

SOCU 450
Lecture 8
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Gender and Feminism

There are many varieties of feminism and many different feminists who changed the course of the world – radical feminists; liberal feminists; socialist feminists, etc. In this course, we will begin by reading the work of Charlotte Perkins Gilman, who was part of the first wave of feminism, from the late 19th century to the early 20th century. First wave feminists focused on women's legal rights, although the excerpt from Gilman assigned in this class focuses on equality in marriage –more a concern of second-wave feminism. The second wave started in the early 1960s and lasted until the early 1980s. Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* (1949) ushered in this second wave, and we read a famous excerpt from that book, "Woman as Other," in this course.

We end this unit, and the course, by reading the writing of three contemporary third-wave feminists –Patricia Hill Collins, Gloria Anzaldúa, and Paula Gunn Allen—who demonstrate that race and class intersect with gender, resulting in women of color having a qualitatively different life experience than that of the white, middle-class women who defined the first and second waves.

But what is feminism? Feminism is ultimately an ethical position that argues for the intrinsic dignity of the individual over and beyond gender categorization. Feminism is also a political position that seeks to ensure gender equality, the equal treatment of individuals in all spheres of life. What is patriarchy? Patriarchy is a system of gender domination where men design a society to suit their own interests and systematically exploit, degrade, and oppress females. What is gender? Gender is essentially a theatrical performance and a socially constructed category. Men play the role of being a man ("I like trucks and beer and sports!") and women play the socially assigned role of female ("I am emotional and like to shop"). If you want to find out how embedded gender roles are in "common sense," show up to a holiday dinner wearing lipstick and/or a dress (if you are a male) or shave your head and/or cut your hair short for this dinner (if you are a woman). Observe the reactions on everyone's face upon your arrival.

What is sexual objectification? This refers to a way of treating women and/or men as strictly a means for sexual pleasure as opposed to a whole person with intrinsic dignity.

Let's also cover a common misconception about feminism. Are feminists "man haters"? The answer is no. Feminists criticize and oppose the ideas and practices that lead to the oppression of women, in all realms --the personal as well as the political. Showing that the personal is political is one of the most significant contributions of feminism. Are you a feminist?