class, though there has been some disagreement about how patriarchal relations were/are created and sustained. Firestone (1970) argued that the fundamental inequality between men and women is traceable to the physical realities of female and male biology (particularly their roles in reproduction) and their consequences. Ortner (1974) in contrast, saw the relegation of women to the private sphere arising out of the *interpretation* of biology in terms of women's association with nature and men's, with culture and civilization.

The third main assumption of radical feminism is that, to be aware of the effects of male domination, women have to undergo a process of women-focused education (or re-education) known as 'consciousness raising'. Developed in the 1960s, consciousness raising is a means of sharing information about female experience and was used as a means of educa-

tion for women in the absence of a comprehensive knowledge-base on women.

We wanted to get the truth about how women felt, how we viewed our lives, what was done to us and how we functioned in the world. Not how we were *supposed* to feel but how we really did feel. This knowledge, gained through honest examination of our personal experience, we would pool to help us figure how to change the situation of women. (Shulman 1980: 154)

For a time, during the 1970s, radical feminist goals dominated the 'second-wave' women's movement as it drew in women from a wide range of backgrounds and interests. In Britain, Rowbotham remembers that there seemed to be small groups in most large towns, loosely connected together through national conferences; thus, 'the movement was sufficiently concerted to back national campaigns, for example on abortion' (Rowbotham 1989: xii).

Feminists grouped to address one or more of the numerous concerns of women characterizing the last quarter of the twentieth century: issues such as sexuality, women's health, abortion and reproductive rights, pornography, male violence, and also access to and conditions of employment, child-care provision, sexual harassment in the workplace and so on. The need to create a knowledge-base that illuminated the experiences of women resulted in a burgeoning feminist scholarship and also the emergence, particularly in the United States, of a proliferation of Women's Studies courses. Further, the perceived need to create a more effective, female, political power-base led to increased interest in the development of women-friendly organizations and practices (non-hierarchical, cooperative etc). This was characterized by 'the refusal of formal delegated structures of political organisation, a stress on participation rather than representation' (Mitchell 1986: 26).

Further, as Mitchell (1986) points out, radical feminism not only sought to challenge contemporary sexual relations and politics; it also produced a new language and a new discursive framework based on liberation and collectivism.

One of the most striking features of women's liberation and radical feminism was their recourse to a new language—the language of liberation rather than emancipation, of collectivism rather than individualism. (Mitchell 1986: 26)

However, by the end of the 1970s, a number of different feminist perspectives surfaced to challenge the hegemonic position of radical (and to some extent, liberal) feminism, both as a critique and an extension of the feminist project. For example, women within *marxist* and *socialist* organizations began, in a sense, to strike back at the sisters who had originally defected, although in Britain, as early as the 1950s, Juliet Mitchell had begun to articulate feminist ideas within the British Left. Because she was criticized by male comrades for ideological incorrectness, she began to develop a feminist position that demanded changes outside conventional marxist economic and social policy. These included changes in: *production*—women's place in the labour market; *reproduction*—sexual divisions within the family; *sexuality*—in the views of women as primarily sexual beings and sex-objects; and *socialization*—in the way in which the young were reared and educated (Mitchell 1971).

Later, other marxist and socialist feminists attempted to incorporate ideas about women's oppression and patriarchal relations into classic marxism, focusing in particular, on the relationship between production (the labour market) and reproduction (the family); the interrelationship of capitalism and patriarchy; and the complex interplay between gender, culture and society (see, for example, Barrett 1980; Davis 1981; Segal 1987).

Accordingly, patriarchy has a materialist and historical basis in that capitalism is founded on a patriarchal division of labour. Hartmann (1976) for example, defined patriarchy as a set of social relations with a material base underpinned by a system of male hierarchical relations and solidarity.

An important emphasis was that of the impact of class on gender formation exemplified in MacDonald's claim that gender and class are inexorably drawn together within capitalism:

both class relations and gender relations, while they exist within their own histories, can nevertheless be so closely interwoven that it is theoretically very difficult to draw them apart within specific historic conjunctures. The development of capitalism is one such conjuncture where one finds patriarchal relations of dominance and control over women buttressing the structure of class domination. (MacDonald 1981: 160)

Whilst this feminist perspective had greater explanatory power, it appeared to be less suc-

cessful than radical feminism in attracting large numbers of women to its political position, possibly because in seeking to incorporate feminist ideas within marxism, its complexities posed an obstacle to all but the most theoretically sophisticated.

In many ways, the most important challenge to radical feminism came from *black feminism* which criticized not only the white, patriarchal society for triply oppressing black women (on the basis of sex, colour and class) but also the oppressive nature of the white women's movement which had glossed over economic and social differences between women in its attempt to articulate an authentic, overarching female experience. Moreover, in the United States, both waves of feminism were associated with black political campaigns: in the nineteenth century, around the abolition of slavery and in the twentieth, around the Civil Rights movement. The apparently new black feminist presence was to shatter irreparably the notion of universal sisterhood—though as Tuttle points out, black feminism has been in existence as long as white feminism 'although [it has] . . . suffered the fate of most women of being "lost" to history' (Tuttle 1986: 41).

Black feminists challenged the idea that a feminism that ignores racism can be meaningful. As bell hooks wrote in 1984:

Feminist theory would have much to offer if it showed women ways in which racism and sexism are immutably connected rather than pitting one struggle against the other, or blatantly dismissing racism. (hooks 1984: 52)

Moreover, it mounted a challenge to some of the most central concepts and assumptions of the white women's movement. Carby argues, for example, that the concept of 'patriarchy' has different meanings for black women.

We can point to no single source of our oppression. When white feminists emphasize patriarchy alone, we want to redefine the term and make it a more complex concept. Racism ensures that black men do not have the same relations to patriarchal/capitalist hierarchies as white men. (Carby 1982, rep. 1987: 65)

hooks further argued that the concentration of the white feminist movement on identifying white middle and upper-class men as the 'enemy' and the 'oppressor' let other men off the hook.

The labelling of the white male patriarch as 'chauvinist pig' provided a convenient scapegoat for black male sexists. They could join with white and black women to protest against white male oppression and divert attention away from their sexism, their support of patriarchy and their sexist exploitation of women. (hooks 1982: 87-8)

Black feminists pioneered the concept of identity politics, of organizing around a specific oppression, which allowed for both difference and equality to become issues within feminist politics. Hill Collins adds a commitment to a humanist vision in her definition of black feminism as 'a process of self-conscious struggle that empowers women and men to actualize a humanist view of community' (Hill Collins 1990: 39). She also draws on standpoint theory to articulate a specific black woman's position in the political economy, in particular, their ghettoization in domestic work enabling them to see white élites from a position not available to black men.

Interestingly, British black feminists retain stronger links with marxist and socialist feminism than their North American counterparts due to the specific experience of British imperialism and colonialism. For example, Brah and Minhas present their feminist position as follows:

We start from the position that any discussion [of education] . . . must be understood in the context of the complex social and historical processes which account for the subordination of black groups in British society. Social relations between white and black groups in Britain today are set against a background of colonialism and imperialism. (Brah and Minhas 1985: 14)

In particular, British black feminists emphasized the exploitation and unjust treatment of black immigrants (women and men) from the Caribbean and the Asian subcontinent from the 1950s onwards, for example, concerning overt discrimination such as the use of the 'colour bar' in housing, employment and education (Bryan *et al.* 1985). The state was further viewed as having created new forms of racism (termed 'institutional racism') within the bureaucracies and institutions for which it was responsible; thus 'contemporary racism now needs to be seen as a structural feature of the social system rather than a phenomenon merely of individual prejudice' (Brah and Minhas 1985: 15).

Furthermore, the possibility of making generalizations across all groups derived, say,

from theories based on the white family as a site of sexual oppression, was heavily criticized. Phoenix (1987) argues that in the light of the endemic and unremitting racism of British society, the black British family is more likely to be a source of strength and a haven, than a site of oppression for black women.

Simultaneously, radical feminism began to exhibit divisions as breakaways championing a *separatist* feminist position were taken up by the 'new age' philosophies of Mary Daly and her followers on the one hand, and political lesbianism on the other. Mary Daly, in her 1979 volume *Gyn/Ecology* offers a new, metaphysical *spiritual feminism* in which men are depicted as evil and death-loving, parasitical on the energies of good, life-loving women. Daly argued that patriarchy is itself the world's prevailing religion and that women need to withdraw from men in order to create a new, women-centred universe with a new philosophy and theology, and even a new language.

Lesbian feminism, in sharp contrast, took a much more overtly political stand, arguing that lesbianism is not simply a matter of sexual preference or an issue of civil rights but rather a whole way of life combining the personal with the political. The concept of *political lesbianism* was developed as a critique of the ideology and practices of heterosexuality. According to Charlotte Bunch,

Lesbian-feminist politics is a political critique of the institution and ideology of heterosexuality as a cornerstone of male supremacy. It is an extension of the analysis of sexual politics to an analysis of sexuality itself as an institution. It is a commitment to women as a political group, which is the basis of a political/economic strategy leading to power for women, not just an 'alternative community'. (quoted in Tuttle 1986: 180-1)

The argument was made that since sexual orientation is a matter of personal preference, lesbianism should not be stigmatized. Furthermore, that lesbianism should be made more visible within the women's movement, in history and in society as a whole. Moreover, because political lesbianism constitutes a major challenge to male domination in its commitment to an autonomous, women-centred society, it has a legitimate and central place in any movement which seeks to redress the power balances between the sexes.

Significantly, the more 'radical' feminist

groupings were remarkably successful in achieving societal attitudinal change, particularly given their relatively small numbers. Their public campaigns, for instance, concerning the seriousness of rape and the establishment of rape crisis centres, the revelation of hitherto unacknowledged incidence of child sexual abuse and male violence in the family, the establishment of havens for battered wives, and campaigns against pornography as a violation of women's civil rights, all fundamentally affected the societies within which they were active (see, for example, Brownmiller 1975; Dworkin 1981).

Another form of feminism to emerge in the 1970s, drawing to some extent on both marxist and radical feminism but also with its own specific knowledge-base was that of *psychoanalytic feminism*. Its main concern was to place greater emphasis within feminism on how the oppression of women affects their emotional life and their sexuality (as opposed, say, to their employment prospects or position within the family). It argued, for instance, that the roots of women's oppression are deeply embedded in the psyche and that for women to free themselves, an 'interior' (as well as societal) revolution is necessary so that women are able to challenge their own oppression. Extending her earlier ideas on the necessary prerequisites for women's liberation (see earlier in this chapter) Mitchell (1982) continued to articulate her concern about the ideologies underlying women's position, this time taking Freud's theories about the unconscious and the construction of femininity and demonstrating their importance as tools for analysing and challenging patriarchal society.

Criticisms of the phallogocentric nature of Freud's work led other feminists into alternative ways of theorizing women's position in the family and in child-rearing. Chodorow, for example, explored mother/daughter relationships. Rejecting the notion that women's universal primary role in child-care could be explained in purely biological or social terms, Chodorow claims that women become mothers because they were themselves mothered by women. In contrast, the fact that men are parented by women psychically reduces their potential for parenting. Women's exclusive mothering, Chodorow asserted:

creates a psychology of male dominance and fear of women in men. It forms a basis for the division of

the social world into unequally valued domestic and public spheres, each the province of a different gender. (Chodorow 1978)

According to this view, patriarchy stems from the gender formation of females and males, uniting psychic and property relations (Dinnerstein 1976). Thus to achieve women's liberation, the family must be reorganized so that women and men share parenting responsibilities equally and children grow up dependent upon both women and men from their earliest days. Not surprisingly given other radical feminist perspectives, major criticisms of Chodorow's thesis includes her prioritization of psychic dynamics over social structures in women's liberation, and her failure to appreciate the diversity of family structures inter- and intra-culturally (Tong 1989).

Other, more complex (and often more confusing!) critical feminisms emerged in the 1980s to challenge and critique both the women's movement and patriarchal relations, developing out of the general disillusionment with science and macro-political theory in the post-Chernobyl and post-Communist/Cold War eras. They were grounded, as Lather writes, in 'the disappointed hopes engendered by optimistic confidence in the continuing progress and imminent triumph of Enlightenment reason' (Lather 1991: 87).

They arose out of theories of poststructuralism and postmodernism, increasingly popular and influential in the social sciences towards the end of the 1980s. However, there was much confusion about what poststructuralism and postmodernism brought to the understanding of social relations. In fact, Hudson reveals the extent to which characterizations of postmodernism differ: seen alternatively as a myth, periodization, condition or situation, experience, historical consciousness, sensibility, climate, crisis, episteme, discourse, poetics, retreat, topos, and task or project (Hudson 1989: 140). Calinescu (1985) suggests however that postmodernism is principally used in two ways: as a historical category (namely defining a post-modern era) and as a systematic or ideal concept (namely a theoretical, analytic framework). Also, its relationship to poststructuralism lies in the acceptance by poststructuralists of the analytic framework but not the sense of periodization.

Thus, if postmodernist critiques aim to

deconstruct philosophical claims generally, and the very idea of possible unitary theories of knowledge, *post-modern feminism* also concentrates on such critiques but within feminism (Nicholson 1990). Accordingly, feminism is perceived as having much in common with postmodernism in questioning the 'foundationalism and absolutism' (Hekman 1990: 2) of the modern historical period (from the late eighteenth century onwards); in criticizing the claims to objectivity and rationality of modern (male) western scholarship; and in asserting that this epistemology must be displaced and a different way of describing human knowledge and its acquisition must be found.

Feminism, like postmodernism, poses a challenge to modern thought in every discipline from philosophy to physics, but the cutting edge of both critiques is to be in those disciplines that study 'man'. Both feminism and postmodernism are especially concerned to challenge one of the defining characteristics of modernism, the anthropocentric [male-centred] definition of knowledge. (Hekman 1990: 1-2)

However, Hekman makes the point that feminism is also tied to the universalisms of Enlightenment epistemology, both because of its modernist legacy (namely the emergence at the end of the eighteenth century of liberal feminism as part of Enlightenment thinking in, say, the work of Mary Wollstonecraft, 1792), and because of radical feminism's adherence to dichotomies and absolutes connected with revealing an essential nature of womanhood. Accordingly, a post-modern approach to feminism must necessarily reject outright the epistemological categories that have created and sustained the female-male dualism and also aim to reveal some of the flaws in contemporary feminism, such as the attempt to define an essential female nature (such as by Mary Daly), the failure to recognize the historical and cultural embeddedness of its own assumptions, or to replace the current 'masculinist' epistemology with a similarly flawed 'feminine-ist' epistemology. Moreover, if all knowledge (including that created by feminism) is perceived as interpretive and open to criticism this will add considerable substance and power to the overall feminist critique.

In contrast, *poststructural feminism* has placed more emphasis on the creation of new ways of seeing and knowing. Drawing on the

work of the French philosopher Michel Foucault among others, poststructural *feminism* seeks to analyse in more detail the workings of patriarchy in all its manifestations—ideological, institutional, organizational and subjective. Moving away from the universals of liberal and radical feminism, social relations are viewed in terms of plurality and diversity rather than unity and consensus, enabling an articulation of alternative, more effective ways of thinking about or acting on issues of gender (Wallach Scott 1990).

A poststructural analysis, it is argued, differs fundamentally from structuralist analyses such as that of the linguist Saussure in that it recognizes the importance of 'agency' as well as structures in the production of social practices:

It recognizes not only the constitutive force of discourse and the social structures emerging through those discourses, but accords the possibility of *agency* to the subject. For children and anyone else not accorded full human status within society, agency stems from a critical awareness of the constitutive force of discourse. (Davies and Banks 1992: 3)

Thus people are not socialized into their personal worlds, not passively shaped by others but rather, each is active in taking up discourses through which he or she is shaped.

Moreover, feminist poststructuralism argues that what it means to be a 'woman' and/or to be acceptably 'feminine' shifts and changes as a consequence of discursive shifts and changes in culture and history. If the meanings of concepts such as 'womanhood' or feminism, for that matter, are necessarily unstable and open to contestation and redefinition, then they require continual scrutiny; according to Wallach Scott (1988: 5):

they require vigilant repetition, reassertion and implementation by those who have endorsed one or another definition. Instead of attributing transparent and shared meaning to cultural concepts, post-structuralists insist that meanings are not fixed in a culture's lexicon but are rather dynamic, always potentially in flux.

What poststructural feminism claims to be able to do, then, even if it lacks any substantive powerbase, is to offer discursive space in which the individual woman is able to resist her subject positioning (a specific fixing of identity and meaning). According to Weedon (1987: 105):

A constant battle is being waged for the subjectivity of every individual—a battle in which real interests are at stake, for example, gender-based social power—dominant, liberal-humanist assumptions about subjectivity mask the struggle.

As a 'reverse-discourse', feminism is positioned to challenge meaning and power, enabling the production of new, resistant discourses. Weedon suggests, however, that radical feminism has failed to do this thus far since it has run parallel to the hegemonic, male discourse, rather than subverting its power. On the other hand, while privileging the interests of women, feminist poststructuralism, Weedon argues, is more analytical and illuminating in revealing how power is exercised through discourse, how oppression works and how resistances might be possible.

Criticisms of postmodernism and post-structuralism have largely been concerned with questioning their appropriateness, although theoretically strong, for political action. Thus the charge that postmodernist (and indeed poststructuralist) feminism cannot provide a viable political programme because it rejects absolute values and verges on relativism, needs seriously to be addressed even though its rejection of male-defined knowledge and action is one of the most obvious goals of feminism.

The range of feminisms described above, I suggest, are those that have been of most influence to British feminism; however, other forms have had greater prominence in other cultures. In France, for example, different forms of feminism have emerged both out of *existentialism* and *poststructuralism/postmodernism*—indeed Tong claims that until recently, post-modern feminism was popularly referred to as 'French feminism' (1989: 217).

In the first instance, drawing on the work of the French existential philosopher Jean-Paul Sartre in her 1949 book *Le Deuxième Sexe*, Simone de Beauvoir (1953) conceptualized woman's oppression as unique, derived from her position as the Other, not only separate from man but inferior to him. Her perception of the effects on women of having and caring for children suggested to de Beauvoir that it was harder for a woman to become and remain 'a self', especially as a mother. Writing at a time when feminism was at a low point, de Beauvoir argued the case for cultural factors in women's oppression, seeing causes and rea-

sons beyond those suggested by female biology and physiology to account for why woman is invariably selected by society to play the role of the Other (de Beauvoir 1953). At the time of writing *Le Deuxième Sexe*, de Beauvoir declared that she was not a feminist, believing the class struggle to be more important and that women's rights would come with the achievement of socialism. In the 1970s, however, she joined the Women's Liberation Movement, latterly convinced of the need for women to unite to fight against the manifest continuation of sexual inequality in revolutionary, leftist societies.

Later, in the 1980s, younger French feminist writers such as Cixous, Irigaray and Kristeva drew on the work of de Beauvoir as well as the philosophical writings of Foucault, Derrida and Lacan, to develop a philosophy of *deconstructionism* which aims to illuminate the internal contradictions of the predominant systems of thought and also to reinterpret Freudian psychoanalytic theory and practice (Tong 1989). Cixous (Cixous 1971), for instance, applies Derrida's notion of 'difference' to writing, contrasting feminine writing (*l'écriture féminine*) with masculine writing (*littérature*) and arguing that these differences are psychically constructed. For a variety of socio-cultural reasons, masculine writing has reigned supreme over feminine writing with the consequence that man has been associated with 'all that is active, cultural, light, high or generally positive and women with all that is passive, natural, dark, low or generally negative' (Tong 1989: 224). However, the legacy of de Beauvoir is also clearly evident in this strand of French feminist thought since Cixous also asserts that man is the self and woman is his Other; and woman exists in man's world on his terms. She further argues that women need to write themselves out of the world men have constructed for them by putting into words the unthinkable/unthought, and by using women's own particular forms of writing.

As feminism has become more fractured, and identity politics more possible, other feminisms have continued to emerge: for example, *Christian feminism* (concerned with the creation of a feminist theology—e.g. Maitland 1983); *humanist feminism* (advocating equality that judges women and men by a single standard—e.g. Young 1985); *Muslim feminism* (which sees women's liberation as both

more threatening to Islam than it is in the West but also more broadly based—e.g. Mernissi 1985); *eco-feminism* (another broadly-based movement with aims ranging from a quest for a new spiritual relationship with nature to concern to empower women in developing countries—e.g. Vidal 1993) and so on. Conflicts within feminism led also to the use of labels of a more derogatory nature for the activities and beliefs of certain forms of feminism by those holding alternative views: for example, the terms 'revisionist', 'bourgeois', 'career' have all been applied to liberal feminism (Tuttle 1986) which has often been viewed by more radical feminist perspectives as conservative and conformist.

If anything is certain, it is that new feminisms will continue to emerge in the decades to come to reflect the different cultural, psychological and material concerns of new generations of women, rather than any terminal decline of feminism or entry into any post-feminist era.

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