TOWARDS ACHIEVING GREATER FEMALE PARTICIPATION IN NIGERIAN POLITICS (EXECUTIVE AND LEGISLATIVE POSITIONS): AN ANALYSIS OF POSTMODERN FEMINIST JURISPRUDENCE

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Abstract

Feminism and feminists have multidisciplinary viewpoints on challenges posed by various social theories that have shaped equality and equity on sexuality, gender, gender identity and gender expression. One of such is decentralizing the feminist agitation to achieve real change towards greater female participation in Executive and Legislative positions in Nigerian politics. Conventionally, feminism has evolved through in-depth analysis of inequality between the genders to more social and functional constructions of sexuality. Feminist theories evolved within different feminist schools of thought and generations. This is evident in several etymologically related fields such as feminist jurisprudence, feminist theories, feminist geography and feminist criticism. These theories examine the real or perceived male versus female inequities and inequalities along the intersectional lines of gender, gender roles, class, race and sexuality. The activists seek to eliminate power inequality. Academic discourse of these inequalities enables students of feminism, law, social justice and jurisprudence to expound on ways to change these skewed dynamics. This paper examines the decentralization of the feminist agitation in post-modern feminist jurisprudence. The study utilized a doctrinal approach of research to review primary and secondary sources. It found interesting certain aspects of feminist agitations and their intersections with jurisprudence. Recommendations were proffered on ways to decentralize these agitations for a more effective result.

Keywords: Feminist, Feminism, Jurisprudence, Essentialism, Nigeria.

Introduction

The development of feminist philosophy has been a remarkable journey toward gender equality and the acceptance of women's rights. A revolutionary change has occurred from its origins in classical feminism, which provided the framework for challenging established gender roles and promoting fundamental rights, to the creation of post-modern feminist jurisprudence. As a result of this transition, feminist activism has become more decentralized. Through this approach, feminist academics and activists work to bring about actual change by embracing all viewpoints and addressing intersectional issues. The goal of traditional feminism, which gained popularity in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, was to ensure that women had access to basic civil rights like the ability to vote, the right to equal education, and the right to own property. It was a pivotal period in feminist history that prepared the way for succeeding waves of activism. However, as time went on, many

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feminists realized that simply integrating into the existing patriarchal systems would not be enough to eliminate society's ingrained inequalities.

Postmodern feminist jurisprudence is a dynamic and complex strategy that developed in reaction to the constraints of classical feminism. It aimed to dismantle conventional power structures and the idea of a single, shared experience of women; stressing the significance of comprehending how identity markers like race, class, sexual orientation, and disability intersect with one another, realizing that these aspects greatly influence how oppression and privilege are experienced. As the feminist movement continues to fight for real and long-lasting change, its decentralized trajectory is a testament to its tenacity and adaptability. Postmodern feminist jurisprudence provides a way ahead to achieve true gender equality and justice for all by recognizing intersectionality and encouraging inclusivity. In this investigation, we will look more into the principles of postmodern feminist legal theory and how they have influenced the ongoing fight for a more just society.

Conceptual Clarifications

Beginning this academic journey necessitates a thorough examination of feminist thinking, from its earliest origins in classical feminism to the subtleties of post-modern feminist jurisprudence. A clear comprehension of the fundamental terms and concepts used in this analysis is essential to successfully navigate this trip. We may create a strong foundation for our comprehension of the developing feminist discourse by offering precise and thorough definitions. The importance of placing these phrases within the larger historical, social, and cultural context cannot be overstated. It enables us to understand the subtleties of their development and use across time, allowing for a more informed and nuanced understanding of the transformative trajectory of the feminist movement. Through this endeavor, we aim to reveal the complex layers of feminist theory, looking at how cultural norms, legal frameworks, and philosophical paradigms have both shaped and been shaped by it. We seek to provide light on the way to achieving true gender equality and tearing down oppressive institutions that have lasted throughout history by diving into the complexities of feminist philosophy.

***Jurisprudence*:** Jurisprudence has been variously defined. To the Roman Jurist, Ulpian,[1] it is the 'Knowledge of things divine and human'. It could also mean "a knowledge of the law," "a study of the nature and functions of the law; or a theoretical inquiry into the nature of justice and kindred matters. It could also be seen as the "Scientific synthesis of the essential principles of law"

The science of jurisprudence has developed through an attempt to systematize, criticize and classify law. In so far as jurisprudence is concerned, it is related with the rules of external conduct of human beings, rules which people are required to observe and obey, therefore, as of necessity, it is, related to such other sciences as economics, ethics, sociology, philosophy, anthropology, political science, psychology etc."

Various methods of jurisprudence have been enunciated by different scholars,[2] including Analytical jurisprudence which is a critique of law in terms of strict logic. While Historical Jurisprudence tries to interpret the laws in terms of history, Functional Jurisprudence on the other hand is the study of the functions of the many concepts in law as well as the social interests or the systematic analysis of what law is, which John Austin significantly differs in acceding to..

***Feminist Jurisprudence*:** Feminist jurisprudence cannot be discussed without a dive into contemporary jurisprudence because it is a subset of contemporary jurisprudence like Racial jurisprudence. Feminist agitation arose from gender essentialism, which portrays men and women as having innate attributes that are unique that make their classification into different genders in the society. Essentialism assigns gender roles that are side by side, with one, giving rise to the other. There are learnt behaviors in a given society that are considered either feminine or masculine by a given society, and essentialism is the claim that these behavioral attributes are due to the inherent

[1] HH Brown, 'Ulpian's Definition of Jurisprudence' (1921) 41 *Canadian Law Times* 758 <http://heinonline.org/HOL/LandingPage?handle=hein.journals/canlawtt41&div=116&id=&page=> accessed 14 April 2026.

[2] BA Iheme, *A Handbook on Jurisprudence and Legal Theories* (2nd edn, 1994) 2.

biological composition that creates gender[3]. A feminist is seen as someone who scrutinizes women's role and experience in various fields of endeavor such as education, family, work place, etc. They focus on gender inequalities with the aim of achieving equality, which would require radical change in the political, economic and social spheres.[4]

Many proponents of feminism challenge the idea that there exists a singular, "essential" women's experience that can be divorced from the complexities of social class, race, and other societal realities. This viewpoint contends that such a perspective might inadvertently suppress certain voices in favor of privileging others, particularly neglecting marginalized voices like those of black women, who are often unheard within the mainstream of legal discourse. In recognizing the pervasive influence of patriarchy across all facets of society, women who identify this power structures propose feminist theories of law. By doing so, they aim to unveil and rectify the imbalances and injustices perpetrated within both public and private spheres, advocating for a legal framework that addresses the intersecting challenges faced by women of different backgrounds. This inclusive approach to feminism fosters an environment where all perspectives are acknowledged and valued, amplifying the voices of those who have long been marginalized. By engaging with diverse experiences and perspectives, feminist movements can evolve into more holistic and effective vehicles for societal transformation, striving towards a future where equality and justice are truly attainable for all, regardless of their social position or background.

They demonstrate the influence of patriarchy on the socio-economic condition of women and call for reforms to correct the gender injustice, exploitation, restriction, etc.[5]

History and theory of feminist jurisprudence

History of Feminist jurisprudence can be traced from contemporary jurisprudence as a fight against race and patriarchy. Feminism sometimes connotes agitations towards achieving economic, political, and social equality between men and women as well as legal protection for women. It encompasses several theories of gender inequality which evolved at different times. These theories advocate and campaign for women emancipation, empowerment, entitlements and rights. Feminism influenced several perspectives in many spheres of life in Western society. The activists fought for women's interests, bodily integrity, autonomy, capacity to contract, own property, vote, abortion, reproduction including access to contraception. They also canvassed for equal opportunity to employment, equal remuneration, protection from rape, sexual harassment, domestic violence, etc.

Feminist theories and agitation gained widespread popularity and waves in the 1970's, although reference to it in public parlance started in the 1940's.[6] Historically, according to Humm and Walker, this agitation can be described in three waves.[7] The first wave of feminist agitations started in the nineteenth century, continued till the end of that century, then into the early years of the twentieth century. It focused mostly on women's suffrage, especially their right to vote.[8] *Voltairine de Cleyre*, and Margaret Sanger, were some of the activists of this generation who campaigned mainly for women's sexual, reproductive, and economic rights at this time.[9] In 1854, Florence Nightingale fought for the establishment of female nurses as adjuncts to the military.[10] In the United States, this wave of activism was pioneered by Lucretia Mott, Lucy Stone, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, and Susan B.

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[3] 'Feminist Legal Theory' (University of California Davis School of Law) <http://femlegaltheory.blogspot.com/2012/09/essentialism-and-gender-roles.html> accessed 14 April 2026.

[4] R Delmar, cited in C Beasley, *What is Feminism?* (Sage Publications 1999) 27–28.

[5] M Akram, 'Feminist Legal Theory' (A Pakistani Notebook, 20 January 2015) <https://apakistaninotebook.wordpress.com/2015/01/20/feminist-legal-theory/> accessed 14 April 2026.

[6] K Hepburn refers to the "feminist movement" in the 1942 film *Woman of the Year*.

[7] P Singh, 'A Study on the Waves of Feminism' (2018) 5(12) *Journal of Emerging Technologies and Innovative Research* <https://www.jetir.org/papers/JETIR1812A22.pdf> accessed 14 April 2026.

[8] K Offen, 'Defining Feminism: A Comparative Historical Approach' (1988) 14(1) *Signs* 119 <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3174664> accessed 14 April 2026.

[9] *Ibid.*

[10] National Army Museum, 'Florence Nightingale: The Lady with the Lamp' <https://www.nam.ac.uk/explore/florence-nightingale-lady-lamp> accessed 14 April 2026.

Anthony. They worked for the abolition of slavery and then led the agitation for the right of women to vote.[11] American first-wave feminism also involved others such as Frances Willard, who led conservative Christian groups. Some other radical feminists in this wave include Matilda Joslyn Gage and they expressed themselves within the National Woman Suffrage Association or individually. American first-wave feminism culminated in the passage of the Nineteenth Amendment to the United States Constitution in 1919, empowering women to vote in all states.[12]

The second wave extended from the 1960's to 1980's and dwelt on legal and social rights for women. The proponents[13] saw it as a continuation of the earlier phase of feminism involving the suffragettes in the United Kingdom and United States of America. Estelle Freedman, the famous scholar drew comparisons between the first and the second waves of feminism emphasizing that the first wave focused on rights such as suffrage, while the second wave was largely concerned with other issues of equality, such as ending discrimination. The author and feminist Carol Hanisch[14] coined the slogan "The Personal is Political", which highlighted personal experiences of women and became synonymous with the second wave. Second-wave activists viewed women's cultural and political inequalities as intertwined and as symptoms and signs of sexist power structures. Simone de Beauvoir, the renowned author and scholar in her treatise titled" The Second Sex"[15], examined in detail women's oppression. It set out a feminist existentialism and recommended a radical change in moral values of the society that act against women empowerment. As an existentialist, she agreed with Jean-Paul Sartre's assertion that existence precedes essence; hence "one is not born a woman, but the society makes one a woman." Their argument hinged on the social construction of Woman as the other. This, de Beauvoir highlighted as fundamental to the societal oppression of women. She held that historically women have been considered deviant and abnormal and argues that even Mary Wollstonecraft proposed that men are the ideal toward which women should aspire. Hence, for feminism to dismantle the obstacles to equality and equity, this attitude must be set aside[16]. Other scholars such as Betty Friedan[17] in her piece titled 'The Feminine Mystique' criticized the idea that women could only find fulfillment through keeping the home, having children and bringing them up. In the book, Friedan hypotheses that women are influenced by the unfounded theories that enjoins them to find identity and essence in their lives through their husbands and children. Such thinking makes women completely lose their identity, which becomes subsumed in that of their family.

The third wave extends from the 1990's to the present day, and addresses the perceived failures of preceding waves. It began in the mid-90's and was driven by post-colonial and post-modern orientation. In this wave many feminist beliefs were deconstructed, including the concept of "universal womanhood," and heteronormativity[18]. The movement broadened the parameters of feminism. It was more inclusive of several groups of women who were previously excluded on the prejudice of race, class and sexual orientation. This raised a forum which highlighted the multifaceted experiences of young women, a section of women that is consistently misrepresented by older generations, the mainstream media, and other avenues[19].

This wave of feminism underscored the personal characteristics of individual women and political contradictions, thereby including women pluralities and refusing to follow a particular

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[11] FE Dudden, 'Women's Rights, Abolitionism, and Reform in Antebellum and Gilded Age America' in *Oxford Research Encyclopedia — American History* <https://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780199329175.013.20> accessed 14 April 2026.

[12] B Elinor, 'Women's Rights Movement' in *Encyclopædia Britannica* (Encyclopædia Britannica, 16 December 2023) <https://www.britannica.com/event/womens-movement> accessed 14 April 2026.

[13] I Whelehan, *Modern Feminist Thought: From the Second Wave to "Post-Feminism"* (Edinburgh University Press 1995).

[14] B Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique* (1963) (WW Norton, 2nd edn 2013).

[15] S de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex* (1949) H Parshley tr (Vintage 1989).

[16] *Ibid.*

[17] Friedan (n 14).

[18] M Rampton, 'Four Waves of Feminism' *Pacific Magazine* (Pacific University, 25 October 2015) <https://www.pacificu.edu/magazine/four-waves-feminism> accessed 14 April 2026.

[19] K Jacob, 'Analyzing the Third Wave of Feminism' *Feminist Ezine* <http://www.feministezine.com/feminist/historical/Third-Wave-Feminism.html> accessed 14 April 2026.

feminist activist line.[20] They were stronger and more empowered, without attempts to victimize anyone. They defined themselves as subjects, not as objects of a sexist patriarchy. An aspect of third wave feminism is the celebration of ambiguity and refusal to think in terms of "us versus them." Most third-wavers do not call themselves "feminists" and reject the word because they find it limiting and exclusionary.

Theories of Feminism: The feminist agitation highlights women's injuries socially, sexually, politically, educationally and economically. It also criticizes the epistemology of Jurisprudence where everything is seen from the male perspective. Some theories on this subject have argued that patriarchal principles determine the construction of our understanding and knowledge of law, therefore the government that makes and enforces the law needs to become stakeholders in the struggle to include the interests of women. Discrimination against the female gender, which is fostered by power imbalances and patriarchal stereotyping, persists in both private and public spheres both in times of conflict and in peace. It cuts across cultural, national , social and religious boundaries. This is mirrored in laws, policies and practice, hence, the government needs to be involved.

The major theories of feminism include, radical, radical-libertarian, radical-cultural, liberal, socialist, cultural, eco, etc.

Radical Feminism: This school opines that it takes more than acts of legislation to change the dominance of males over females in the society. The proponents believe that a fundamental shift in society is key to the dissolution of patriarchy. They usually conflict with the liberal feminists. They aim to free both men and women from the society assigned gender roles. The goal is to overhaul this arrangement by any possible means. Some radical feminists are of the opinion that they must fight men, patriarchy, and the gender system that confines them to rigid social roles. They fight to reject these roles, all aspects of patriarchy and in some cases, they reject men as well[21]. Although this argument cannot be sustained as many feminists have dissociated themselves from this thinking by clearly stating that radical feminism opposes patriarchy, not men[22]Radical feminism adopts a more radical approach to inequality between men and women. In contrast to liberal feminism, the radical school argues that a social revolution for the sake of women is the only means for liberation of all women. This school of thought highlights the difference between women and men. They engage in groupings that seek to exclude males completely. Overall, the proponents of radical feminism belong to two groups with very different views. One of such is the radical libertarian Feminism.

Radical-Libertarian Feminism: This school of thought firmly believes that the societal constraints imposed on women due to reproduction and traditional femininity significantly curtail their ability to participate fully and effectively in all aspects of society. Arguing for a more androgynous approach, they challenge conventional female gender roles and actively defy sexual norms, asserting their right to have complete control over their sexuality. Embracing an ethos of empowerment, they advocate for the utilization of artificial reproductive methods to minimize the time devoted to pregnancy, thus enabling women to focus more on pursuing economic endeavors and self-determined life paths.

In their pursuit of autonomy and bodily agency, Radical-Libertarian feminists passionately advocate for the widespread availability and accessibility of contraception, safe abortion, and various forms of birth control. By advancing these reproductive rights, they endeavor to liberate women from the shackles of unwanted pregnancies, providing them with greater control over their own bodies and life choices. Ultimately, their radical stance seeks to create a society where women can thrive unhindered by traditional gender expectations, fostering an environment of genuine equality and self-determination for all individuals.

Radical-Cultural Feminism: Radical-Cultural feminists hold counter distinctive opinions from radical-libertarian feminists. They opine that women should be proud of and exude their femininity

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[20] *Ibid.*

[21] M Akram, 'Radical vs Liberal Feminist Legal Theory' (A Pakistani Notebook, 31 January 2015) <https://apakistaninotebook.wordpress.com/2015/01/31/radical-vs-liberal-feminist-legal-theory/> accessed 14 April 2026.

[22] *Ibid.*

as it is better than masculinity. One of the activists, Mary Daly suggests finding the "wild female within". This type of radical feminist sees sex and penetration as male dominated. They associate sex with female subordination, porn, rape and abuse that must be eliminated. They believe that reproduction enhances the power of women.

Liberal Feminism: The gravamen of liberal feminists is that all people are made equal by God and should be equal in all respects. They hold that discrimination arises from the socialization process for men and women, which supports patriarchy and keeps men in positions of power. Liberal feminists are of the opinion that women have the equal mental capacity as men and should be given equal opportunities in political, economic and social spheres.[23] It should be left for women to choose, not have their life chosen for them because of their gender. Ultimately, women must be equal to men. Liberal feminists[24] advocate for legislation that can eradicate the societal obstacles for women. They want laws for equal opportunities and rights for women, equal access to jobs and equal pay. Because eliminating these hindrances directly confronts the elements of patriarchy and frees women from the shackles of oppression. Liberal feminist is seen as the jurisprudence behind *Reed v Reed*[25] where the Supreme Court held, that a law that discriminated against women violated the Constitution. The Court recognized that women had a constitutional right to equal protection of the law, turning from a long list of previous rulings that allowed women to be excluded from juries, or the legal profession, or even bartending. These were on the grounds that women needed to be protected from the rough-and-tumble of the workplace or the public places, or confined to a particular sphere of life and home[26]. The same also in the case, *Califano v Goldfarb*,[27] The Court was confronted by the dependency test for widowers to receive social security benefits. Before this case, the rule was that if you were a widow, you would get social security benefits; but a widower would have to prove that he was actually dependent on his wife as the wage earner, in order to get those benefits. That rule was struck down, as being based on gender stereotypes in *Califano v Goldfarb*. As a result, today tens of thousands of widowers are awarded these benefits every year. After this decision, there was a twenty-fold increase in the number of widowers that received those benefits. It also changed the law in public education towards women, as they were also seen as wage earners. Also, the decision led to other rulings opening up public nursing schools to men and opening up military colleges to women. That neither of the institutions can have single-gender admission policies based on false assumptions about what sort of education is best for one gender or the other. These changes became revolutionary on perceptions of control over marital property, with the courts striking down laws providing that husbands had exclusive control over jointly owned property. In spite of these landmark achievements, radical feminists disagree with liberal feminists for being solely focused on only equal pay in the public sphere.

They argue that the 'sameness approach' brings women on the same threshold as men. They queried how could this thinking applies in spheres where men either cannot or usually do not relate for example pregnancy, abortion, sexual violence? Activism of liberal feminists' accounts for several legislative reforms that have elevated the status of women. This is especially so in spheres of political rights, health and education. However, liberal feminism seems to concentrate on the legislative aspect. It is therefore criticized for not breaking down the hardcore practices of society and patriarchy that continues to suppress women.

The liberal feminist is less aggressive than the radical feminist, seeking equality. In essence, they do not want women to be superior to men, as that would result in the reverse injustice, that they

[23] Liberals believed equality in the public sphere; for them men have more rights and power than women, and to counter that they seek reforms through which equality can be established — see L Simpson.
[24] B Friedan (n 14).
[25] *Reed v Reed* 404 US 71 (1971); see also *Weinberger v Wiesenfeld* 420 US 636 (1975).
[26] *Bradwell v Illinois* 83 US 130 (1872); see also *Hoyt v Florida* 368 US 57 (1961).
[27] *Stanton v Stanton* 420 US 7 (1975); *Califano v Goldfarb* 430 US 199 (1977).

are fighting against, but instead their desire is to see men and women viewed with equal standing and status.[28]

Socialist Feminism: This theory anchors its position on the link between class structure and the inequality against women. Working men are rewarded handsomely because they produce tangible, economic goods. On the contrary, women's work at home is not valued. This economic reward empowers men to control women. They rebut the theory that biology pre-determines one's gender, insisting that social roles are not inherent. Socialist feminists[29] criticize capitalism and patriarchy. They believe that all women experience the same oppression just for being a woman; that the way to end it, is to abolish social class and gender groupings. They insist that women must work side by side with men in political and economic endeavors and must see each other as equals. They focus on the society in general, especially social relations in the community, highlighting inclusivity of race, ethnicity and other perceived fault lines.

Cultural Feminism: This theory seems a departure from others. They admit that there are differences between men and women. Hey also traces these differences to fundamental biological factors, stating that women must understand this and make the best of these differences. For example, they believe that women are naturally kind and gentle. Cultural feminists believe that because of these differences, political leadership by women across the world would lead to less wars and more peace, making the world a better place.[30] Essentially, male values of independence, hierarchy, competition and domination cause crisis and wars; whereas female values association, dependence, cooperation, relationships, community, sharing and trust which breeds peace.

Eco- Feminism: Eco-feminists postulate that male dominance is damaging to both the environment and women. They trace a link between a man's desire to dominate women and the wilderness, for the purpose of complete control. They argue that this desire destroys both women and the Earth.[31]

They opine that women understand and are one with nature, hence the terms Mother Nature or Mother Earth. This understanding and relationship could make humans live in harmony with one another and with the earth.

Post- modern feminist jurisprudence

Postmodernism is an idea of the late 20th century, championed by the French philosopher Jean-François Lyotard in 1979 but with its roots firmly traced to the late1800.[32]. According to the modernist, history is a process of evolution from the traditional life through liberalism, capitalism to the industrial revolution with its accompanying self-consciousness. In contrast postmodernism rejects the focus on self and encourages group consciousness. For clarity, the concepts postmodern and post structural are sometimes used as synonyms, both terms signaling a "crisis of confidence in conceptual systems".[33] However, postmodernism is "an American term"[34] that applies in different socio-cultural areas of life. In the early 1990s it was inclusive of post structuralism.[35]

Postmodern feminism does not connote a single theory or a grand theory. It does not believe in a single 'truth'. It applies techniques of deconstruction to expose internal contradictions of apparently coherent system of thoughts[36]. These acted as an effective tool for dismantling patriarchal structures

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[28] M Wollstonecraft, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792) <https://scholarsbank.uoregon.edu/xmlui/bitstream/handle/1794/788/vindication.pdf> accessed 14 April 2026.

[29] A Jaggar, *Feminist Politics and Human Nature* (Rowman & Allanheld 1983) <https://webruhan.files.wordpress.com/2014/08/jaggar-feminist-politics-and-human-nature-philosophy-and-society.pdf> accessed 14 April 2026.

[30] C Gilligan, *In a Different Voice: Psychological Theory and Women's Development* (Harvard University Press 1982).

[31] M Mies and V Shiva, *Ecofeminism* (Zed Books 1993).

[32] JF Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* (G Bennington and B Massumi trs, Manchester University Press 1984).

[33] P Lather, *Getting Smart: Feminist Research and Pedagogy With/in the Postmodern* (Routledge 1991) 159.

[34] EA St Pierre, 'Refusing Alternatives: A Science of Contestation' (2004) 10(3) *Qualitative Inquiry* 348.

[35] *Ibid.*

[36] J Derrida, *Of Grammatology* (G Spivak tr, Johns Hopkins University Press 1976).

of law and jurisprudence. Postmodern feminists, following Lacan,[37] focus on translating the good old traditional psychoanalytic principles of Freud, with all its consequences of biological determinism and subordination of women.

Postmodern feminists generally depart from any specific prototype of what a feminist should be, by avoiding "phallogocentric thinking," or theories that concentrate on any absolute term. They dwell on both feminist theory and practice[38], thereby creating a nexus between idealism and realism. Postmodern feminist proponents argue against any essentialism and do not believe that abstract, categorical theories derived from assumptions about human nature can serve as the basis of knowledge[39]. They view an individual as made up of multiple institutional and ideological forces that, in various ways interact, intersect and even contradict each other.

Theorists of the Postmodern school do not proffer a single answer to the challenges women face. This is principally due to their non-belief in a single solution to anything. In addition, if they try to propose the solution, it would suggest that all women's oppressions are alike and is a unitary thing. They believe that the solution to male dominance over women requires contextual evaluation that focuses on the peculiarity of human experience. Postmodern Feminism theory is based on propositions of Foucault[40], de Beauvoir, as well as Derrida and Lacan. Through their multiplicity of propositions, there is a common thread, because they accept the male/female binary as a main categorizing force in the social fabrics of our society. Through the works of Simone de Beauvoir, the female can be seen as having been molded into the role of the 'other'. They argue against the patriarchal aspects of the structure of society and the dominant order. Many of them repudiate the feminist label, as it reflects an essentialist position. The theory is open to several interpretations. It is designed to see multiple truths, multiple roles, multiple realities as part of its focus. It rejects a single essential nature of women and creates a useful philosophy for diversity in feminism because of its acceptance of multiple truths and rejection of essentialism."[41]

This position is glaringly different from some other feminist theoretical frameworks. Within postmodern feminism, feminist empiricism, or liberal feminism, believes in equal opportunity as the primary focus. They concentrated their efforts on creating a level playing field. It interrogates the events within the structure rather than the nature of the structure of human interactions. To them, to agree with the idea that there is a single truth misled liberal feminists. In this sense postmodern feminism appears somewhat radical in nature. One of the renowned postmodern feminists, Luce Irigaray[42] whose main thrust is to liberate women from men's philosophies, including the ones of Derrida and Lacan, on which her theory is built. Irigaray enunciated three strategies for a woman to "experience herself as something other than 'waste' or 'excess' in the little structured margins of a dominant ideology."[43] First is build a gender neutral language, second is to "engage in lesbian and autoerotic practice, for by virtue of exploring the multifaceted terrain of the female body, women will learn to speak words and think thoughts that will blow the phallus over;" Third is to "mime the mimes men have imposed on women. If women exist only in men's eyes, as images, women should take those images and reflect them back to men in magnified proportions."[44] Ultimately, postmodern feminism led to some of the major creative discourses in the last thirty years. Its main approach, research analysis, has been used in various fields to interrogate many different assertions. This has

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[37] J Lacan, *Écrits: A Selection* (A Sheridan tr, Tavistock Publications 1977).

[38] H Cixous, L Irigaray and J Kristeva; see R Tong, *Feminist Thought: A More Comprehensive Introduction* (4th edn, Westview Press 2014) 193–194.

[39] S Gannon and B Davies, 'Postmodern, Post-structural, and Critical Theories' in SN Hesse-Biber (ed), *Handbook of Feminist Research: Theory and Praxis* (Sage Publications 2007) 78.

[40] M Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (A Sheridan tr, Allen Lane 1977) 120.

[41] H Olson, 'The Power to Name: Marginalizations and Exclusions of Subject Representation in Library Catalogs' (Unpublished PhD dissertation, University of Wisconsin-Madison, 1996) 19.

[42] L Irigaray and J Kristeva, in R Tong, *Feminist Thought: A More Comprehensive Introduction* (4th edn, Westview Press 2014).

(Kristeva, New French Feminisms, as quoted in Rosemarie Tong)

[43] Tong (n 42) 227.

[44] *Ibid* 228.

produced advancements and logical theories that have revitalized the feminism struggle by questioning many previous assumptions that were not critically evaluated. It has also encouraged further research and activism on contemporary feminism.

Challenges facing post-modern feminism

Postmodern feminism has not been without criticisms. A key criticism is its affirmation of the link between the feminine and the biological body of women. Several authors believe that the post-modern feminist restrains women over male and the masculine. Some feminists in the mold of Irigaray opine that postmodern feminism's embrace of the feminine, or "mime the mimes men have imposed on women", feels like the subjugation of women by the male dominant society. That some of them did not wish to wear dresses when their mothers tried to make them go to the patriarchal church. That they do not want to wear such dresses as an identity. Also, many see the effort of postmodern feminism to deconstruct feminist theories and arguments against essentialism as a way of destroying the schools of thought rather than building them, which is not useful to feminism ultimately. Similarly, the skepticism of postmodern feminism to categorize women as a basis of grounding theory or political action, have been attacked as precluding political action and preventing the reaching of the goal of ending women oppression.

As empowering as the postmodern feminist widely varying viewpoints looks in its theoretical framework, some feminists fear that this diversity may lead to potential loss of the feminist community. This is principally because with no clear philosophy accepted by all feminists, it is difficult to achieve effective political action.

Just as postmodernism as a general concept, postmodern feminism is criticized for its rejection of linear construction as being apparent nonsensical writing. The other theorists see much of the writing of post-modernists in rejecting linear construction as elitism. The critics contend that only few academics can participate. The rejection of essentialist theories by postmodern feminists creates an apparent lack of conceptual framework for the understanding of postmodern feminism which is clearly reflected in these criticisms. Many authors query how postmodern or post structural deconstructions can explain the corporeal enfleshed actions that impact on women's lives negatively? How can hypothesis help to explain rape, birth, menstruation, etc and how these exist in the flesh of women's bodies? Whether their theories inevitably entail a degree of "somatophobia"[45] That is unhelpful for feminists? For example, Foucault[46] wrote that "the body is the inscribed surface of events", which is another way of criticizing post-structural thought as an exclusionary mechanism among the intellectual constructions of post-modern feminism. Similarly, Ramazanoglu in 2002 opined that post-modern feminist paradigms are intellectually elitist and constitutes a disadvantage to many feminists: "The difficulties and abstractions of so much postmodern thought have coincided with a period of competitive career pressures in higher education so that only certain kinds of feminist thought are deemed worthy of respect, funding or promotion."[47] One may argue, in contradistinction to the positions of the critics, that feminism and critically post-modern and post-structural paradigms have much in common to begin with, in that they share a "hermeneutics of suspicion." Feminist agitations are commonly denominated by their belief in a multidisciplinary approach to the agitation. Beasley in 1999 described contemporary feminism "as a kind of empty shell into which may be poured any number of different concerns, details and explanations."[48] Consequently, Brown observed that despite the academic institutionalization of women's studies "contemporary feminist scholarship is not involved in group conversation, rather it focuses on respective disciplines, or bodies of theory, that are themselves rarely engaged with each other."[49]

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[45] E Grosz, *Volatile Bodies: Toward a Corporeal Feminism* (Indiana University Press 1994); V Kirby, 'Corporeal Habits: Addressing Essentialism Differently' (1991) 6(1) *Hypatia* 4.
[46] M Foucault, 'Nietzsche, Genealogy, History' in P Rabinow (ed), *The Foucault Reader* (Pantheon Books 1984) 83.
[47] C Ramazanoglu and J Holland, *Feminist Methodology: Challenges and Choices* (Sage Publications 2002).
[48] C Beasley, *What is Feminism?* (Sage Publications 1999) 28.
[49] W Brown, *Politics Out of History* (Princeton University Press 2001) 33.

It is time feminists start treating disciplinary borders with some disdain.[50] They should not be seen as autonomous states or bodies of knowledge but as historical and archaeological analysis would show, they are inventions of the commodification of knowledge and thinking arising from enlightenment and development over the generations. Hence, through the interstices between disciplines, as between discourses, that new thinking may be fruitfully generated.

Decentralizing postmodern feminism

Post-modern feminism's decentralization represents a paradigm shift from the established top-down, consistent method of feminist activism. A decentralized strategy emphasizes the diversity of identities and experiences within the feminist movement rather than imposing a single goal that might not resonate with the various realities of all women. With this fundamental change, it is acknowledged that women do not represent a single race, ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation, or socioeconomic background; rather, they come in a variety of forms, each with its own set of challenges and victories. Decentralizing postmodern feminism guarantees that individuals who have previously been marginalized or ignored are given proper respect and agency in forming feminist agendas and strategies by prioritizing the views and experiences of oppressed groups. It seeks to establish a setting where these voices are actively amplified in addition to being heard. In this process, it is important to aggressively seek out and promote the stories of women of color, women with disabilities, and members of other marginalized populations. The versatility of this method to incorporate a wide range of viewpoints is one of its main advantages.

Postmodern feminists are better able to understand the complex relationships between privilege and oppression that influence women's lives by acknowledging the interconnectedness of gender with other social categories like race, class, and sexuality. This intersectional lens enables focused and successful lobbying for diverse topics by enabling a more nuanced awareness of the difficulties experienced by distinct communities. Decentralization also promotes an inclusive atmosphere within the feminist movement. It recognizes that because of their particular circumstances, certain women could feel excluded from or underrepresented in the mainstream feminist debate. Decentralized feminism fosters an atmosphere of empathetic, respectful, and collaborative relationships by providing room for various voices and ideas. Postmodern feminists can address the distinctive difficulties encountered by various communities and advance inclusivity by recognizing the many views.[51]

Decentralizing feminism entails actively soliciting feedback from women with a range of experiences, including those who are of various colors, ethnicities, socioeconomic statuses, sexual orientations, and abilities. This guarantees that strategies and policies are inclusive and take into account the multiple, interrelated elements of oppression. Feminist activism that is decentralized supports neighborhood and grassroots efforts. It promotes local organizing, giving people and communities the tools they need to fight for their own needs and rights. Collaboration between feminist organizations and other social justice movements is facilitated by decentralization. Diverse groups can raise their voices and collectively confront oppressive institutions by cooperating. Using a decentralized strategy, feminist activism acknowledges the value of cultural sensitivity. It honors and integrates regional traditions and customs. Feminist activism is made more receptive to the many needs of women by decentralizing it. This inclusiveness encourages marginalized groups to feel a sense of ownership and belonging, which promotes more long-lasting and revolutionary change. Decentralization in post-modern feminist jurisprudence might result in legal changes that specifically address the problems encountered by various communities. Changes to family law, rules governing the workplace, and safeguards against gender-based violence may all be part of this. A decentralized feminist movement is capable of advocating for policies at the local, regional, and global levels.

[50] See S Bricoleurs, *Feminist Methodologies for Critical Researchers: Bridging Differences* (AltaMira Press 2002).

[51] J Li, *Feminists without Feminism: Women's Online Movement in Contemporary China* (Master's thesis, Duke University, 2022) <https://dukespace.lib.duke.edu/dspace/bitstream/handle/10161/25366/Li_duke_0066N_16795.pdf> accessed 14 April 2026.

Policies become more relevant and effective when they take into account local settings and the experiences of different groups.[52]

Conclusion

The rise of postmodern feminism presents a compelling opportunity to address feminist issues in a fresh and transformative manner. Through its post structural and postmodern concepts, this movement initiates invigorating discussions that steer clear of essentialism and nihilism, thus paving the way for a brighter future, free from the oppression faced by women. The non-essentialist approach of postmodern feminism has triggered a significant paradigm shift, challenging traditional modes of thinking and ushering us into more optimistic and effective ways of co-existing. However, it is crucial to recognize that this discourse is an ongoing and dynamic process. The true impact of postmodern feminism becomes evident when we embrace its decentralized nature, promoting broad inclusivity. When men, women, and children all unite as activists working towards gender equality and equity, the transformative power of this movement multiplies exponentially. By fostering collaboration among diverse voices, we can create a society where everyone plays an active role in dismantling gender-based discrimination. This collective effort holds the potential to forge a more just and harmonious future for all.

[52] J Home, S Ahmed and ME Conway, 'Decentralizing Feminist Theory from Academia: Bringing Transfeminism and Disability Justice into Feminist Discourse' (2021) 9(1) *Journal of Feminist Scholarship* <https://digitalcommons.uri.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1267&context=jfs> accessed 14 April 2026.