

Feminism Is for Everybody: Passionate Politics Study Guide

Feminism Is for Everybody: Passionate Politics by Bell hooks

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Plot Summary

Feminism Is for Everybody - Passionate Politics by author bell hooks (prefers that her name be spelled in all lower case letters) lives up to its title. It is a passionate account of the struggles and challenges faced by the feminist movement. The account also makes a strong case for the inclusion of men within the movement. One of the arguments that hooks makes throughout the book is that feminism—creating a world free of sexism—is only possible if men and women both believe in and fight for the feminist cause.

The patriarchal society is based on the power of man over women; of boss over underling; of lesbian lover over partner; and, of parent over child. Relationships built on this uneven turf are doomed to fail. In order to achieve societal transformation, everyone must learn to think in a non-sexist fashion. Activist hooks repeatedly makes the point that little boys and little girls need to receive an equal education on sexism. They will therefore be able to naturally develop the ability to think in an anti-sexist manner. By creating a society in which women and men are truly equals, the potential for honest, full, committed relationships for everyone will be the reward.

Author hooks provides a history of the feminist movement—its successes, failures, disappointments and readjustments. The reader is told in the first section that the basic goal of feminism is the replacement of the patriarchal system existing in the society with one free of male dominance and sexism. She readily points out the many benefits for all.

Within that large framework, hooks takes each sub-category of the feminist platform and explains its progress toward the end goal. Each of the sub-categories must succeed in order to reach the ultimate goal of an equal society for both genders. Issues such as racism and classism are elements that intersect very closely with feminism. The eradication of racist, classist and sexist thinking and behavior is essential in achieving the feminist agenda.

Author hooks also dedicates ample space to what feminism is not. It is not fighting to allow only a few privileged, upper-class women to succeed; rather, its struggles focuses on the betterment of all women and men. Feminism is not synonymous with lesbianism. Removing the negativity of the patriarchal system will provide a better life for gay and straight and man and woman.

For the future of feminism which has declined recently in popularity and public relevance, radical visionary feminism urges each woman to examine her own life to better understand her position within the framework of the patriarchal society. In its impending renewal, feminism must take strength from the great strides that women and men have towards gender equality. Feminism is for everybody.



Feminist Politics: Where We Stand

Feminist Politics: Where We Stand Summary and Analysis

The goal of feminism is to end all forms of sexism, sexist exploitation and oppression. Feminism does not target men as its enemy; rather, it is the structure of the society with which it is at odds. Unfortunately, through the years, that goal has been morphed and tarnished.

Firstly, mass media which is run by white men, only felt comfortable covering certain portions of the feminist message; i.e., equal pay, equal opportunity, and the sharing by men of household and parental duties. Since American society is primarily Christian, there was a long-standing sentiment—even among some women—that male domination of our society was appropriate and expected.

Initially, in the feminist movement there were explosions of anger towards men, but that anger was misdirected from its true foe—sexist injustice that permeates our society. Early on, white females were the leaders of the movement. Understandably, black women were caught up in another worthy fight—civil rights and black liberation. Therefore, white women emerged as the stars of the feminist movement.

From its earliest beginnings, feminism was split between reformist thinkers and revolutionary thinkers. Reformists wanted to find a way for women to fit and thrive within the existing societal system while revolutionaries strove to transform the system entirely—once and for all eliminating patriarchy and sexism. It is understandable therefore that the powers of the male-dominated press were reluctant to focus on the subject that might well lead to their own demise.

While the reformist movement paved the way for women to rise to high positions within the business world, it left multitudes of women stuck with the duties and meager pay of the lower echelon. Many of these successful women became sexist themselves by failing to expose the fate of the subordinated women who were doing the dirty jobs that they, like the men before them, were refusing to do.

Lifestyle feminism fostered the thinking that there could be as many feminist movements as there are women. But that does not stand up to scrutiny. On abortion, for example, one cannot be both a feminist and anti-abortionist if the end to sexism includes unchallenged reproductive rights. Power feminism—gaining power by the exploitation of others—is another sign that the cause had lost its way.

True feminism needs a restart. Its original purpose has been blurred. A return must be made to the goal of feminism—the end of sexist oppression.



Consciousness-Raising: A Constant Change of Heart

Consciousness-Raising: A Constant Change of Heart Summary and Analysis

A feminist is made, not born. When groups were first formed, it was clear that many women bought in to the long-held practices and beliefs of a male-dominated society. Consciousness-raising groups were formed and meetings were held—usually in the homes of activists. Building a neutral society, every voice was heard. Through debates and disagreements the basic tenets of feminism emerged.

After the movement began to strengthen, the next step was the dissemination of materials containing those ideas cultivated by the work of these groups. Leaders within the movement spearheaded the inclusion of women's studies at colleges and universities. By the late 1970's, women's studies were on a solid course toward acceptance. Lost in this triumph was the fact that many of the women at the forefront of the cause were fired from campuses because they did not have the credentials to teach what they knew better than most. Some returned to get the Ph.D.'s; however, others, out of frustration and disappointment, left the movement thereby rendering it bereft of some of its brightest. The movement then shifted to the upper class as only women of privilege who could afford to attend these universities would be privy to the study of feminist issues. Once again, the media focused on these high-profile women, and the feminist revolutionaries, many of them lesbians and from working-class backgrounds, were displaced and lost visibility.

To further their own careers, some women adopted the jargon of the feminist movement without really understanding it; therefore, though they were high-profile and garnered attention, they were not true advocates. Without the consciousness raising groups where women could confront their own sexism, the focus shifted to equality in the workplace. Because they did not deal with their own internalized sexism, some high-profile women who vocalized their support actually wound up slowing progress.

When consciousness-raising groups re-emerge, men must be included in them. It will be impossible to achieve the goals of feminism without the support and understanding of the men in our society. If boys and men had a full understanding of the negativity caused by the sexism in our society, the mainstream media would have never been able to avoid the true goal of feminism.



Sisterhood Is Still Powerful

Sisterhood Is Still Powerful Summary and Analysis

When bell hooks transfers from her small college to Stanford, she immediately sees a difference in the same-sex classes and those with both men and women. In the latter case, women did not speak up as much as men. They were not called upon for their opinions nor did they often volunteer to speak. When the women did offer an opinion, it was usually in a soft quiet voice lacking vitality and confidence. As her time at Stanford went on, Bell herself began to feel less confident. She had been at a small all-girls school before transferring. She felt more certain of her abilities and was supported by the professors of her small school.

In her women's classes at Stanford, however, she once again felt that support. Tillie Olsen, the writer, encouraged her students to think first about the fate of women from working-class backgrounds. Another professor, Diane Middlebrook, handed out one of bell's poems, asking the class to critique the work not knowing whether the author was a male or female.

One of the feminism's greatest foes was the "enemy within." From young girls on, females had been taught to view themselves through the prism of a world dominated by man. Women wanted to be seen most favorably by the men who controlled them. This thinking fostered anger, jealousy, fear and hatred among women. Male bonding was an accepted and expected eventuality—women bonding together was an act of treason within the man's world. The feminist movement gave permission for female bonding.

In the early 1970's changes were taking place in the classroom, the home and the office. The first challenge to women, however, remained to change female sexist thinking and was the first step to solidarity and a powerful sisterhood. That sisterhood would be the basis that would ultimately undermine sexism and overthrow patriarchy. But as long as women mimic powerful men and dominate other women, the sisterhood is impotent, and in fact is non-existent. When women of the 1980's who rose to positions of power began to emulate their male counterparts in the conviction that the strong should rule over the weak, feminism took a blow. When some black feminists tried to share their lessons learned in the civil rights fight and apply it to the feminist movement, white activists turned their backs on them.

As opportunities grew for women, the hard work of achieving solidarity with all classes of women began to wither. It is time now (when this book was written) for a renewed commitment to political solidarity between women, which is essential for the resurgence of the feminist movement.

Young women growing up now may feel that sexism is no longer a problem. But they have to learn to look past that outer layer to understand the work that must be done to realize true equality and self-actualization and success without dominating anyone else

and to understand that a re-emerging sisterhood is a powerful and essential tool for that end.



Feminist Education for Critical Consciousness

Feminist Education for Critical Consciousness Summary and Analysis

Women in the first groups exploring the new feminism included in their work the analysis of sexism, strategies for overcoming patriarchy and new models for society. Those who wrote, like bell hooks, were the propagators of this new wave. Author bell hooks wrote *Ain't I a Woman: Black Women and Feminism* in 1970. It was not published until 1981, by a small feminist collective.

The two most important contributions to feminism was the wealth of literature written by advocates and activists and the demand for the recovery of the history of women's literature and writers. The feminist movement urged universities to rediscover women's writing and include it in their curriculum. This literature provided not only a new genre but history from the viewpoint of women. This resurgence of women's literature opened the door for new work by and about women.

The feminist movement created respect for women's academic work—past and present—and an end to gender bias in curricula. Bell learned about feminist politics long before she entered the feminist classroom; however, the classroom was where she learned feminist thinking and theory. Some white leaders were at first resistant to including the struggles of black women to help shape feminist thought. However, these women were eventually able to recognize their own biases without rethinking their theories—an important shift in the movement.

Once feminism became the child of academia, one casualty was the writing of clear, understandable information for the average woman. The movement became a political one, confined within the narrow world of academia. Academic politics and careerism overshadowed feminist politics. In order for feminism to regain momentum, it is essential that literature for the masses be available, especially for the young.

College programs in women's studies are at risk as conservatives are urging their removal. Although these programs need to be saved, community-based studies on feminism are needed. Children's literature and public school curricula are both venues needing the attention of activists. By not creating the proper curricula in elementary schools and by allowing mass media to dictate what feminism is, much misinformation is disseminated. Funding for a feminist TV network, which would reach a broad and diverse audience, is another goal of the movement. Information on feminism needs to be made available to everyone—men and women.



Our Bodies, Ourselves - Reproductive Rights

Our Bodies, Ourselves - Reproductive Rights Summary and Analysis

With the onset of the sexual revolution—free love—women came face to face with the prospect and reality of unwanted pregnancies. Privileged women had the options of both contraceptives and abortions which poor women often did not. Women who clamored for abortions in the late 1960's and early 1970's had witnessed the botched abortions and unhappy, forced marriages that unwanted pregnancies brought about.

White women of privilege were more likely to have access to safe abortions, while poor and black women often sought dangerous, illegal abortions. Although abortion received the most attention by the media and conservatives, it was not the most pressing reproductive issue facing women. Rather, the most sought after reproductive safeguard was the development of safe birth control pills. This method of contraceptive was safe and allowed women to have sexual freedom without the worry of unwanted pregnancies.

The issue of abortion captured the attention of the mass media and Christian groups. It directly challenged the ideation that women were created to have children. Abortion remained the focus of the media rather than gender injustice, an issue too radical for a medium that is conservative at its roots and largely anti-feminist. Although abortion was deemed legal and made safe, by the 1990's the feminist political movement had diminished and a backlash from anti-abortion factions once again challenged a woman's reproductive rights. The anti-abortion movement has targeted state-funded or free abortions. What has resulted is that women of privilege still have access to safe abortions while poor women—an increasingly expanding number—do not. The option of safe, affordable abortions should be available to all women. However, with the access to safe contraceptives and meaningful sex education, the necessity for abortions will diminish. Focus on reproductive rights is necessary to protect the freedom of women.



Beauty Within and Without

Beauty Within and Without Summary and Analysis

For centuries, women had been taught that their worth was in their appearance—or rather in the evaluation of one's appearance by others, mainly men. But women began to examine how they felt about their bodies. It was liberating in the 1960's when women began to choose not to wear bras and girdles and other constricting clothing worn to appear more attractive to men. Further liberation was realized when women were allowed to wear pants at the workplace. Some women decided not to wear crippling high heels forcing the shoe industry to produce low-heeled, more comfortable shoes. Some women abandoned make-up, choosing to like what they saw in the mirror without it.

Cosmetic manufacturers and the fashion industry initially feared feminism would ruin their businesses. Mass media joined their campaign portraying feminists as hypermasculine, big and just plain ugly. Concerned with the female dollar for once, industries began to recognize the importance of providing women what they wanted and needed. Fashion began to take notice of the comfort women demanded in their attire. Magazines began to include the writings of women in their pages.

Women began to recognize the life-threatening aspects of appearance obsession, i.e., anorexia and compulsive overeating, both diseases having their roots in lack of self-worth. Efforts of feminists drew the medical industry's attention to these conditions. Women's health is an issue that draws the support of most women, regardless of their views on feminism. Women's acceptance of their bodies, has allowed them to more readily accept the aging process in the male-dominated society.

In the 1990's, the resurgence of obsession with appearance is a threat to the progress made over the last several decades. The reed-thin blond who needs a good meal is the ideal. Anorexia and other disorders are commonplace. Although today's fashion magazines carry stories warning against eating disorders, it appears as mere lip service since in the same issue photos of emaciated young women dominate the fashion pages. There are more articles by men and less input by women.

Until feminism returns to the fashion industry, our society runs the risk of ruining the self-esteem and health of young women growing up under pressure to attain an appearance designated by others as acceptable.



Feminist Class Structure

Feminist Class Structure Summary and Analysis

The first concern of many feminists was not racial divides but rather that of class. Once privileged groups of well-educated white women began to equal the success of men, the feminist class struggle was no longer considered important. The mass media focused on the "struggles" of these women and shined no light on the multitude of women still suffering under the sexist society. Betty Friedan's book, *The Feminine Mystique*, made the case for women who were stuck at home as housewives. However, the women she referred to were typically higher class women who did not want to do menial work for meager wages. The multitude of lower class women had no such options.

Once some of these disenchanting housewives began to take the low-paying jobs, it was a boon to the movement in that more light was shined on the vast injustices that face working women. The efforts of reformists were helpful in helping upper class women gain in position and power. However, lower class working women were left to contend with being paid less than their male counterparts. Lesbian activists were among the first to put a voice to these inequities in clear and understandable language. It became obvious to feminist leaders that the issue of class had to be addressed before the movement could succeed.

By including class within the platform of feminism, the intersections of class and race came to the forefront. Many black women were at the bottom of the economic ladder. While black women had fought the battle—and many of their white, privileged fellow feminists had not—there was conflict. It was difficult for white leaders to cede their self-appointed ownership of feminism. Powerful men were willing to allow women of their class to succeed because of their fear that their positions would be threatened if nonwhite people were to gain power and privilege. The mass media was glad to join in what became white power reformist feminism.

Women were asked to view the success of the few privileged women as success for all. In the 1990's, this hype fostered destabilization of the movement. Lower and middle-class women working outside the home did not find equality at home in shared responsibility. The advent of no-fault divorce tended to favor the male. Distrust grew among black feminists. Seeing the successes of privileged white women enforced their fears that the feminist movement was yet another white power grab.

Feminist liberation can only be a reality with a societal shift in class elitism. Conservative immigration policies coupled with a move against welfare assistance will create a new underclass of women and children who will suffer abuse from the existing patriarchy. When women of class disingenuously make claim to the feminist movement, they undermine it and keep the patriarchal system in place. They not only betray feminism, they betray themselves as they will in the end be re-subordinated.

Global Feminism

Global Feminism Summary and Analysis

Early in the movement, privileged-class white women took charge of the feminist movement, expecting whites of lower classes and blacks to be followers. These white women proclaiming the need for gender equality did not bother to determine if similar movements were active in other parts of the world. These women emerged as the authentic representatives of feminism, forcing women of color and "radical" white women to the background. Radical feminists were dismayed to learn that their "leaders" while spouting feminist jargon were firmly committed to Western imperialism. Their arrogance led them to think they could establish the feminist agenda for other women of the world, particularly third-world countries. That attitude mimicked the pervasive sexist and racist attitude of powerful men.

Great concern exists among feminists for the plight of women in third-world countries. Conditions such as forced female circumcision, sex clubs in the Far East, veiling of women in Africa and the mid-east are important issues. However, the feminist leaders must make the connection between these horrific problems and the ones that exist within their own society. Risky cosmetic surgery in the West and female circumcision in Africa are both deigned by men as ways to improve the appearance of the female. Both practices originate from sexism and misogyny.



Women at Work

Women at Work Summary and Analysis

By the 1990's, half the women in America were working women. When the feminist movement began in the sixties, already one-third of America's women were working. Working women received a mixed message by reformist thinkers who intimated that if a woman is a "working woman" she is already liberated. That was most certainly not the case for the many working women who were earning meager wages in undesirable positions and who were not free at all from male domination. The reformists were mainly higher-class women who rose to positions equal to men in their peerage. Their vision of "work" was not the reality of millions of women. Equal pay for equal work did receive more attention and women gained more rights in relation to earnings and opportunities. However, dollar for dollar, women fall short of equal pay earning only 73 cents for each dollar earned by man for the same work.

Work does not liberate women; rather, it is economic self-sufficiency that does. Women stay in relationships they can barely tolerate because they do not have the earning power to leave them. Better paying jobs and reasonable work schedules are needed to truly liberate the working woman. Rather than feeling liberated, many working class women felt the sting of hours of work outside the home followed by a grueling schedule inside the home. Some women blame "feminism" for forcing them into the workforce; however, it was the economics of the time and the trend towards materialism in our society that expanded the numbers of working women.

Women who stayed home and tended to the needs of husband and family felt isolated and depressed—they never escaped from their workplace. Women who worked felt a sense of community. When problems evolved at work, there were others to rely on for answers and support. Feminism broke ground for privileged women who were able to access work that was satisfying and monetarily rewarding. Masses of women not achieving monetary freedom, however, were alienated from the movement that seemed to only serve those of privilege.

Work is a necessary evil even if not rewarding in many senses. The conservative solution for the hard life of working women, is for them to stay in the home—an option not based in reality. The employment of both men and women is essential in modern times. The feminist agenda cannot offer women a way out from this reality. To turn work into a satisfying and rewarding experience, much is left to be accomplished. Teachers must be paid more; job-sharing programs must be developed, and work and college classes must be made available in the home. If people, men and women, were given two years of state aid while they pursue a career, welfare would no longer have the stigma that it now has.

There is a growing divide between wealthy and poor women. However, there are signs that some women of privilege are attempting to bridge the gap by helping to develop

strategies to gain solidarity with women who lack power. Early feminists did not foresee the problems that would arise from women becoming an increasing factor in the work force. The common ground of true equity in the work force may be the issue that will appeal to all women.

Race and Gender

Race and Gender Summary and Analysis

The demand that feminism address race and racism changed the face of the movement more than any other factor. Years ago, a young white girl readily observed her own superiority to black girls. Only white women appeared on TV or in magazines. The only reason, the girl may have observed, that black women did not appear in media was that they were not white.

No white women knew the plight of the black woman better than did those who were activist in the civil rights movement. Ironically, when these same women shifted their efforts to the feminist movement, they suppressed and even denied the struggles of the black woman. These leaders, realizing they were indeed victims of sexism, swept the race issue under the rug. Black women in the early years of the movement who for the first time in their lives were told they were peers of white women were reluctant to bring up the race issue to their new "friends."

Freer-thinking younger generation black women in the 1970's and 1980's felt free to confront white feminists about their racism. Author bell hooks was one of these women who began confronting the issue and demanding change while just a nineteen-year-old at Stanford. These younger black women were accused of being traitors to the feminist cause by deflecting attention from sexism. However, without addressing the racism existing in the minds of the white feminist leaders, there would be no possibility for real sisterhood, and feminism would therefore be doomed.

Once white women began to understand the black female's position, the movement finally put aside the prior focus that was solely on the rights of just the privileged white women. Although the movement became a sisterhood of anti-racist feminism, it has yet to transfer to the day-to-day relations between black and white women who for the most part are still socially isolated from each other. More work needs to be done with relationships between young white and young black girls.

Visionary black activists in the feminist movement paved the way for reconsideration of racist issues for the entire society.



Ending Violence

Ending Violence Summary and Analysis

Domestic violence, or as hooks calls it, patriarchal violence was an issue that was front and center in the feminist movement. However, violence existed not only from man against woman, but from parent (mother and father) against child and lesbian woman against lover. Patriarchal violence is based on the belief that it is acceptable for a more powerful individual to control others through force. Use of the term "patriarchal violence" is a reminder that violence is connected to sexism and sexist thinking, ergo, male domination. More women are beaten and murdered inside the home than out. Children often suffer abuse as bystanders who come to the defense of their mothers.

Most people agree that equal pay for equal work is a fair proposition. They also agree that domestic violence should be stopped. However, there is stubborn resistance when an attempt is made to link such behavior to sexism. All forms of violence must be fought against—including women who abuse their children. Both men and women must fight domestic violence before it can be ended.

Another signal that violence is acceptable is a woman tolerating violent attacks from her husband, thus "telling" her son that the man in the family gives out abuse and the woman takes it. In a culture of domination everyone is taught to accept violence as a means of control. There is a link between militarism and patriarchal violence in that dominance of the weak by the powerful is accepted and applauded.

Unemployed men feel unimportant and out of control and often their anger is manifested at home where they can feel they are dominant and have control. As long as the patriarchal system of dominance survives, those in power will feel entitled to maintain control by any means.



Feminist Masculinity

Feminist Masculinity Summary and Analysis

Women left abusive relationships with men utilizing their experience and anger in their roles as activists in the feminist movement. However, it became clear that "man" was not the challenge to freedom; rather, it was the dissolution of the patriarchal system of which both men and women were victims. The conservative press consistently presented feminists as "man haters" a wedge issue they used to discredit the movement. Feeding into the nation's homophobia, the press went a step further and referred to all feminist leaders as lesbians.

The contemporary movement, however, was quick to point out that men suffered from the patriarchal system as much as women. Men were stereotyped and broadly given a sexist identity. While some within the movement welcomed anti-sexist men with open arms, others were skeptical. Were these men sincere and was it the proper message to send that the "oppressor" (man) was part of the movement. Some feminists had a black and white view of man (oppressor) and woman (oppressed).

Women who refused to view anti-sexist men as allies inhibited the support these men were capable of supplying to their spouses or partners and the economic and emotional ties that are intrinsic in committed relationships. The struggle to include men in the movement was, not surprisingly, ignored by the press. Anti-feminist thinking gave rise the "men's liberation movement," a movement that mimicked the negative aspects of the women's movement.

Even though the anti-male faction within the feminist movement was minuscule, it served to deflect male responsibility away from the woman's fight against sexism. There was a fear of what men might become under a truly sex-neutral society—the radical feminists wanted to emasculate men. Sexism can only be eliminated once men realize that to be masculine they do not have to dominate over anyone. There is little literature or educational venues that exist offering ways for men to develop an identity not rooted in sexism and free of the need to dominate.

Feminist masculinity, the feminist view of men, is not scary; rather, it is an identity in which men are free from the bonds of the patriarchal society and one in which they demand equal rights for women.



Feminist Parenting, Liberating Marriage and Partnership, A Feminist Sexual Politic - An Ethics of Mutual Freedom

Feminist Parenting, Liberating Marriage and Partnership, A Feminist Sexual Politic - An Ethics of Mutual Freedom Summary and Analysis

Feminist Parenting: One of the major focuses of the early feminist movement was to raise children free of sexist thinking, thus cultivating a future without sexism. The problem, however, was that the focus on instilling the proper thinking about gender was exclusively on girls. Even mothers contributed to their sons' distorted view of what defines masculinity.

Abuse of children runs the gamut from verbal to psychological and physical to sexual. The feminist movement has helped adult sexual abuse survivors face their demons. All forms of abuse will end once the patriarchal system has been abolished. One of the best examples of anti-sexism thinking provided to children through the efforts of feminism is the push for shared parental responsibilities.

The anti-feminist backlash most damaging to children is the wrong-headed conventional wisdom that it is dysfunctional for children to be raised in a single-mother head of household.

"Liberating Marriage and Partnership": Many heterosexual women were drawn to the feminist movement after years in male-dominated marriages and relationships. Many women viewed their relationship as just another vehicle for sexual slavery and male dominance. Sexual liberation allowed women to chose to live with a man rather than marry him and thus be free of the patriarchal continuum. Some elected a new sexuality—celibacy or lesbianism. Female sexual liberation was fancied by many men who enjoyed sex with now uninhibited women, although this sexual parity laid the groundwork for man's prowess to be put to the test.

Some patriarchal hardliners insisted that most feminists were lesbians. In reality the movement exposed the fact that many women were not sexually satisfied within their patriarchal relationship. Women have the freedom to be non-monogamous if they choose to be. This posture destroys the notion that the female body belongs to men. Women no longer are tied to the notion that their purpose in life is to have children. A couple can choose to be childless and have an equitable peer relationship. Feminism places the emphasis on equal, satisfying relationships rather than on sexist, patriarchal marriages.

"A Feminist Sexual Politic - An Ethics of Mutual Freedom": Prior to the sexual revolution, women were taught that they were "whores" if they enjoyed sex or sought sex free of obligation. Feminism challenged this basic precept at a time when safe birth control had become available for women. It was frightening to think of a world where men want sex and women fear it. Feminism changed the world view of female sexuality forever. It did not take women long to recognize that sexual liberation and sexual promiscuity were not one in the same.

Some heterosexual women chose to experiment with lesbianism. Many women found themselves in yet another dominated position. Promiscuity among lesbians did not equate sexual liberation any more than it did for heterosexual women. Radical lesbians began engaging in sadomasochistic behavior driving heterosexual women to turn to celibacy or patriarchal models of sexual freedom.

Women continued to be in unhappy, sexless relationships; unwanted pregnancies were on the rise; and, homosexual men and women still had no voice. A new discourse within the feminist movement needed to begin.



Total Bliss - Lesbianism and Feminism, To Love Again - The Heart of Feminism, Feminist Spirituality

Total Bliss - Lesbianism and Feminism, To Love Again - The Heart of Feminism, Feminist Spirituality Summary and Analysis

"Total Bliss - Lesbianism and Feminism": It's difficult to say which came first—sexual liberation or the feminist movement. For many activist lesbians, joining the feminist movement was a natural progression. The special wisdom that lesbians brought to the movement was the reality that women did not need a man for happiness or success or even sexual bliss. The movement soon distinguished between a "woman-identified woman" or a "man-identified woman." The "man-identified woman" would readily give up her activism if it threatened a relationship with a man. The "woman-identified woman" activist supported the feminism platform regardless of her personal relationship. The "woman-identified woman" is not synonymous with "lesbian."

Visionary lesbians had a positive impact upon the movement. They were more likely to actively support a cause outside their own intimate relationships. They would readily volunteer to debate a white supremacist while the straight activist leaders focused mainly on their own personal relationships. Radical lesbians brought sexual and emotional liberation to the movement, giving women the freedom to choose who they will love. They were leaders in challenging the rules of relationships of the patriarchal system. Challenging and fighting against homophobia will always be a part of the feminist movement.

"To Love Again - The Heart of Feminism": Many women joined the movement because they felt they had been betrayed by the promise of love and of living happily ever after. Feminism teaches that the only relationships between men and women that can survive are those in which both support feminism. In a patriarchal system, one can do anything in the name of love—beat people, control them and even, in a crime of "passion," kill them. Feminism stresses the importance of self-actualization—not living for another person, be it a man or a partner or one's child.

Anger drove many activists to solve the issue of male relationships by refusing to have them. Mass media exploited this view and morphed it into "man-hating." Some women abandoned feminism when they felt no support for having a loving relationship with a man. Early activists were remiss by not stressing the importance of strong heterosexual relationships.



"Feminist Spirituality": Feminism has always contained an element of the spiritual to satisfy those needs in women. Early feminists looked to the spiritual works of 19th century mystic, Julian of Norwich. They launched a critique of "patriarchal religion," which exposed its metaphysical dualism where everything is black or white or good or bad. This was the thinking behind sexism, racism and other forms of oppression.

Some feminists looked to the eastern religions for the comfort they found in their female deities. A number of early activists were atheists which led to conflict about the inclusion of spirituality in the movement. Patriarchal religion has long been a barrier to the spread of feminism. No group has demonized feminism more the right-wing fundamentalists. The main bone of contention from the right has been the issue of women's reproductive rights. Mass media has contributed to the stereotype of the feminist often disingenuously portraying them as anti-religious. Modern feminists readily acknowledge the importance of spirituality as an essential element for many women.



Visionary Feminism

Visionary Feminism Summary and Analysis

Feminism has always had a vision of a better future. Initially, the fundamental goal of visionary feminism was to change the lives of all women and to enhance their personal power by breaking away from male dominance. Care had to be given not to lose sight of the poor and black women who did not at first have access to feminist information. Although visionary feminists have made strides towards equality, lack of effective communications has remained a problem. Education would inform the connection between male domestic abuse and the male dominant society and the crucial need to eradicate the patriarchal system.

For a resurgence of the feminist movement to occur, there must be grass roots energy. Anti-sexist education in the communities and in elementary education is essential. For feminism to defeat patriarchy, the politics must be clear and consistent—this is not a garden-variety of feminism. One cannot be anti-abortion and a feminist. An activist cannot publicly denounce the patriarchal system and then privately benefit from it. Men must be educated and become allies of the movement for feminism to succeed. Radical visionary feminism requires that each woman examine her own life to understand her position within the framework of the patriarchal society. In its renewal, feminism must take strength from the great strides women and men have towards gender equality. Feminism is for everybody.



Characters

bell hooks

The author of the book is bell hooks. It is to be noted that she opts to spell her name in all lower case letters. Ms. hooks tells the story of her early involvement in the feminist movement. Author hooks is the author of many books on politics, race and culture. She is a frequent lecturer on the world-wide stage and a professor of English at City College in New York.

During the beginning stages of feminism, many black women like Ms. hooks were using their energies and skills in the struggle for civil rights; therefore, many of the "stars" that emerged from the movement were white. However, Ms. hooks was acutely aware of the importance of the movement and eventually became an activist in the movement and applied many of her efforts towards the cause of feminism.

From her vantage point, hooks was able to witness the early successes as well as the set-backs and failures of what she refers to as the true cause of feminism; i.e., the transformation of a society from one that is male dominated to the ideal one which is sex neutral.

Being a black feminist she had a double challenge as she saw resistance from the mainly white leaders of the feminist movement to include the unique struggles of black women in formulating the platform of feminist politics.

The book, *Feminism Is for Everybody* advocates what the title suggests. Ms. Hooks underscores the importance of raising the consciousness of men about feminist issues—without their support and understanding, a truly sexually-neutral society will be impossible. The book takes the reader from the early days of the movement in the late 1960's and 1970's. The successes in the early days were followed by disappointments and ebbing interest in the decades that followed. Written in the 1990's, hooks appeals to the reader for renewed support of the movement. She outlines the necessity of educating young boys and girls in early education.

White Feminist Leaders

The early feminist movement, beginning in the sixties, was led by white women. Women of color were busy with the gender-neutral cause of civil rights. Strangely, many of the white leaders of the movement showed resistance to the inclusion of issues they deemed to be central to the fights of black women—feeling that the fight for racial equality did not play a role in the fight against sexism.

As the feminist movement began to take on momentum, success did not greet everyone. Once privileged groups of well-educated white women began to equal the success of men, the feminist class struggle did not seem as important. The mass media



focused on the "struggles" of these white women and all but ignored the millions of women still suffering under the sexist society.

Black feminists had fought the sexism battle in the trenches while their privileged white counterparts were steeped in rhetoric and theory. There was a conflict of class and culture, and it was difficult for white leaders to cede their perceived ownership of feminism. All women were asked to view the success of the few privileged white women as a shared success. Black feminists seeing the the lion's share of rewards going to privileged white women had their suspicions confirmed that the "sisterhood" lacked authenticity. The movement was damaged.

Privileged-class white women took charge of the feminist movement, expecting whites of lower classes and blacks to be followers. These women emerged as the high-profile representatives of the feminist cause, relegating the issues of women of color and "radical" white women to the background. This posture ran parallel to the sexist and racist attitudes of powerful white men.

Next generation black women in the 1970's and 1980's did not feel especially flattered to have white "girlfriends" and had no fear in confronting white feminists about their racism. These younger black activists were accused of deflecting attention away from sexism. However, without addressing the racism existing in the minds of the white feminist leaders, there would be no possibility for real sisterhood, and feminism would therefore be doomed. Once credence was finally given to the black woman's position, the movement put aside its prior exclusive focus on the rights of just the privileged white woman.

Tillie Olsen

Tillie Olsen was a writer and one of bell hooks' first professors at Stanford.

Diane Middlebrook

Diane Middlebrook was a writer and one of bell hook's first professors at Stanford. She was considered an outstanding scholar and did biographical work on Anne Sexton.

Toni Morrison

Toni Morrison was a black writer who was not widely known at the time bell hooks attended Stanford. Author hooks chose Morrison as the subject of her graduate dissertation.



Alice Walker

Alice Walker re-discovered the outstanding works of black writer Zora Neale Hurston who became the most canonized black female writer in American literature.

Zora Neale Hurston

Zora Neal Hurston's writing went virtually unknown until rediscovered by Alice Walker.

Betty Friedan

In her book, *The Feminine Mystique*, Betty Friedan wrote about the multitude of women who felt confined and subordinated in their homes as "housewives."

Mary Barfoot

Radical white activist Mary Barfoot in her book, *The Coming of Black Genocide*, complained about white activist leaders who abandoned the movement in favor of their own successes.

Julian of Norwich

Julian of Norwich was a mystic of the 19th century. Many early activists looked to her feminist teachings which contained spiritual insight.



Objects/Places

Feminism

Feminism is the struggle to displace the male-dominated patriarchal system with an anti-sexist society in which men and women have true equality.

The Feminine Mystique

In her book, *The Feminine Mystique*, Betty Friedan's wrote about "the problem that has no name," a reference to the multitude of women who felt confined and subordinated in their homes as "housewives."

Class and Feminism

Class and Feminism, is an anthology of essays each emphasizing that class had more meaning than just monetary status.

The Coming of Black Genocide

The Coming of the Black Genocide, written by radical white activist Mary Barfoot, accused some early white activist leaders of buying into the patriarchal system.

Night-Vision: Illuminating War and Class n the Neo-Colonial

Night-Vision: Illuminating War and Class in the Neo-Colonial Terrain is an anthology of radical thought which criticized activists who did not understand neo-colonialism.

Hatreds: Racialized and Sexualized Conflicts in the Twenty-

In *Hatreds: Racialized and Sexualized Conflicts in the 21st Century*, author Zillah Eisenstein laments about the lack of focus on the benefits of feminism on a world-wide basis.

Feminist Theory from Margin to Center

Feminist Theory from Margin to Center, authored by bell hooks discusses the issue of working women and feminism.



Ain't I a Woman: Black Women and Feminism

Ain't I a Woman: Black Women and Feminism, was bell hooks' first book, written when she was just a nineteen-year-old student at Stanford.

Stanford

Author bell hooks transferred from a small private school in the south to Stanford University where she was first introduced to feminist politics.

Patriarchal System

The male-dominated patriarchal society is the system which feminism is fighting to replace with a non-sexist way of thinking and behaving.



Themes

Reformists v. Revolutionaries within the Feminist Movement

The author of the book, bell hooks (all lower case letters if preferred by the author), is a revolutionary activist within the feminist movement. She takes great care in her book, *Feminism Is for Everybody* to draw distinctions between revolutionaries and reformists. Revolutionary feminists were those women who first organized the movement. Their goal, simply stated, was to transform the patriarchal society into one that is completely sexually neutral.

Reformists, on the other hand, were advocates for conditions short of that goal. For example, reformists saw advancements for women in positions of power in business as progress for the feminist movement. They were satisfied to crack the door open and have a few women move to the top. They were happy with equal pay for equal work legislation and regulations and with equal opportunities for advancements. While such progress was positive, focus was shifted from the basic goal of the movement. Once some of these women became successful, they learned to live within the framework of the existing patriarchal world, not work in carving out a new, truly-liberated society.

Some women who called themselves reformists merely took on the jargon of feminism really not knowing what it was at its roots. Often these women became clones of the men in positions of power—taking advantage of their powerful position and delegating their dirty work to those women who were not able to climb out from the subjugated positions. These women adopted the posture of the patriarchal system that the powerful rule over the weak. Reformist women presented some of the biggest challenges in the feminist movement.

Racism of White Feminist Leaders

At the beginning of the feminist movement in the late sixties, virtually all its leaders were white women, oftentimes well-educated, "privileged" women. There was a stark absence of black leaders early on in the movement. Activist black women were involved in other worthy battles—civil rights and black liberation; therefore, white women emerged as the "stars" of the feminist movement. These white leaders were resistant to including the problems of black women as part of their political platform. Poor black women were experiencing a very different set of problems stemming from sexism and racism than those of their privileged, white fellow activists. For example, black women were often compelled to seek affordable, risky abortions while wealthy white women had safer options.

Although arguably black women had been the true field soldiers in on the discrimination front, it was difficult for white leaders to cede control of the movement. Through



consciousness-raising training, white leaders recognized the importance of including the struggles of black women in the feminist platform. The white leaders were eventually able to understand their own biases without rethinking their theories—an important shift in the movement.

Even though the issues of black women were included in the feminist movement, distrust grew among black feminists. Seeing great successes exclusively among privileged white women told already wary black women that the feminist movement was yet another area of white control. However, the racism of white leaders was ultimately exposed and dealt with. The demand that feminism address race and racism changed the face of the movement more than any other single factor.

Ironically, outstanding white women who were successful activists in the civil rights movements began to suppress and even deny the existence of racism within the feminist movement. They swept the race issue under the rug; they wanted to focus on their own sexism issues. Black women who were accepted by white women into the movement were uncomfortable discussing the racism of their new "friends" with their new "friends." Freer-thinking younger generation black women in the 1970's and 1980's did not hesitate to confront white feminists about their biases. Eventually white feminists began to understand that racism had to be honestly addressed in order for the movement to achieve success.

Patriarchal Society

Patriarchy is the system is a male-dominated culture rife with sexism. The fundamental goal of early feminist revolutionaries was to create a sisterhood that would ultimately displace patriarchy into a society devoid of sexism. Women are seduced by the patriarchal system as well as men. When women began to achieve success in the "man's world," they often bought into the precept that the powerful control the weak. By women mimicking powerful men and dominating other women, the patriarchal system survived.

Conservative policies on issues such as welfare perpetuate an underclass of women and children who will continue to suffer the abuse in the existing patriarchy. When successful women of class subscribe to the tenets of a male-dominated world and disingenuously claim to be feminists, they undermine the movement and bolster the patriarchal system.

Patriarchal violence, also known as domestic violence, is a main focus of the feminist movement. Such violence exists not only in man against woman, but in parent (mother and father) against child and in lesbian woman against partner. Patriarchal violence thrives when there is the acceptance that a more powerful person can control a weaker one by force. By choosing the phrase "patriarchal violence" it reminds one that violence is directly connected to sexism and sexist thinking, ergo, male domination.

As long as the patriarchal system of dominance is allowed to exist, those in power will feel entitled to maintain control by any means.

Style

Perspective

The author of *Feminism Is for Everybody* is bell hooks who prefers to have her name written in all lower case letters. She is one of the first black female activists to join the feminist movement. Earlier black, female activists had been hesitant to address the racism that existed within the white activists who were the leaders of the movement. bell hooks is an expert on social injustice as it relates to sexism and racism.

Author bell hooks attended Stanford where she was able to voice her deeply-held feelings about feminism and its counterpart for women of color—racism. That bell hooks is an authority on feminism and black women's issues goes without saying. She has been one of the foremost voices and writers in the struggles of women—especially black women—since the 1970's. There could be no one more qualified to write a book dealing with the subjects of racism and sexism.

bell hooks is the author of numerous books that cover the issues of race, sexism, and culture. For example, when she was just nineteen years of age and a transfer student to the prestigious Stanford University, Bell wrote *Ain't I a Woman: Black Women and Feminism*. Later in her career, bell authored the book, *Feminist Theory from Margin to Center*, which focused on the on-going struggles of women, especially women of color, against the male-dominated society.

bell hooks probably did not have to do much research to write this book. From her narrative, it is readily apparent that hooks needed only to rely on her vast wealth of knowledge and experiences to produce this account of the feminist movement.

Tone

The author of *Feminism Is for Everybody* is bell hooks (lower case preferred). She is a long-time activist, analyst and thinker in the struggles against racism and sexism in today's society. As such, hooks has the necessary heft that gives her account instant credibility. Her tone throughout the book is one of teacher and activist. All her experiences—both the ups and downs—in the long battle against injustice in society morphs her message into one that is Utopian in goals and realistic in actualities.

While issues such as racism and sexism are emotional in nature, hooks maintains a straightforward manner in relating how the feminism movement has been derailed by both external barriers and internal conflict. The attitude that hooks displays throughout her account is one of tenacity. She maintains optimism even in the face of defeat and disappointment. The author presents an honest work. She does not lay the entire blame of sexual injustice at the feet of men; rather, she makes a strong case that women—as enablers of male dominance and advocates of the patriarchy system—share in society's sexism and oppression.



Structure

Feminism Is for Everybody, subtitled *Passionate Politics*, is an account of the feminist movement by women's activist bell hooks (lower case letters preferred by the writer). While the author relates the movements successes in a chronological order, the book is not structured on a strictly defined time-line. It tells the overall history of feminism in a forward moving manner; however, successes and failures within the various sub-issues of feminism are addressed within their own time-frames.

For example, in hooks' discussion of "Feminist Parenting," she relates the metamorphosis of that subject from start to finish, ending as most of her chapters do, with what still needs to be accomplished. The author provides a view from 10,000 feet of the overall success of feminism. She also gives the reader a close up look at each sub-issue. One can therefore understand the importance of each sub-category within the larger framework of the overall movement.

The book is separated into nine chapters that are both numbered and titled. The first chapter, "Where We Stand," is an overview of the progress of feminism—an summary of its progress to date (written in the late '90's). The other chapters then proceed, as stated earlier, into the sub-categories which is the substance on which the politics of feminism is based. Appropriately, the last chapter, "Visionary Feminism," describes the work still needed to be done and the future of feminism as envisioned by its leaders.



Quotes

"Simply put, feminism is a movement to end sexism, sexist exploitation, and oppression." (1)

"Sisterhood could not be powerful as long as women were competitively at war with one another. Utopian visions of sisterhood based solely on the awareness of the reality that all women were in some ways victimized by male domination were disrupted by discussions of class and race." (3)

"Without confronting internalized sexism women who picked up the feminist banner often betrayed the cause in their interactions with other women?" (11)

"Everything we do in life is rooted in theory. Whether we consciously explore the reasons we have a particular perspective or take a particular action there is also an underlying system shaping thought and practice." (19)

"Class is much more than Marx's definition of relationship to the means of production. Class involved your behavior, your basic assumptions, how you are taught to behave, what you expect from yourself and from others, your concept of a future, how you understand problems and solve them, how you think, feel, act." (39)

"The emphasis on work as the key to women's liberation led many white feminist activists to suggest women who worked were already liberated." (48)

"If welfare not warfare was sanctioned by our government and all citizens legally had access to a year or two of their lives during which they received state aid if they were unable to find a job, then the negative stigma attached to welfare programs would no longer exist. If men had equal access to welfare then it would no longer carry the stigma of gender." (52)

"Patriarchal masculinity teaches men that their sense of self and identity, their reason for being, resides in their capacity to dominate others." (70)

"No anti-feminist backlash has been as detrimental to the well-being of children as societal disparagement of single mothers. In a culture which holds the two-parent patriarchal family in higher esteem than any other arrangement, all children feel emotionally insecure when their family does not measure up to the standard." (77)

"Love in patriarchal culture was linked to notions of possession, to paradigms of domination and submission wherein it was assumed one person would give love and another person would receive it." (101)

"When we accept that true love is rooted in recognition and acceptance, that love combines acknowledgment, care, responsibility, commitment, and knowledge, we understand there can be no love without justice. With that awareness comes the



understanding that love has the power to transform us, giving us the strength to oppose domination. To choose feminist politics, then, is a choice to love." (104)

"Since that which is radical is often pushed underground in our setting then we must do everything we can to bring feminism above ground to spread the word. Because feminism is a movement to end sexism and sexist domination and oppression, a struggle that includes efforts to end gender discrimination and create equality, it is fundamentally a radical movement." (113)



Topics for Discussion

What is a patriarchal society?

What is the difference between a feminist reformer and a feminist revolutionary?

How has the white, privileged feminist activist at times been a stumbling block to the progress of the feminist movement?

How has the advancement of some feminist leaders to high-earning positions been a detriment to the overarching goals of feminism?

Why was it crucial for white female leaders of the feminist movement to recognize and include the unique plight of the black woman in the development of the movement's platform?

How are abuses of children by fathers and mothers both linked to the patriarchal system and male dominance?

Why is early education important in the fight against sexism and why is it essential that this education is just as focused on boys as it is on girls?