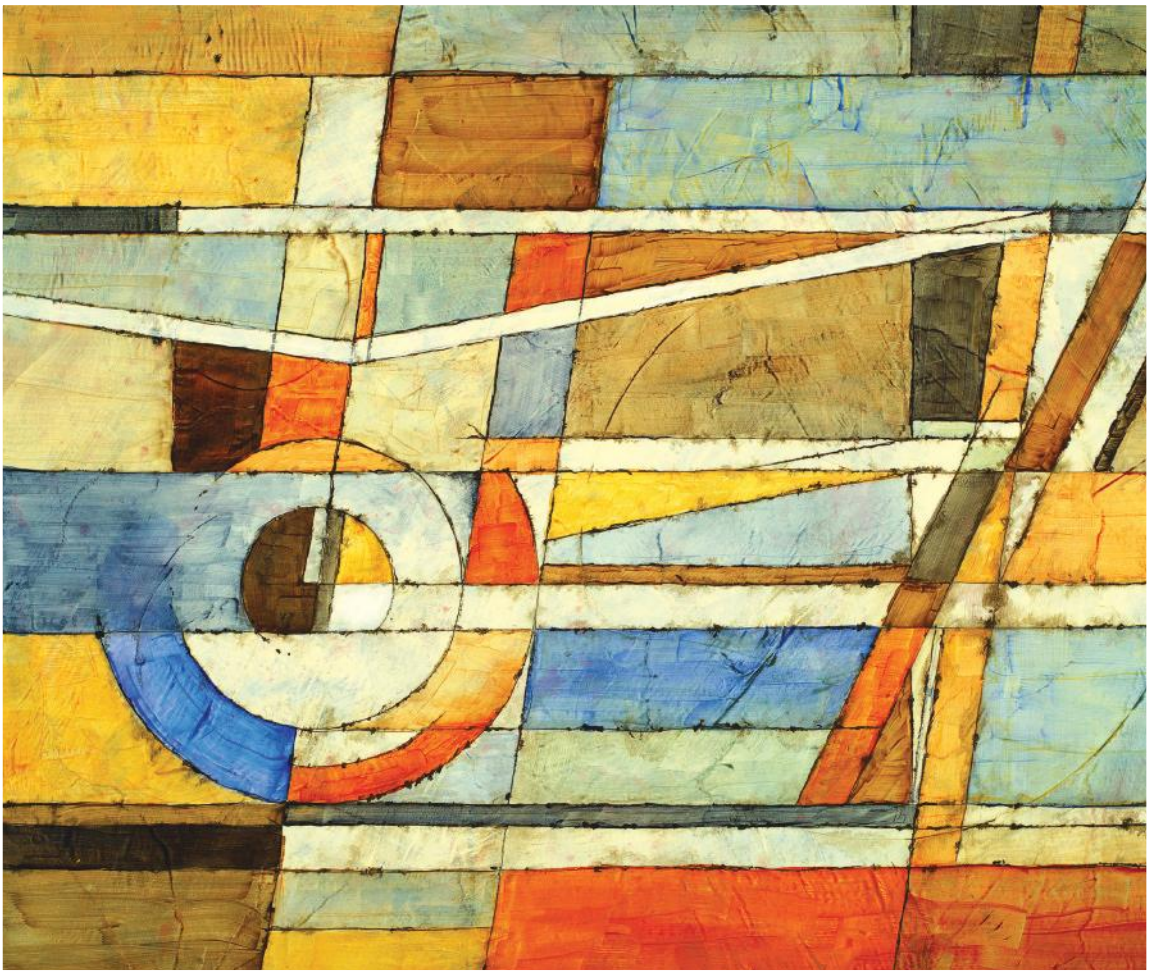


Feminist Issues

Race, Class, and Sexuality



Sixth Edition

Nancy Mandell • Jennifer Johnson

SIXTH CANADIAN EDITION

**FEMINIST ISSUES:
RACE, CLASS, AND
SEXUALITY**

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Preface

We are very pleased and proud to bring forward the 6th edition of *Feminist Issues*. Significantly revised, the new edition provides an in-depth analysis of key issues facing women in Canada. Politics, sexuality, social media, intimate relationships, life course challenges, and institutional barriers are some of the issues the authors address. While the text is aimed at the new undergraduate reader, seasoned students and practitioners of feminism(s), anti-oppression, and related areas of study will also find rich and engaging discussions of current feminist topics. No matter who you are, where you are or what your life circumstances, young girls and women experience oppression and omission. Sensitive to differences in age, gender, sexuality, language, region, and ethnicity, in this book our authors examine both continuing and new challenges facing women.

Since the 5th edition, there has been a veritable groundswell of media interest in feminist issues in Canada and transnationally. The continued widespread existence of sexual assault on university and college campus campuses, ongoing sexual harassment in workplaces, unyielding calls by Indigenous people and allies that challenge Canadian society to account for literally hundreds of missing and murdered Indigenous women, ongoing violence against women transnationally, and genuine engagement from feminist men's groups in shifting dominant ideas about masculinity have all come to the forefront of popular discussions about feminism. In order to ensure that media interest is more than fleeting, students of feminist ideas need to continue to build capacity for action. Whether your feminist action happens in your teaching, on social media, at your child's daycare, in the streets, at the kitchen table, or on the floor of the House of Commons, we think it is important that readers continue to have access to in-depth feminist discussion of the topics addressed in this book as a part of their/our reason to act.

The 6th edition includes nine new authors from across Canada who have singly or collaboratively authored new material for this introductory text. These wonderful new contributors broach the topics of critical race and Indigenous feminisms, transnational feminist theory, critical masculinity studies, sexuality and gender identity, violence against women, and health. Returning contributors have substantially revised and updated five chapters within the thematic areas of education, aging, beauty culture, mothering and work, education, and historical trajectories of select types of feminism. Every chapter is theoretically grounded and contains contemporary examples.

With the writing of this preface, we have also to mark the passing of our colleague, friend, and previous contributor, Dr. Sharon Rosenberg (July 31st, 2010). We remember Sharon as an internationally recognized, controversial, challenging, and well-loved theorist of cultural and feminist studies. We also remember her as a mentor of new feminist thinkers.

As always, we have sought contributors who are both seasoned academics as well as new-entry scholars in an effort to further collaborative research and teaching about feminism. We have done this by reaching out to scholars in universities of all sizes across Canada, who have deep commitments to the intellectual communities they work within.

The production of knowledge about feminism can be a minefield of politics, social tensions, and debate, both within communities that already consider themselves “feminist” (and there are many) and those who baldly oppose gender, racial, class, and sexual equality (and sadly, there still exist some of those as well). In other words, the production of knowledge about feminism is messy and often partial and incomplete. One of the most important features of this book is that authors write the material for this collection, drawing upon their own original research and assessment of their fields as they stand today. They have sifted through mountains of literature, firsthand interviews, popular media, policy and legal documents, and records of individual/collective experiences to distill for the reader some key ideas about their topic. Authors have been asked to present answers to the following questions: *Why is the topic an issue for feminism? Why discuss it now? How have some of the core issues for feminists been taken up within this topic? How would/how do feminists working on this topic define problems that exist for women?, and: What solutions does are posed for these problems?* In their answers, authors challenge our ideas about what topics feminism can be applied to and where feminist understandings of these issues still need to grow.

Putting together this collection of ideas, arguments, and research has been a privilege and a pleasure. The contributors and peer reviewers of this text have been generous with their time, constructive criticism, and written work. We thank each one of them for their work. For one of us—Jen Johnson—work on this collection represents a full circle return to a text that was first introduced to her as a student in 1995. Working with Nancy Mandell, the originator and editor of this text, has been a privilege and a tremendous learning experience. For Nancy, bringing Jen on board was an inspired choice as she has completely revitalized the discussion and moved it in new and fascinating directions. We each do our part in the ongoing struggles for women’s equality in Canada. We the editors and the contributors are very proud to offer this edition as our small contribution to these movements.

Acknowledgements

Numerous people have read versions of these chapters and generously offered rigorous and thoughtful critiques. Given their attention to peer review, we are confident that these chapters represent the best possible versions of the contributors' work and for this we are extremely grateful. We thank also the seven anonymous reviewers of the previous edition, feminist scholars from all over Canada who teach about feminism to 'new' audiences and to those students who have given invaluable feedback over the years—we are listening. At Pearson we would like to thank Madhu Ranadive, Matthew Christian, and Keriann McGoogan for their guidance and timely suggestions on the composition and framing of the collection. To Pearson's staff and copy editors, especially Ruth Chernia and Garima Khosla, we are grateful for your attention to detail and for bringing this collection to fruition.

Nancy would like to welcome Jennifer Johnson on board and thank her for agreeing to co-edit *Feminist Issues*. Jen's lively sense of humour and her considerable energy and enthusiasm for the project have made her an ideal collaborator. The sixth edition is markedly stronger because Jen has joined the team. Nancy also thanks the people from whom she gains strength and affection: her long time partner Lionel; her 'boys'—Jeremy, Ben, and Adam—and their partners—Marissa, Caroline, and Jamie—and now their children—Micah, Eli, Charlotte, Brooke, and Emily. As *Feminist Issues* has grown, so too has Nancy's family!

Jen is very thankful to Nancy for the opportunity to join her in co-editing this text—thank you for taking a chance on me! Working with you afforded me the opportunity to learn far more than I ever could have on my own. I am extremely thankful also to my research assistant, Taynia Rainville: thank you for your exceptional work ethic and ability to ask good questions fearlessly. To Shana, thank you for your patience into the many months of drafts and editing. My hope is that this book is one small part of shifting our culture to allow our trio of proto-feminists: Leandr , Rhys, and Ma l, a chance at living in a more just society.

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Chapter 1

Theorizing Women's Oppression and Social Change: Liberal, Socialist, Radical, and Postmodern Feminisms

Shana L. Calixte, Jennifer L. Johnson, and J. Maki Motapanyane

INTRODUCTION

Although feminism has come to mean many things to many people, we prefer the words of bell hooks who wrote: “Simply put, feminism is a movement to end sexism, sexist exploitation, and oppression” (2000, p. 1). Feminism begins with the premise that women’s and men’s positions in society are socially, economically, culturally, and historically shaped, not biologically predetermined. It is also premised on the idea that not all women experience gender inequalities in the same way. An understanding of this unequal distribution of power inevitably exposes other oppressions based on factors such as race, sexuality, class, dis/ability, and nationhood (St. Denis, 2007, p. 47). Feminism is political in that it aims to achieve gender equity in all spheres—social life, politics, economic conditions, language, culture, and many other areas. But feminists remain unclear about how best to achieve both general and specific redistribution of social and economic power.

In this chapter, we outline several historical and contemporary approaches to defining women’s oppression, their means for remedying this oppression, and the ways in which each perspective judges whether equity has been achieved. The first three of these theories are decidedly modernist and challenge oppression within the framework of gender dichotomies, while the fourth theory presented—postmodern feminism—attempts to shatter these altogether. Although not exhaustive, this chapter follows several historical trajectories of feminism in Western nations revealing how fundamental assumptions and ideas about gender have emerged and changed over time.

LIBERAL FEMINISM: KEY HISTORICAL POINTS, PRINCIPLES, AND GOALS

Liberalism is a philosophy of politics and scientific inquiry developed in the 17th and 18th centuries during a period of European social change called the “Enlightenment” or the “Age of Reason.” Liberal feminists use the core principles of liberalism to insist that

women be integrated into existing social, political, religious, and economic institutions in order to achieve equality with men. Specifically, liberal feminists use liberal ideas of rationality, meritocracy, equality of opportunity, and freedom of choice as core principles on which to achieve women's equality.

First, liberal feminists emphasize women's capacity for rational thought and thus their shared humanity with men. Early feminist thinkers argued strenuously that women's capacity for reason was the same as that of men. Mary Wollstonecraft, in *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792) scandalized her contemporaries by refuting the widely held idea that women were inherently simple, irrational, and emotional. Through formal education, Wollstonecraft claimed, women can develop their innate capabilities for intellectual thought and thus become better wives and mothers. Wollstonecraft's ideas anticipated arguments put forward by women in later centuries.

Second, liberal feminists endorse the concept of meritocracy. This principle emerges clearly in the works of Harriet Taylor Mill (1807–1858) and her long-time companion, the political philosopher John Stuart Mill (1806–1873). Harriet Taylor Mill argued radically for the desirability of women to earn and have control of their own property and money that she saw as the basis for achieving equality between the sexes. Only by earning their own status (instead of relying upon a man for their keep) and controlling their own property would women have a chance of realizing equality of opportunity with men in other spheres.

These two principles—rationality and meritocracy—have been particularly important in facilitating women's access to formal education. Early liberal feminists understood that, without a formal education, women could not advance in social status or political participation, and could not acquire other social and legal rights unless they held educational credentials equal to those of men. But in 19th century Canada, women faced many challenges in this regard. First, women who wanted further education found themselves up against the view that educated women compromised their natural roles as child-bearers (Garvie & Johnson, 1999). Second, some 19th century white women who wanted an education, particularly married women, were accused of “racial suicide” because the racial theories of the time presumed the moral superiority of white people and women's obligation to reproduce that “race” instead of going to university (Valverde, 1992). As well, some ethnic minorities and people of colour, such as members of the Black communities of eastern Canada and southern Ontario, found themselves unwelcome in white Protestant or Catholic schools. Black women were key in establishing separate schools as early as 1830, even prior to the formal abolition of slavery in Canada. Separate schools were not only a site of women's education but also a form of resistance to the racism Black people experienced from white Canadians (Kelly, 1998; Sadlier, 1994). In Canada West (now Ontario) and East (now Quebec), female teachers proliferated throughout the 1850s, providing what little education was considered necessary for girls, such as writing, reading, and needlework (Prentice et al., 1996). In 1858, Canada's first female university students studied at Mount Allison University in New Brunswick. They studied a limited range of topics that typically included literature, languages, rhetoric, history, and home economics (developed specifically for female students' entry into

post-secondary education). Typically, women students were segregated in all-female classrooms and required to sit apart from male students in adjoining rooms where they could hear the lecture but not be seen by the men (Garvie & Johnson, 1999). By the early 1900s in Canada, through informal but highly effective networks of women graduates, education for women came to be thought of as an enhancement of the young middle-class woman's "natural" qualities (Garvie & Johnson, 1999). The principles of rationality and meritocracy were thus exercised incrementally in the fight for early access to education.

Third, liberal feminists advocate equality of opportunity for women in all areas of social, economic, legal, and political life. This principle was critical in shaping liberal feminists' goal of getting women in Canada the vote. Between 1850 and 1920 liberal feminists pushed for women's suffrage.¹ Feminists lobbied the state, held demonstrations, and staged mock parliamentary debates to ridicule the men who upheld women's political and legal inequality. Suffragists used a variety of tactics to challenge the familiar dichotomy of "passive" femininity versus the "active" and political masculinity thought appropriate for political decision-making (Roome, 2001). Some felt that petitioning, letter-writing, and public speaking were the best tactics to achieve their goals. The work of maternal feminist and journalist Nellie McClung (1875–1951) in Manitoba is a good example of effective public speaking; she used wit to ridicule male politicians in the press. Maternal feminists argue that women's essential role as mothers imbues them as moral and caring people who have the best interests of children and communities at heart, thus making them well-suited to political participation.

Canadian women gained equality of opportunity to participate politically unevenly. Although most women were granted the federal vote in 1918, this still excluded most Indigenous people and people of Chinese origin (Cleverdon, 1974, p. 108). After 1918 the federal government divested itself of responsibility for granting the provincial franchise, so while some Manitoban women could vote provincially in 1916, others, such as their Québécoise counterparts, had to mobilize to bring 14 separate bills in 13 years to the Quebec legislature. Finally, under the leadership of Thérèse Casgrain (1896–1981) they enjoyed success in 1940. For Status Indian women, enfranchisement under the Indian Act required that they give up their association with a band, their status, and any land or property entitlements, a deeply unjust trade. Status Indian women achieved the vote in 1960 when the universal right to vote was introduced, though this cannot be attributed to the legacy of liberal feminism.

The movement for universal suffrage was often combined with women's attempts to correct other social inequities such as poverty. Maternal feminists and liberal feminists worked together along with socialist and conservative women toward the goals of social reform and, ultimately, the vote (Roome, 2001). Led by Dr. Emily Howard Stowe (1831–1903), the Toronto Women's Literary Club (established in 1876) reorganized as the Canadian Women's Suffrage Association in 1883 when some minor rights for women to vote in municipal elections were won (Prentice et al., 1996). In Quebec, women's organizing around suffrage and social problems such as poverty and health took place largely through women's Roman Catholic organizations, reflecting the appeal of Christian-based public service organizations such as the Women's Christian Temperance Union (WCTU) and the Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA). Their work centred on providing shelter

and educational programs for young, single, and poor women. With the slight increase in women's access to formal education and legislation such as the 1884 Married Women's Property Act (allowing married women to hold property exclusive of their husbands' ownership), feminists built the capacity for their movement (Prentice et al., 1996). Social reformers and religious organizations such as the WCTU were concerned about the state of urban dwellers, reacting to the poverty and malnutrition of the masses that came with urbanization and industrialization. In Western Canada, for example, where milk was more costly than alcohol, women began to make the connections between poverty, the availability of alcohol, and the violence of men toward women and children (McClung, 1915/1972).

While a national women's movement advocated for the vote for women, it did not advocate for every woman to have the right to vote. Social Darwinist ideas of racial purity as the basis for building a strong nation meant that Indigenous peoples, people of Chinese origin, and new immigrants from Eastern and Southern Europe were viewed as biologically inferior and denied the vote (Strong-Boag, 1998). Even social reformers argued for white women's superiority. Flora MacDonald Denison, a Canadian suffragist, was particularly critical of the morals of recent male immigrants (Prentice et al., 1996), while Emily Murphy (1868–1933), one of the “famous five” women who won women's right to take up public offices, such as appointment to the Senate of Canada in 1929 (Cleverdon, 1974, p. 149), wrote extensively on the threat of Chinese and Black men's corruptive tendencies to the moral purity of white women (Valverde, 1992). The white ribbons worn by WCTU activists signified white racial purity as much as they did the purity of milk over alcohol (Valverde, 1992). Despite the extensive political organizing of Black women such as Harriet Tubman (1820–1913) in the suffrage movement and of other women of colour in organizations such as the WCTU, white suffragists and social reformers persisted in the belief that their participation was additional, not central, to its eventual success (Sadlier, 1994; Valverde, 1992). Maternal feminists in particular embraced and applied the principles of equal opportunity and meritocracy but felt that white women had a superior moral and racial integrity, indicating white female suitability for political participation (Roome, 2001; Valverde, 1992).

Fourth, freedom of choice is a principle of liberal feminism. Freedom of choice is often understood as being closely related to the concept of equal opportunity, for without the opportunity to do so, you cannot freely *choose* anything. For example, the question of whether to stay home and care for your children or seek paid work is often understood as a question of choice for liberal feminism, a choice that requires equal opportunity in order to be exercised. The federal government had briefly empowered women to join the paid workforce during the Second World War by investing in subsidized daycare and encouraging women to join the war effort in traditionally male forms of employment (Timpson, 2001). After the war, women were encouraged by the media, religious institutions, and school systems to go back to the role of homemaking. In addition to the existence of sexist job descriptions and the lack of labour laws to prohibit sexist hiring practices in most fields, the post-war welfare state did not include a national daycare program (nor has any federal government since then), so many women had little choice but to fulfill their unpaid roles as mothers and wives. Women, who had previously worked outside the home,

and even those who had not, became increasingly focused on exercising their freedom of choice to engage in paid labour.

Liberal feminist principles and, in particular, equality of opportunity are evident again in the Royal Commission on the Status of Women, 1970 (RCSW), which is a benchmark moment of Canadian women's rights. It is important to understand the groundswell of activism leading up to the RCSW was not only an undertaking of liberal feminists but also included the efforts of many involved in other inter-related struggles, such as new immigrant activist networks (Brown, 1989; Calliste, 2001); renewed challenges to the federal Indian Act raised by First Nations, Métis, and Inuit peoples; and the revitalization of Indigenous women's leadership in their communities (Maracle, 2003, p. 71). Simultaneously, the gay and lesbian liberation movement was challenging the criminalization of homosexuality and in 1969 achieved its decriminalization (Kinsman, 1987). As well, gender-based labour organizing was gaining strength (Luxton, 2006). These movements provided a new base of women dissatisfied with their relationship to the state and ready to do something about it.

Strategically, the RCSW proposed a human rights framework that had equal opportunity as its goal (Timpson, 2001, p. 29). Headed by Florence Bird (1908–1998), the RCSW spent over a year touring the country receiving briefs and hearing presentations from individuals and groups that had something to say about the status of women in Canadian society. The entire process was televised so that the nation watched; feminists were hopeful that the public nature of the RCSW would help them hold the federal government to carrying out the recommendations.

Based on the input of more than 300 women's organizations across the country and many more individuals, the RCSW identified four major areas of importance for Canadian women: the right to choose homemaking or paid employment; the shared responsibility for child care among mothers, fathers, and society at large; the special treatment of women relating to their maternity; and the special treatment of women to help them overcome the adverse effects of discriminatory practices in Canadian society (Paltiel, 1997, p. 29). These recommendations supported the central liberal feminist principle of equality of opportunity for women. The RCSW made 167 specific recommendations to the federal government as to how the social, political, and economic status of women could be improved. Some were implemented; many more were not. For example, Canada still lacks a national daycare program that would allow more women equal participation in the labour force. Many liberal-feminist organizations, although recognizing that many more issues have been added to the agenda, still use the RCSW recommendations as a measuring stick for women's equality with men in Canada.

Contemporary and Global Dimensions of Liberal Feminist Thought

Perhaps surprisingly, Canada is a global leader in supporting women's equality in some areas to the exclusion of others. In education it is certainly a leader in most fields. Women were rare in Canadian university programs in medicine, the sciences, and engineering until the

1940s, when Canada's participation in the Second World War necessitated more doctors. Although some female physicians did practice medicine in Canada before the Second World War, the number of female students did not immediately approach the number of male students. After the Second World War the number of women seeking higher education in general arts increased dramatically. Women have worked their way slowly into universities and colleges and into traditionally male-dominated areas of study, such as the sciences and engineering, such that their numbers have begun to approach those of men or exceed them in some fields, such as in the arts and in the study of law at some universities. Access to education is one of the major accomplishments of liberal feminism.

As a result of high levels of education, Canadian girls and women enjoy high overall labour force participation (62%) when you consider that in many countries women over the age of 15 account for far less than half of the active labour force (for example, 15% in Algeria and 40% in Italy) (World Bank, 2014). In contrast to Canada's relatively stable paid labour force access for women, current trends tell another story. In fact, Canada now ranks 19th in a measure called the Global Gender Gap set out by the World Economic Forum, where it lags behind countries that have experienced major wars and social upheavals in the late 20th century, such as Nicaragua (6th), Rwanda (7th), or large economic crises that have necessitated periodic mass migration, such as the Philippines (9th). Whereas in the 1990s it ranked among the top countries in the world according to the United Nations Gender Equality Index, Canada now ranks 23rd globally (Prasad & Freeman, 2015).

Why the change? Among many other factors, these statistical tools look at the significance of persistent gender wage gaps as a main indicator of equality between men and women in the prime of their work lives. Statistics Canada reports that the percentage of women ages 25 to 54 years old in the paid workforce was 81% in 2005 and has approached that of men, which was 91% in that same year (Statistics Canada, 2006b). Whereas women's earnings relative to men even narrowed until the late 1990s, their average hourly wage rate has stayed consistent at 82 to 83% of men's average wage, where it appears to be stuck (Drolet, 2011, pp. 6, 14). Of course, women cannot choose the average wage they'd prefer—the *male* dollar (\$1.00) versus the *female* dollar (\$0.82)—so the wage gap continues to be a liberal feminist issue.

It is also quite remarkable that despite women's achievements in the labour force, Canada has not been able to elect equal numbers of men and women to the House of Commons. Canada currently lags behind other Western nations with comparable advantages in the global economy including the United States (43%) and New Zealand (40%). By comparison, countries such as the Philippines (55%) and St. Lucia (52%) surpass gender parity among elected legislators (United Nations, 2012). At a very basic level, outright sexism is still actively directed at female Members of Parliament, the most evident of these being through social media (Ryckewaert, 2015). Green Party leader Elizabeth May noted, "Our looks are attacked more, our clothing is attacked, the notion of sexual attractiveness and sexual violence . . . some of it is quite vile," and MP Megan Leslie reports tweets made by members of the public on official social media for their offices, referring to sexual violence against female MPs of all political backgrounds: "CPC skank

Michelle Rempel needs to eat a dick,' read one example. 'Eve Adams is a skanky-ass bitch, a younger Playboy version of Belinda Stronach,'" read another (Ryckewaert, 2015). Others suggest these sexist attitudes extend to their daily participation in the House of Commons with MP Laurin Liu observing that her party's finance critic was heckled during one speech with comments such as "learn to read" (Ryckewaert, 2015).

Unfortunately, if standards for gender equality are taken to mean that governments should continuously protect and support gender equality, then Canada has recently been set on a very different path. The 1990s saw repeated cuts to social funding under a Liberal government and the eventual dissolution of the National Action Committee on the Status of Women, then Canada's only national feminist lobby group. In 2006 Status of Women Canada had its operating budget reduced by 43% by a Conservative federal government. Ironically, the responsibility of announcing and carrying out the extraordinary cuts fell to a woman, then Minister Bev Oda, responsible for Status of Women, who also removed the word "equality" from the agency's main goals (Brodie, 2008).

Critiques of Liberal Feminism

It is important to understand that equality of opportunity, meritocracy, and freedom of choice have not been advanced equitably for all women. White women in Europe and the Americas might have seen hope in liberal ideas, but the status of Indigenous women within their own communities was particularly compromised by those acting on liberal democratic—but patriarchal and racist—ideas (Maracle, 2003, p. 74). Enakshi Dua outlines many forms of political action that Indigenous, Black, and immigrant women have taken to challenge their exclusion. These focused on women's roles in treaty negotiations, (sometimes armed) Indigenous resistance to colonization, resistance to racist immigration and settlement policies, and access to democratic rights (Dua, 1999, pp. 11–12). Indigenous people in Canada have suffered a diminished economic, political, and social status under a significant piece of legislation called the Indian Act (1876). Among the goals of land appropriation and racial assimilation, a major intention of the Act was for Indigenous women and children to become subject to their husbands and fathers just as European women were. Furthermore, Article 86 of the Act forbade Indians from obtaining a formal education unless they gave up Indian Status and any land or property they might have access to, making it impossible for both men and women be both "educated" and "Indian" at the same time (Downe, 2005). Canadians viewed these measures as a path to "civilizing" Indigenous people, when in fact it was an aggressive and nonsensical destruction of the diverse and strong family structures already in place throughout Indigenous societies (Stevenson, 1999). Women who enjoyed meaningful political participation and high status in their societies before the arrival of Europeans actually had their status reversed by the presence of European liberal democratic rule (Lawrence 2004, p. 46). Furthermore, the implementation of Indian residential schools as a tool of assimilation (from 1884 to 1996) meant that generations of Indigenous children experienced devastating repression of language and culture within the formal education system. People's experience of equality of

opportunity, meritocracy, and freedom of choice is therefore heavily mediated by the ways in which their legal and political history are gendered and racialized.

A primary criticism of liberal feminist theory is its selectivity and privileging of the objectives of white middle- or upper-class women. In the past, women's equality with men has not always been the primary consideration of women whose social class was far removed from that of the average middle- or upper-class wife. If a person is subject to legislation such as the Indian Act, arguing for gender equality with men makes little difference without racial and class equality (Arneil, 2001, p. 54). This short-sightedness is demonstrated by the argument of some early Canadian feminists that only white women of Canadian birth should be allowed the vote (Prentice et al., 1996).

At the same time, liberal feminism has often been written about without attention to the contributions made by Indigenous women and women of colour whose participation in equality-seeking activism is significant (Dua, 1999). Acknowledging the complexity of obtaining goals for *all* women, such as equal access to education and political and labour force participation, is necessary. Liberal feminist understanding of women's oppression and methods of social change incorporate women into existing political and economic institutions without necessarily transforming the relations of power between men and women within those organizations or even in society at large.

SOCIALIST FEMINISM

Defining Socialist Feminism

Socialist feminism originates in Marxist theory and uses class and gender as central categories of analysis in its explanation of women's oppression. Socialist feminism has several key goals in its analyses and activism. First, socialist feminism relates the oppression experienced by women to their economic dependence on men. One of the goals of socialist feminism is therefore to advocate for women's economic independence. In addition, socialist feminism provides a materialist analysis of gender inequality by identifying the relationship between systems of patriarchal oppression in which women are subordinated to men, and class relations in capitalist economic systems in which the working classes are subordinated to the upper classes. A second goal of socialist feminism is to expose and challenge the devaluation of women's unpaid labour in the home. In doing so, socialist feminists advocate for the acknowledgement of the value of women's domestic work, a sharing of domestic responsibilities in the home, and state involvement (financial and legislative) in creating a society that is equitable and just for everyone. A third, related goal of socialist feminism is to highlight and do away with continuing gendered pay inequality (a major contributor to women's financial dependency on men and the over-representation of women among the total number of poor), as well as the gendered division of labour within the wage labour market (which is responsible for the over-representation of women in service industries and feminized employment). Socialist feminism uses analyses of class to explain the ways in which social, economic, and political power is distributed in varying

amounts to members of society, and how this process is influenced by factors such as gender, racialized and ethnic identity, age, sexual orientation, and ability.

Historical Background: Marxist and Socialist Feminism

Karl Marx (1818–1883) and Friedrich Engels (1820–1895) were influential in the development of socialist feminist thought. Their *Communist Manifesto* (1848/1998) outlines the relationship of human beings to the ways in which we produce and reproduce for survival as a central factor in understanding the socio-political characteristics of any particular historical period. Individuals consciously and socially manipulate our environments in particular ways in order to feed, clothe, and house ourselves (Tong, 1998).

In *The German Ideology* (1932/1968), Marx and Engels advance an analysis of capitalist oppression that features the family as the original site of an inequitable division of labour, later to be reflected in the capitalist labour market. Marx and Engels argued that wives and children constituted a “first property” for men, to whom they provided labour, and men exerted control over the context, conditions, and environment in which this labour took place. Although gender and the oppression of women were not a focus for much of early Marxist thought, in *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State* (1884/1972), Engels did venture an examination of the sources of women’s inequality (Somerville, 2000). Engels linked the economic conditions of people to the ways in which the family is organized as a productive and reproductive unit. The change in modes of production, which saw men in charge of the domestication and breeding of animals, was, according to Engels, a major factor in the unequal shifting of power between men and women. With men predominantly in charge of the family, the work and the material contributions of women to the community were devalued. Men became the owners of private property (women, land, family resources), and inheritance tended to flow downward, from husbands to sons. Individuals and individual units became more important than communities or collective acts.

Concern over inheritance led to the patriarchal formalization of the nuclear family unit as a method of ensuring the passing down of private property and wealth from father to children of his own blood (Somerville, 2000). Engels advanced this as simply a reflection of the inequalities perpetuated by the capitalist labour market, with the husband representing the “bourgeoisie” (owners) and the wife taking the role of the “proletariat” (workers). Therefore, the source of women’s oppression, according to Engels, lay in the fact that they did not own or have control over private property. As such, the liberation of women could be ensured only by the eradication of capitalism and the reintroduction of women on an equal footing in the economic production process (Brenner, 2000).

By locating women’s oppression as rooted in capitalism, women’s economic dependence on men is defined as the source of their inequality. Only paid work is valued within a capitalist system that equates the value of an individual to paid work. As unpaid family workers, women are not valued. The capitalist economic system works simultaneously with a patriarchal socio-political system to divide and relegate certain types of work, and,