CONTENTS

Acknowledgements x
Some notes on terminology xi

Introduction
A (partial) history of feminist political theory 1
Different kinds of feminism 2
Feminist political theory, past and present 5

1 Early Feminist Thought 6
Seventeenth-century feminism in Continental Europe and Britain 7
  Early British feminism and the ideas of Mary Astell 8
The Enlightenment and early liberal feminism 12
  Mary Wollstonecraft’s A Vindication of the Rights of Woman 17
The utopian socialists and feminism 22
  Wheeler and Thompson’s Appeal on Behalf of Women 27

2 Liberalism and Beyond: Mainstream Feminism in the Mid-Nineteenth Century 30
Feminism in the United States: Maria Stewart and Elizabeth Cady Stanton 31
  Evangelical Christianity and the temperance and anti-slavery movements 31
The Seneca Falls Convention 34
  The analysis of sexual and personal oppression 36
Education, religion and The Woman’s Bible 38
Class, race and racism 39
Stanton’s feminism 42
Feminism in Britain and Mill’s The Subjection of Women 43
  The spread of feminist ideas 44
John Stuart Mill’s The Subjection of Women 46

3 The Contribution of Marx and Engels 57
Classic Marxist theory 57
Engels’ The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State 59
Feminist criticisms of Engels 62
Marxism as a (problematic) feminist resource 64
  Production and reproduction 64
  Ideology and alienation 66
  The limitations of political and legal reform 68
CONTENTS

4 The Vote and After: Mainstream Feminism in the United States and Britain from the Late Nineteenth Century to the Second World War 70
   The situation of women in the late nineteenth century 70
   The suffrage campaign 73
      Equality or difference? 73
      Anti-democratic and racist strands in the suffrage campaign 75
      Socialism, black feminism and the suffrage campaign 76
      Christabel Pankhurst 78
   After the vote: the re-emergence of contradictions 82
      Equal rights v. welfare feminism in the United States 84
      Equal rights v. welfare feminism in Britain 86
      Birth control 90
      Beyond equality v. welfare 91

5 Left-Wing Feminism in Britain and the United States from the Late Nineteenth Century to the Second World War 92
   Britain 92
      Sylvia Pankhurst 94
   The United States 95
      Charlotte Perkins Gilman 96
      Emma Goldman’s anarchist feminism 99
      American communism and women, white and black 101

6 Marxist Feminism in Germany and Russia 104
   Marxist feminism in Germany 104
      Bebel’s Woman Under Socialism 104
      Clara Zetkin 105
   Marxist feminism in Russia 110
      Early Russian feminism 111
      Orthodox Marxist feminism in Russia 112
      The ideas of Alexandra Kollontai 114

7 Feminism after the Second World War 121
   The situation of western women in the mid-twentieth century 121
   Communism, feminism and black feminism 123
   Simone de Beauvoir and The Second Sex 124
      Existentialism applied to women 125
      Feminist responses to The Second Sex 127
      De Beauvoir’s life and influence 131

8 Liberalism and Beyond: Feminism and Equal Rights from the 1960s to the 1990s 133
   Betty Friedan and the politics of NOW 134
   Subsequent developments 136
## CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>From ‘backlash’ to ‘power feminism’</td>
<td>137</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Susan Okin and a feminist theory of justice</td>
<td>139</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Equal rights feminism: critical analysis and debate</td>
<td>142</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Equality</td>
<td>142</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The state, capitalism and men</td>
<td>146</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The public/private distinction</td>
<td>148</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Individualism and individual rights</td>
<td>149</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reason, knowledge and ethical thought</td>
<td>150</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feminism, equal rights and liberalism by the end of the twentieth century</td>
<td>153</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### 9 Radical Feminism and the Concept of Patriarchy 155
- The origins of radical feminism 156
- Kate Millett and the theory of patriarchy 157
- Criticisms of the concept of patriarchy 159
  - Politics and personal life 159
  - A merely descriptive approach? 160
  - An over-generalised and a-historical account? 162
  - Women good, men bad: an essentialist view of sex difference? 164
- The concept of patriarchy by the end of the twentieth century 166

### 10 Radical Feminism: Patriarchy in Private and Public Life 167
- Patriarchy and the family 167
  - Psychoanalytic theory: parenting and the acquisition of adult sexual identity 168
  - Domestic labour 169
  - Domestic violence and emotional exploitation 170
- Patriarchy, sexuality and sexual violence 171
  - The attack on heterosexuality 172
  - Sexual violence and pornography 175
- Patriarchy and reproduction 178
  - Reproductive technology 178
  - Mothering and eco-feminism 181
- Patriarchy and the state 183
- Patriarchy and the economic system 184
- Patriarchy, ‘man-made language’ and knowledge 185
- Conclusions: the impact of radical feminism 187

### 11 Marxist and Socialist Feminism from the 1960s to the 1990s 189
- The political and ideological context 189
- The domestic labour debate 191
- Women and the labour market 193
- Two systems or one? ‘Dual systems’ v. ‘capitalist patriarchy’ 195
- The material basis revisited 197
- Alienation 201
12 Theoretical Developments: Postmodern Feminisms and Beyond

Postmodernism: knowledge, language, power and identity
‘French feminism’
Judith Butler
Gender, sex and performativity
The ‘doer’ behind the ‘deed’
Queer theory
Feminist applications of postmodern theory
Beyond equality v. difference debates
The ‘doing’ and undoing of gender: gender roles, the state and pornography
Feminist criticisms of postmodernism
Postmodern feminism and earlier feminist thought
Empty gestures?
An end to feminist politics?
Postmodern feminism and feminism: into the twenty-first century

13 Theoretical Developments: Postcolonial Feminism, Black Feminism and Intersectionality

Postcolonial feminism
Western feminist responses
Black feminism
Between gender and race: the marginalisation of black women
Black women: from margin to centre
Intersectionality
Black feminism: critical debates
Twenty-first-century developments in black feminist thought
Intersectionality
Developments and debates
Conclusions

14 Western Feminist Theory in the Twenty-First Century: Developments in Liberal and Socialist Thought

Liberalism and feminism: theoretical developments
Care and the human condition
Rights and capabilities
The limits of toleration and the nature of ‘choice’
Developments in socialist and Marxist feminist thought
CONTENTS ix

Critiques of global capitalism 262
Care and capitalism 264

15 Western Feminism in the Twenty-First Century: Continuities, Challenges and Change 268
The context of twenty-first-century feminism 268
Counting the waves 271
  The third wave: everyone welcome, come as you please! 271
  The fourth wave: getting angry again 278
Feminists in cyberspace 282
  Cyberfeminism 283
  Feminism goes online 285
  Cybersexism and other problems 287
Transgender/transsexual issues 288
  Terminology and history 289
  Feminist responses 290
  Unpacking the debate 292
  Implications for feminist politics 295

Conclusions: Feminist Political Theory Today 298

Bibliography 302
Index 346
We have little direct access to what women may have thought in the early years of recorded history, as they were excluded from education and public debate; indeed, the classical scholar Mary Beard (2014) has found the first example of women being told that they should ‘shut up’ in public in Homer's *Odyssey*, probably composed in the eighth century BC. Nevertheless, it seems likely that wherever women have been subordinated some have resisted, and it is possible to trace elements of feminist consciousness in Europe back to written expressions of women’s thought in the seventh century AD. At this early period, any woman who claimed the ability to benefit from education, or who tried to contribute to theological, philosophical and political debate, or who simply put pen to paper, was challenging her society's teaching about women’s God-given intellectual inferiority and their propensity for sin. It is therefore unsurprising that an identifiable theme in early writing by women is the attempt to re-interpret the scriptures to challenge such beliefs (Lerner, 1993).

By the beginning of the fifteenth century, women’s claims were sufficiently established for a significant number of men to educate their own daughters, some of whom were then able to contribute to a European-wide public debate, which came to be known as the *Querelle des femmes*, over the nature of women and their portrayal in literature (Ross, 2010). Of the pro-women writers, the best known is the Frenchwoman Christine de Pizan (1365–c.1430), who appealed to the authority of women's own experiences and to the record of ‘great women’ in history to assert her sex's innate intellectual equality with men and to defend women against the misogyny of contemporary literature and religious authority. Pizan and her contemporaries used the traditional vocabulary of domesticity while making their claims, and they did not produce any kind of political programme or analysis of power. However, this can be seen as a strategic response to their marginalized status, a way of ‘making the unusual seem acceptable’, rather than support for the status quo (Ross, 2010:18; see also Chance, 2007), and their work shows that debates over women’s role in
society that include a recognisably feminist perspective go back much further than has until recently been assumed. While it is important not to impose current preoccupations on earlier periods, it is also possible to identify in this period an early version of the difference/equality debate which recurs throughout this book, as some writers asserted women’s equal worth with men, while others demanded respect for their alleged sex-specific virtues, such as piety. In addition, some commentators have suggested that early critiques of misogynistic literature and male violence anticipate recent feminist arguments against pornography (Case, 1998; Classen, 2007. For discussion of early feminism and the situation of women in this period, see Lerner, 1993; Akkerman and Stuurnam, 1998b. On de Pizan, see also Altman and McGrady (eds), 2003; Desmond (ed.), 1998; Forham, 2002; Nowacka, 2002).

Seventeenth-century feminism in Continental Europe and Britain

The Querelle had been primarily concerned with education, morality and manners, and participants frequently based their arguments on interpretations of the Christian bible. Feminist theological arguments were further elaborated in the seventeenth century: for example, some writers used the creation story to argue that Eve was superior to Adam because she was created last, or because she was created out of Adam’s rib rather than out of mud and slime (Stuurnam, 1998:72). By this period, ‘[t]he learned woman was no longer a startling figure’ (Ross, 2010:13), and some writers were also engaging directly with the increasingly secular arguments of mainstream philosophical and political debate, appealing to reason rather than to existing authorities when making their claims, and employing concepts and terminology around ‘rights’ and ‘equality’ that are still with us today.

The inspiration for these new ways of thinking was the revolution in western philosophy which had been started in the first half of the seventeenth century by Descartes. According to Cartesian philosophy, all people possess reason, and true knowledge, which is based on experience and self-discovery rather than study of the classics or sacred texts, is in principle available to all. This means that traditional authority is rejected in favour of rational analysis and independent thought, and that customs and institutions which are not in accordance with reason should be rejected. Although, as we shall see, the focus on reason has been criticised by some later feminists, at the time it provided inspiration for many feminist writers, for it implied that women’s exclusion from classical education need not also exclude them from philosophy, for what is important is good ideas, and not ‘what fanciful people have said about them’ (Mary Astell, A
Serious Proposal to the Ladies, in Ferguson, 1985:188). It also meant that the questioning of authority could be extended to that of men over women, and that ‘unreasonable institutions’ might include those, such as seventeenth-century marriage laws, that perpetuated women’s subordination.

Akkerman and Stuurnam (1998b) have described the seventeenth century as the age of ‘rationalist feminism’ in Europe, as writers such as the Frenchwoman Marie de Gournay and the Dutchwoman Anna Maria van Schurman used Cartesian principles to make increasingly egalitarian claims. Such continental feminism was probably given its most systematic and radical philosophical exposition during this period by the Frenchman François Poulain de la Barre in his three famous treatises on sexual equality, first published in the 1670s. In these, Poulain not only claimed that, since ‘the mind has no sex’, women are as capable of reason as men, he also argued that women are as capable as men of gaining the skills and knowledge that would enable them to participate equally in virtually all economic and social activities, including government and military command. Perhaps even more importantly, he suggested that because belief in male superiority was the most basic, widespread and deeply entrenched form of prejudice, a challenge to this could make other forms of prejudice questionable too (de la Barre, 1990; see also Stuurnam, 1998; La Vopa, 2010; Clarke, 2013).

Early British feminism and the ideas of Mary Astell

The impact of continental debates extended to Britain where, by the second half of the seventeenth century, they had combined with more local influences to produce ‘the first sizeable wave of British secular feminist protest’ (Ferguson, 1985:15; see also Ross, 2010), with significant numbers of women using pamphlets and books to challenge received ideas about their sex.

Any attempt to ‘read off’ feminist theory from the social situation of women should be approached with extreme caution. However, it does seem that the increased scale and intensity of the debate in Britain stemmed at least in part from changes in gender roles that occurred in its early years of capitalist development, as well as from the political upheavals of this ‘century of revolution’ (for an overview, see Kent, 1999). Changes in agriculture were creating a new and growing class of wage labourers, while the old system of family-based domestic industry was in gradual decline. Meanwhile, women were progressively excluded from trades and professions in which they had previously been active, such as brewing, printing and medicine, and aristocratic women, who had formerly played an important role in running their husbands’ estates,
Early Feminist Thought

were increasingly restricted to the domestic sphere. As it became increasingly difficult for women to earn their own living, marriage became an economic necessity, and wives became increasingly dependent on their husbands for financial support. Demographic factors were, however, increasing the numbers of ‘surplus women’ unable to find a husband, while the sixteenth-century English reformation meant that the option of entering a convent was no longer available. In this context, it is not surprising that the role of women should have been debated. Moreover, it was only now that the public and the private could be clearly distinguished that it made sense to ask about the appropriate sphere of women’s activity; this distinction was alien to medieval society, but remains central to many discussions of feminism today.

Politically, the seventeenth century was one of the most turbulent periods of British history because, for a time, the country was engulfed by civil war and all political and religious authority was thrown into question. It was almost inevitable that many women as well as men would become politicised and, in addition to the traditional ‘behind the scenes’ involvement, there is evidence of women demonstrating, rioting and petitioning parliament; these activities included a demonstration by ‘Shoals of Peace Women’ wearing white ribbons, who mobbed Westminster demanding an end to the civil war (Davies, 1998:2). Meanwhile, religious debates stimulated new ideas around moral renewal and social justice (Apetri, 2010) and, even more subversively, a number of the radical religious sects that sprang up challenged received notions as to appropriate sexual roles and behaviour: for example, the Ranters preached extreme sexual permissiveness, while the Quakers argued that men and women were not only equal in God’s eyes, but were equally eligible for the ministry.

Questions of authority in state and family were, moreover, intimately linked in the political theory of the time. Conservative defenders of absolute monarchical power argued that the authority of the king over his people was sanctioned by God and nature in exactly the same way as that of a father over his family; this meant that ‘patriarchy’ (the rule of the father) in the home was used as justification for a parallel power in the state. Opponents of such state power, who argued that authority was not divinely ordained but must rest on reason and consent, were therefore forced to re-examine arbitrary power within the family as well: logically, it seemed, patriarchy in state and home must stand or fall together. Perhaps unsurprisingly, this logic was not pushed to its conclusion by male writers. Although Hobbes and Locke, the foremost political theorists of the century, did examine relationships within the family at some length, they fell back on arguments of social convenience and men’s superior strength to justify the continued subordination of women. This meant that while they saw men as independent and rational individuals capable of
perceiving and pursuing their own self-interest, they saw women as wives and mothers, weak creatures unable to escape the curse of Eve, whose interests were bound up with those of their family, and who therefore had no need for independent political rights.

At first sight, this appears to be the kind of inconsistency that a more rigorous application of the underlying principles could rectify; however, some recent theorists have suggested that, despite their universalistic pretensions, the basic premises of early liberal writers were inherently biased against women. Here it is argued that they were based on an essentially male view of human nature that ignored human interdependence and attributes such as nurturing that have traditionally been associated with women; that denied any value to subjective, intuitive or emotionally founded knowledge; and that perpetuated a view of rationality that excluded women, because it defined reason in terms of overcoming femininity (identified with nature, particularity, biology, passion and emotion). Some also claim that the whole approach was predicated upon a distinction between the public and the private, which involved the exclusion of women from the former and a devaluation of the latter. These are complex and contested arguments, which will recur throughout the book: at this stage it is important to note simply that the extension of traditional theory to include women may not be as unproblematical as it at first sight seems, and that the concepts and assumptions made by male theorists are not necessarily adequate when it comes to expressing female needs and experiences (Lloyd, 1984; Coole, 1993; Nye, 1990a; Bordo, 1994; Springborg, 1996; Pateman, 1998a; Waters, 2000; Prokhovnik, 2002, 2007; Brace, 2007).

As in earlier periods, mainstream political and philosophical debates in the seventeenth century were conducted almost exclusively by men. There were, however, exceptions, of whom the most important is probably Mary Astell (1666–1731). Although she has been written out of histories of political thought, in her lifetime Astell was widely seen as a serious contributor to mainstream political theory; she has more recently been described as ‘The First English Feminist’ (Hill, 1986, the First English Feminist) and ‘arguably the first systematic feminist theoretician in the west’ (Catherine Stimpson, Introduction to Perry, 1986:xi. See also Smith, 1982; Kinnard, 1983; Browne, 1987; Waters, 2000; Springborg, 2005; Duran, 2006; Kolbrener and Michelson (eds), 2007).

In Astell’s writings on women, we find the new approach to philosophy and knowledge being used to produce a classic early statement of the core liberal feminist belief that men and women are equally capable of reason, and that therefore they should be equally educated in its use: ‘Since God has given to Women as well as Men intelligent Souls, why should they be forbidden to use them?’ (A Serious Proposal to the Ladies, in Ferguson, 1985:188). Here, Astell anticipated the arguments of Mary Wollstonecraft and other
later writers, by arguing that although women in the society of her day appeared frivolous and incapable of reason, this was the product of faulty upbringing rather than any natural disability, evidence of the need for improved female education rather than its impossibility. However, although Astell based her arguments on the liberal idea of rationality, she did not accept the liberal idea of political rights. Like most of the seventeenth-century feminists, she was a staunch Tory and defender of the monarchy; as such, she was more concerned to deny political rights to men than to attempt to extend them to women. Indeed, the logic of her conservatism led her to a seemingly very unfeminist conclusion: accepting the parallel between authority in the state and in the home, she argued that a wife must obey her husband just as a subject must obey the king; when a woman enters marriage, she argued, she has chosen a ‘monarch for life’, and must therefore submit to his authority (for fuller discussion, see Springborg, 2005).

Astell’s writings are at times heavily ironic, so that not everything she says should be taken at face value; nevertheless her conservatism does seem genuine enough. It has, however, more radical implications than first appear, and in many ways she was carried beyond liberal feminist demands to a broader analysis of the relations between men and women. First, she insisted that a woman’s duty to obey her husband did not involve any recognition of his superiority; indeed, there is throughout her writings a marked tone of barely disguised contempt for the male sex (for example, she said that men are not fit to educate children, for ‘precepts contradicted by example seldom prove effective’; quoted in Kinnard, 1983:37). Secondly, she argued that submission to male authority could not extend to single women, whether ‘poor fatherless maids’ like herself or ‘widows who have lost their masters’ (Reflections Upon Marriage, in Ferguson, 1985:195). This meant, thirdly, that an educated woman should choose to reject the domestic slavery involved in marriage, and she therefore advised women to avoid matrimony (while cheerfully admitting that if they all followed her advice, then ‘there’s an End to the Human Race’; quoted in Perry, 1986:9). From this it followed, fourthly, that women’s activities need not be limited by the need to attract a husband, and they could therefore concentrate on improving their minds rather than their beauty: ‘Were not a morning more profitably spent at a Book than at a Looking Glass?’ (quoted in Perry, 1986:92). Finally, as a practical means of freeing women from marriage and dependence on men, she advocated the establishment of female communities, rather like secular nunneries, where women could live and learn together without men, knowing themselves ‘capable of More Things than the pitiful Conquest of some Wretched Heart’ (quoted in Perry, 1986:102). This idea excited considerable interest; however, it failed to attract sufficient financial support, not so much because of its feminism, but because of its dangerous associations with Roman Catholicism.
All this means that, despite her political conservatism, Astell’s work contains in embryonic form some of the core ideas of late-twentieth-century radical feminism: the idea that man (whether as sexual predator or tyrannous husband) is the natural enemy of woman; the idea that women must be liberated from the need to please men (which Perry [1986:103] sees as an early form of ‘consciousness raising’); the belief that this liberation can be achieved only if women are enabled to live separately from men; the perception that men have controlled and defined knowledge (‘Histories are writ by them, they recount each others great Exploits and have always done so’ [quoted in Perry, 1986:3]); and the understanding that women’s experiences can give them a valuable and distinctive perspective on the world (which Waters [2000] argues makes Astell a precursor of late-twentieth-century standpoint feminism). Underlying all this, there is a clear rejection of the whole scale of values in which man is the unquestioned measure of human worth in favour of a celebration of women: it was not for nothing that Astell’s major work on education was entitled A Serious Proposal to the Ladies … by a Lover of her Sex.

While Mary Astell may have been the most radical and systematic feminist of her time, she was, as has already been said, certainly not an isolated voice. This means that by the early eighteenth century we have a quite widely established perception of women as a group in society whose situation is in need of improvement, and it is this consciousness of women’s group identity which Smith thinks distinguishes writers of this period from their predecessors (Smith, 1982; Ross, 2010). What we do not yet find, however, is any direct challenge to women’s social or economic position or to the sexual division of labour, nor do we find any coherent political programme or demand that the rights of male citizens be extended to women. For the most part socially and politically conservative, these early feminists addressed themselves almost exclusively to women of the upper and middle classes and there were few attempts to link the situation of women to other disadvantaged groups in society. For these writers, it was through education and the exercise of reason that women could be made independent of men; it was not until the second half of the eighteenth century that feminism was to become associated with wider demands for change.

The Enlightenment and early liberal feminism

In some ways, the middle years of the eighteenth century seem to represent a retreat from feminism, as arguments for women’s rationality became less fashionable than belief in their innate weakness and dependence on men, and the ideas of Astell and her contemporaries fell into disrepute.
Nevertheless, although there was no systematic analysis of women’s situation or any organised women’s movement, individual complaints about their lot continued, as did discussion of women’s abilities and social roles, and Karen Offen has argued that ‘... there was clearly a full-blown feminist consciousness in existence among some privileged women and men [in Europe], in dialogue with a mounting backlash’ (Offen, 1998:98. See also Offen, 2000; Rogers, 1982; Spender, 1983a).

In Britain, many women continued to write and publish throughout the period; most famously, the ‘bluestocking’ group of ‘salon intellectuals’ debated and wrote on a range of contemporary issues. The bluestockings, whose best known member was Hannah More, have usually been seen as anti-feminist: they stressed the importance of women’s domestic role, particularly their responsibility for nurturing virtue within the family, and they argued that, to a greater extent than men, women were motivated by ‘sensibility’ rather than reason. However, they also argued that if women were to become good wives and mothers, they must be educated, while arguments about women’s greater emotional sensibility were used to justify women’s involvement in movements for moral and social reform, such as temperance and anti-slavery campaigns. Moreover, the very existence of the bluestockings as a group of intellectual women, publicly discussing and publishing from the 1750s onwards, could be seen as a statement about women’s ability and role in society: no longer a silenced majority, women could not be entirely excluded from public debate (see Midgley, 1995; Caine, 1997; Kent, 1999; Richardson, 2000; Stott, 2000; Guest, 2002). It is in this context that the ideas of the late-eighteenth-century feminists must be understood; although there is no direct line between them and the writers of Mary Astell’s day, their ideas did not explode upon an entirely unsuspecting world.

The second half of the eighteenth century was a period in which the stress on rationality and the questioning of traditional authority, which we saw beginning in seventeenth-century philosophy, reached its fullest expression. It was also a period dominated by the experiences of the American and French revolutions, and in which philosophical debates on the nature of freedom and human rationality took tangible form in the American Declaration of Independence (1776) and the French Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen (1789). What united the philosophers of this so-called Age of Reason or ‘the Enlightenment’ was their optimism and their belief in progress through the onward march of human reason and knowledge; reason replaced God or antiquity as the standard of right or wrong, and no institution or authority was to be exempt from its judgement. Although many of the leading philosophers were in fact socially and politically conservative, the radical implications of these principles are obvious, and they provided the basis for the liberal belief that, as
rational beings, individual men have rights that must not be violated by arbitrary power; that therefore any authority must rest upon the consent of the governed; and that individuals should be, as far as possible, self-determining and free from government control.

Although always expressed in terms of the rights of man, it might at first sight seem that this could be understood as a generic term that includes women; for the most part, however, the philosophers of the Enlightenment and the leaders of the revolutions did not simply fail to make this extension, but they denied that it could be made. There was indeed a strikingly widespread consensus amongst leading philosophers that the principles of rational individualism were not applicable to women, for it was held that by their very nature women were incapable of the full development of reason; thus, we can find in the writings of Voltaire, Diderot, Montesquieu and, above all, Rousseau, the idea that women are essentially creatures of emotion and passion, who have an important role to play as wives and mothers, but who are biologically unsuited for the public sphere (see Rendall, 1985; Schapiro, 1978; Kennedy and Mendus, 1987; Landes, 1988).

This consensus did not, however, go unchallenged, and by the end of the century a number of male writers were attempting to show its inconsistency and to demonstrate that the liberal ideas of the Enlightenment could be applied to women as well as men. For example, the French philosopher Condorcet insisted that women were capable of reason and should be educated accordingly, that they should therefore have the same political rights as men, and that to deny this was an unacceptable tyranny. In practice, Condorcet did not anticipate the widespread involvement of women in politics, but he said there was no reason to deny them political rights in principle – indeed, he argued that women could no more be logically excluded from politics on the grounds of menstruation or pregnancy than could a man because he was suffering from gout (On the Admission of Women to the Right of Citizenship, 1790, and Sketch for a Historical Future of the Progress of the Human Mind, 1793, in Baker (ed.) 1976; see also Schapiro, 1978; Vogel, 1986; Landes, 1988). The German writer von Hippel similarly rejected the idea that women’s exclusion from civil and political rights could be justified in terms of a biologically given nature; it was men, he claimed, who had made women what they were, and he demanded that men and women be given equal rights and education for citizenship rather than for their traditional sex roles. Hippel went further than other writers of the time in blaming men for women’s situation, and in denying that the traditional division of labour between the sexes was sanctioned by reason or nature; it was however, he argued, enlightened men who had to act to liberate women, for they themselves had been rendered incapable of independent political action (On the Civil Improvement of Women, 1793;
see Vogel, 1986. For further discussion of pro-feminist male writers in this period, see Chernock, 2009).

However, women at this time were themselves far from silent, and their voices were to be heard on both sides of the Atlantic demanding equal treatment with men. Thus, in America, Abigail Adams (1744–1818) wrote in 1776 to her husband (who later became the second president of the United States), employing the language that he had used against English rule to point out that her sex too needed protection from tyranny and ‘will not hold ourselves bound by any laws in which we have no voice or representation’. John Adams’ reply that ‘As to your extraordinary code of laws, I cannot but laugh …’ can have done little to change her opinion that ‘all men would be tyrants if they could’ (extracts in Schneir, 1972, and Rossi, 1973). Other correspondence of the period suggests that such ideas were commonly discussed by women of Adams’ class, while a more systematic analysis was given by Judith Murray (1751–1820) (see Rendall, 1985; Spender, 1983a; Rossi, 1973). In the same period, some indigenous American women were protesting against the exclusion of women from negotiations with Anglo-American settlers and seeking to defend their own more egalitarian social arrangements. Although their voices were always marginalized, their views were briefly circulated on both sides of the Atlantic and they provide a salutary reminder that ‘some women came to feminism not to extend European liberal political philosophy of individual rights to include women but rather to defend traditional communal notions of women’s authority against European encroachment’ (Moore and Brooks, 2012:31; see also Hewitt, 2010b).

Meanwhile in England the historian Catharine Macaulay (1731–91) was arguing on lines similar to Anglo-American women. In her Letters on Education (1790), she insisted that the differences between the sexes were a product of education and environment and not of nature: she attacked the way in which women's minds and bodies had been distorted to please men and she demanded that boys and girls be given the same education – and here she went beyond uncritical acceptance of male values to demand that the education of boys too be changed to provide them with traditional female skills. Macaulay’s work has been overshadowed by that of her close contemporary Mary Wollstonecraft (1759–97), but at one time her fame extended across two continents: she was in correspondence with George Washington, and Abigail Adams asked a correspondent to find out all he could about her, for ‘One of my own sex so eminent ... naturally raises my curiosity’ (Spender, 1983a:127, 129). Whatever the reason for her rapid disappearance from public memory (an indigestible prose style, the offence she caused to polite society by marrying a much younger man and the inability of male historians to cope with the existence of more than one feminist writer at a time have all been suggested – see Spender,
1983a), it is certain that at the time her work was widely read. Although gender was less central to her thought than to Wollstonecraft’s, it helped form the latter’s feminist ideas, as Wollstonecraft herself readily acknowledged (Caputi, 2013).

By the late eighteenth century, a key source of ‘progressive’ ideas in England was provided by the Unitarians (Protestant dissenters who saw reason as the basis for religious understanding and social progress). Although their relationship with feminism was not unambiguous, they drew many women as well as men into campaigns against slavery and for education, and they were an important part of the radical circles which Wollstonecraft was to join (Gleadle, 1995; Hirsch, 1996; Watts, 1998; Taylor, 2003).

It was, however, in France that women of this period were to play the most dramatic role: the women of Paris demanding bread, the tricoteuses knitting under the guillotine and Charlotte Corday’s assassination of Marat have passed into legend, while a number of individual women, such as the moderate republican Madame Roland, were involved in the struggle for political power. Feminism as such was always marginal to the revolution; demands for improved female education were, however, included in the first petitions to the National Assembly (the French parliament), and wider issues of women’s rights and representation were soon fiercely debated in pamphlets and the radical press, and in the women’s political clubs that sprang up between 1789 and 1793. With Condorcet, women were arguing that principles of the Enlightenment applied to them too, and that political rights belonged to them as much as to men: Olympe de Gouges’ Declaration of the Rights of Women (1790, in Riemar and Fout, 1980) is the clearest example of this approach. As the revolution developed, demands were silenced, and in an anti-feminist reaction, the women’s clubs were closed and the most prominent writers and spokeswomen were imprisoned or put to death. In the light of her own fate, de Gouges’ claim that ‘since a woman has the right to mount the Scaffold, she must also have the right to address the House’ has a terrible irony (Riemar and Fout, 1980:63). At first sight, women’s demands at this time look like a straightforward and ‘common sense’ application of existing principles. However, as Joan Scott has argued, they were deeply paradoxical, for the claim to equal rights simultaneously denied the relevance of sex difference and affirmed the existence of women as a sexually differentiated group with identifiable interests and needs: ‘... in order to protest women’s exclusion, they had to act on behalf of women and so invoked the very difference they sought to deny’ (Scott, 1996:x). As we shall see, this paradox recurs in later feminist thought. (For further discussion of feminism in the revolution, see also Rendall, 1985; Tomalin, 1974; Kelly, 1987, 1992; Akkerman and Stuurnam, 1998b; Landes, 1988.)
Although the articulation of feminist demands during the French revolution was short-lived, it had an impact on the public imagination that was to affect popular reaction to feminism in other nations: ‘The feeling was that the French were bad, revolution was bad, the French revolution had led to feminism, therefore feminism must be bad’ (Rover, 1970:13). It is therefore important to remember that liberal feminism could be seen as a revolutionary ideology in the most literal sense, if we are to understand the reception given to Mary Wollstonecraft’s ideas in England; for, despite her own revulsion at the extremism and violence of the revolution, ‘Viewed through the smoke of the Bastille, Wollstonecraft loomed like a blood-stained Amazon, the high-priestess of loose-tongued liberty’ (Taylor, 1983:11; see also Hirsch, 1996). This meant that although her work was less original than both her admirers and detractors have claimed, its effect was maximised by its timing – she wrote it two years after the outbreak of revolution; and it was written with a force and passion which reflected the tumultuous times through which she was living.

Mary Wollstonecraft’s *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*

At one level, *Vindication of the Rights of Woman* is simply a continuation of the old debate about women’s nature and their capacity for reason. Here, Wollstonecraft was particularly concerned with refuting the ideas of the philosopher Rousseau who, in his work *Emile*, which described the ideal education of a young man, had included a chapter on the very different education of ‘Sophy’, Emile’s future wife. For Rousseau, men’s and women’s natures and abilities were *not* the same, and these biologically given differences defined their whole role in society, with men becoming citizens and women wives and mothers. This meant that the education of boys and girls must both recognise natural differences in ability and inclination (‘Little girls always dislike learning to read and write, but they are always ready to learn to sew’, *Emile*:331), and encourage the virtues appropriate to adult life: this involved a training in rational citizenship for boys and lessons in how to please a man and bring up his children for girls. Rousseau’s democratic radicalism had marked him out from the other philosophers of the Enlightenment, and it is partly because she shared his passion for liberty and justice in other spheres that Wollstonecraft was so enraged by his views on women: it is the radical nature of Rousseau’s views on politics which give a revolutionary edge to her insistence that girls and boys should be educated alike.

Wollstonecraft’s quarrel with Rousseau was fourfold. First, like earlier feminists, she refused to accept that women were less capable of reason than men, or that vanity, weakness and frivolity were the natural attributes
of her sex (‘I have, probably, had an opportunity of observing more girls in their infancy than J J Rousseau’, *Vindication*:129). In phrases often strikingly reminiscent of Astell (of whom she had probably never heard), she roundly condemned the mindless vanity of upper class women of her day, but like Astell saw this ‘femininity’ as a social construct that distorted rather than reflected women’s true ability. Secondly, Wollstonecraft argued that if men and women are equally possessed of reason they must be equally educated in its use: woman is *not* ‘specially made for man’s delight’ (*Emil*:322), but an independent being who is both capable of and entitled to a rational education. This much had, as we have seen, already been asserted by earlier feminists, but Wollstonecraft extended the argument in her third main point of disagreement with Rousseau: as men’s and women’s common humanity is based on their shared and God-given possession of reason, then *virtue* must be the same for both sexes – that is, it must be based on reason and it must be freely chosen. This meant that for Wollstonecraft the virtues of the good wife and mother could not be seen as ‘natural’, nor could they be based upon a male-imposed ignorance, cunningly disguised as innocence, and she argued forcefully that a woman taught only passive obedience to her husband could never be fit to bring up children. Women must be given knowledge and education so that they can make rational choices, for it is only then that it makes sense to talk of their goodness.

This claim that women’s actions must be freely chosen adds a radical new dimension to the debate, for it challenges the whole idea of ascribed social roles and the rights and duties that accompany them. It is this fourth and final area that distinguishes Wollstonecraft and her contemporaries from the earlier feminists, for the idea of equal *worth* now leads irrevocably to that of equal *rights*. In Astell’s time, belief in women’s rationality had been combined with political conservatism, but now it was firmly linked to political liberalism, and the principles were established that were to lead to later campaigns for women’s suffrage and legal rights and, eventually, to the demand for equal participation with men in the worlds of politics and paid employment.

The systematic articulation of these demands was, however, still very much in the future, and Wollstonecraft was much more interested in establishing the principle than in elaborating a detailed programme for change. She was writing at a time when, although industrialisation was opening up new employment, this was, particularly for women, at very low wages and in appalling conditions, while in the middle ranks of society, women’s economic dependence on men had grown with the increased separation of home and work. As in Astell’s day, employment prospects for middle-class women were almost non-existent, and Wollstonecraft’s own experiences showed her how degrading and unsatisfactory were the
only available options of teacher, companion and governess. Increasingly, a man’s wife was seen as the purely ornamental symbol of his success and not in any sense his partner; this dependency was formalised in Blackstone’s famous decree that within marriage ‘the very legal existence of the wife is suspended … or at least is incorporated and consolidated into that of the husband’ (quoted in Kramnick, 1978:34). It was in this context that Wollstonecraft insisted that women had an independent right to education, employment, property and the protection of the civil law; this, she argued, was needed to ensure that women were not forced into marriage through economic necessity, and that wives were not entirely dependent on the goodwill of their husbands. Women, therefore, needed legal rights in order to make independent rational choices and achieve virtue; a woman who is forced to perform the traditional female roles will do so very badly, but if men

would ... but snap our chains, and be content with rational fellowship instead of slavish obedience, they would find us more observant daughters, more affectionate sisters, more faithful wives, more reasonable mothers – in a word, better citizens. (Vindication:263)

As the above quotation suggests, Wollstonecraft did not expect that education and freedom of choice would lead most women to reject their traditional role, but argued that they would enable them to perform it better. She did not accept the public/private split that runs through liberal thought and which insists on the superiority of the former over the latter; rather she sought to ‘envalue’ women’s domestic responsibilities (Thornton, 1986:88), and to show that domestic duties, properly performed, were a form of rational citizenship: that is, they were to be seen as public responsibilities rather than a source of private satisfaction or tribulation (Vogel, 1986; Sapiro, 1992:182–5).

The problem with this, of course, is that in a world in which domestic duties are unpaid, the economic dependence of a woman upon her husband remains; Wollstonecraft had perceived the dangers of this, but did not follow its implications through. Similarly, her insistence that motherhood is a form of citizenship does not solve the problem of the male monopoly of formal political and legal power, which leaves women dependent on the goodwill of men to ‘snap their chains’. Here, she did briefly suggest that women should have representatives in government (Vindication:260), but this was in no way central to her argument, and although she argued that women must be free to choose a career in business or public life, she never suggested that individual successful women might use their power to benefit their sex as a whole. Carole Pateman has argued that Wollstonecraft was caught in an underlying dilemma which
still traps liberal feminists today: she sought to claim citizenship for women on gender-neutral grounds at the same time as recognising their specific qualities and roles, within a framework that allowed women to become full citizens only by being like men (Pateman, 1988b).

Some recent feminist critics of liberalism and the Enlightenment have argued that Wollstonecraft’s arguments are further confused by her uncritical acceptance of an inherently male model of rationality which, as discussed above, is bound up with the need to subdue qualities traditionally associated with women, such as passion and emotion, and which sees calculating self-interest rather than sympathy, emotion or imagination as the only legitimate basis for human motivation and conduct. Even Rousseau, who stressed the importance of passion in human affairs, insisted that public life must be ruled solely by reason. He therefore argued that women (the objects of passion) can have no place in politics; later feminist critics argue that this exclusion is not simply a regrettable product of Rousseau’s personal prejudices, which could be ignored by later theorists, but is basic to a view of rational citizenship which presupposes not only the exclusion of passion from public life, but its containment and expression within the family. This means that, from a Rousseau-ite perspective, if women enter political life they not only disrupt it, they also destroy its domestic foundations (Canovan, 1987; Coole, 1993). Critics argue that such an approach cannot provide an adequate basis for a woman-centred theory or feminist politics. The problem is only compounded if domesticity too is seen as a source of civic responsibility to which the same public standards of rationality apply. Some feminist critics of liberal rationality have therefore criticised Wollstonecraft’s apparent denial of any legitimate place to more unruly emotions and desires, and they have attributed her unhappy private life to an unworkable belief that, even in marriage, passion and love must be subordinated to reason, so that ‘In the choice of a husband women should not be led astray by the qualities of a lover’ (Vindication:224. See Brody, 1983; Caine, 1997).

As Virginia Sapiro has pointed out, a problem with this body of feminist criticism is that it is often based on a caricature of Enlightenment thinking. It also misrepresents Wollstonecraft, who employed the contemporary (and contested) notion of sensibility to argue for the legitimacy of both emotion and reason, ‘so long as emotion was trained by reason and reason tempered by emotion’, and whose belief in women’s need to control their sexual impulses was simply common sense in an age when lack of reliable contraception or safe childbirth meant that ‘Sexuality was – materially and not just conceptually – a life-and-death matter for women’ (Sapiro, 1992:xxi, xix. See also Taylor, 2003; Gerson, 2002). It is also self-evident that unhappy relationships are not confined to liberal feminists, and many a contemporary feminist whose heart or sexual desire refuses to
obey the dictates of logic will empathise with Wollstonecraft’s unhappy love affairs and sympathise with the conflict between love and reason that was articulated in her private correspondence; many may also envy her eventual marriage to the philosopher William Godwin, which appears to have been based on a high degree of mutual respect and independence, as well as love (Walters, 1979; Moore, 1999). Ironically, it was the publication of her correspondence by Godwin shortly after her death in childbirth that did most to discredit her ideas for the next generations of women: the association of feminism with ‘immorality’ effectively banished it from consideration in ‘respectable’ society.

A further criticism that has frequently been made of liberal feminists is that they fail to recognise the ways in which gender intersects with other forms of oppression or to relate the situation of women to wider social conditions. In particular, Wollstonecraft was writing at a time when opposition to slavery was rapidly growing and, like many later writers, she was able to score polemical points by likening marriage to slavery (Taylor, 2003) – but this move both risked trivializing the horrors and degradation involved in slavery itself and ignored the distinct oppression of female slaves (Ehrmann, 2013). Wollstonecraft has also been accused of being class-blind and interested only in the plight of middle-class women. Thus, it has been said that ‘her feminism was basically a demand for equality with bourgeois man’ (Walters, 1979:320), and certainly the Vindication did address itself to women of the middle class, and she consistently seems to assume that the existence of servants is necessary if domestic work is to be more than mindless drudgery.

However, the ideas discussed in the radical circles in which Wollstonecraft moved were certainly not confined to the demand for formal legal rights, but encompassed a whole range of social, economic and religious concerns, with a clear overlap between the ideas of early liberal and socialist writers (see Gleadle, 1995; Watts, 1998). If we look beyond the pages of A Vindication of the Rights of Woman to Wollstonecraft’s earlier A Vindication of the Rights of Man (1790), we see her rejecting arguments for hierarchy and privilege, and attacking inheritance and property as causes of poverty and misery for working people; her last novel (Maria; or, The Wrongs of Woman, published posthumously in 1798) was concerned with exploring the predicament not only of the middle-class heroine, but also of a servant girl drawn into prostitution (Taylor, 2003). To describe Wollstonecraft as a socialist would be an exaggeration, for her ideas on economics remain latent rather than systematically articulated, but there is in her writings a consistent insistence that a good social order is incompatible with a high degree of inequality: ‘From the respect paid to property flow, as from a poisoned fountain, most of the evils and vices which render this world such a dreary place to the contemplative mind’
(Vindication:252) and ‘the more equality there is among men, the more virtue and happiness will reign in society’ (Vindication:96). Thus, she went well beyond the defence of equal property rights normally associated with liberalism, and provides an interesting link to the ideas of the ‘utopian socialists’ to which we now turn – indeed one of the foremost of these, Robert Owen, was to say that he ‘had never met with a person who thought so exactly as he did’ (quoted in Rauschenbusch-Clough, 1898:188).

The utopian socialists and feminism

The term ‘utopian socialist’ was used by Marx and Engels to refer to those who believed that competitive capitalist society should be replaced by a more equitably organised, cooperative and rational one, and that this could be achieved by demonstrating the reasonableness and desirability of reform: persuasion and example, not class conflict and revolution, were to be the agents of social change. The best known of these early socialists were the Frenchmen Saint-Simon (1760–1825) and Fourier (1772–1837), and the British Robert Owen (1772–1837). They did not form a unified group and some of their ideas were eccentric in the extreme; they were, however, an important influence on later writers and, unlike most later socialists, they saw relationships between the sexes and within the family as central issues – changes here were not seen as simply the by-products of social change or class struggle, but were themselves a necessary precondition for the transformation of society. These feminist aspects of their thought were developed by some of their followers and attracted widespread interest and excitement in both Europe and America (Taylor, 1983; Levitas, 1998; Moses, 1998; Moses and Rabin, 1993; Gleadle, 2000b). There was lively debate in the press and, while previous generations of feminists had broken ground by going into print, women such as Frances Wright, Anna Wheeler, Frances Morrison and Flora Tristan were now stating their case in public and drawing huge crowds to their lectures and meetings (Taylor, 1983; Eckhardt, 1984). In the numerous but short-lived socialist communities that the movement inspired, the role of women was a central concern (Muncy, 1973), while William Thompson and Anna Wheeler’s 1825 Appeal on Behalf of Women remains an outstanding contribution to feminist theory.

In this context, the ideas of Wollstonecraft and other liberal feminists were but a starting point and, although socialist feminism was never a coherent movement, a number of key themes emerge. In the first place, the goal was not equal rights within the existing system, but within a radically transformed one in which private property was to be abolished or
Early Feminist Thought

severely modified, and in which women would have economic as well as legal independence. Secondly, the traditional division of labour between the sexes was widely attacked: not only were women to be given a full place in productive life, but some even suggested that men should share communal responsibility for domestic work. Thirdly, the family as an institution was widely condemned: it was seen as a source of male power, a bastion of selfish individualism incompatible with socialist cooperation and a coercive restraint on free choice. Following from this, some stressed, fourthly, the importance of the free expression of sexuality and argued that ‘free love’ was the necessary basis of a free society. All this meant that the liberal claim for equal rights was now placed firmly within a socio-economic context of which Wollstonecraft had shown only passing awareness, and power relationships were identified within the family as well as in public life. Recent writers have also seen, in the new ideas on sexuality, a symbolic challenge to the dualism of Western political thought, for reason and virtue no longer seemed to require the denial of passion, but rather its fullest possible expression.

Attempts to put this analysis into practice, however, met with little success. With their faith in reason and human perfectibility, the leaders were very much children of the Enlightenment; they therefore expected that education and example would prove the moral and practical superiority of their system, and that capitalist funding would be found to further the cause of social transformation. Perhaps not surprisingly, such support was seldom forthcoming. Thus, although Owen claimed to have shown that benevolence was not incompatible with capitalist self-interest in his famous model factory at New Lanark in Scotland, where improved conditions, health and housing had produced not only a healthy workforce but healthy profits too, other capitalists remained unconvinced that this represented a sound return on investment. They were also frightened off the scheme by Owen’s increasingly radical ideas on religion and the family. Owen himself came to see the establishment of socialist communities as a speedier means of regenerating society: as with those inspired by Fourier, the idea was not to ‘drop out’ of existing society, but to change it by force of example. In practice, however, the communities were to prove more of a warning than an inspiration.

America in the nineteenth century had seemed to offer an ideal opportunity for social experiments, and Emerson wrote in 1840 that ‘Not a reading man but has a draft of a new community in his waistcoat pocket’ (quoted in Muncy, 1973:5). Of the five hundred or so secular and religious communities that were established, about 50 were inspired by Fourier, and 16 by Owen (of which the most famous was New Harmony, founded in 1825 by Owen himself); there were also at least seven Owenite communities in England between 1821 and 1845. However, none of these socialist
communities lasted for more than a few years. This was partly because optimism and idealism could not compensate for lack of practical skills and financial resources, and partly because they tended to attract all kinds of opportunists and misfits and were torn by personality clashes and policy disputes; attitudes to women and to the family also seem to have played a crucial role (Lockwood, 1971; Garnett, 1972; Hardy, 1979; Gleadle, 2000b).

For Owen, private property, religion and marriage formed a kind of unholy and inseparable trinity: each was evil in itself, each upheld the others and none could therefore be eradicated in isolation. Thus, to stop the married woman being treated as the property of her husband, it was necessary to abolish not only marriage but also private property. To abolish private property, it was necessary to remove the major source of individualism and selfish gratification – the family. To do this, it was necessary to attack the cement that bound them together and upheld them both – religion. However, although the three institutions were logically entwined in theory, Owen found himself unable to abolish the family in practice: most of those entering the communities wished to live as couples; communal child-rearing and the separation of children from their parents was far too unpopular to carry out; and fear of scandal led him to downplay his attack on marriage (although in fact Owen never advocated promiscuity, but stable relationships based on free consent rather than legal constraint). The need for such caution was shown by the extent of public hostility to the Owenite community that had been established at Nashoba in 1825 by Frances Wright, with the rehabilitation of former slaves as a major aim. Wright’s unorthodox views on marriage (‘she put an affirmation of sexual experience that no one else in nineteenth century America would approach’, Eckhardt, 1984:156) provoked widespread condemnation and effectively removed any chances of attracting ‘respectable’ financial support. Fourier’s ideas on the liberating effects of sensuality were downplayed for similar reasons: he had advocated extreme sexual permissiveness both as a means of breaking down the ethics of individualism and possessiveness, and because he thought repression was harmful and incompatible with harmonious society; clearly his ideas could all too easily become an excuse for sexual exploitation, but in practice the Fourierite communities largely ignored this aspect of his thought and adopted a relatively conservative attitude to the family (Muncy, 1973:70). This means that although the failure of the communities is often cited as proof of the inadequacy of the utopian socialists’ theories, their theories on the family were never in fact put to the test.

As with the family and sexuality, so too with the division of labour: socialist theory was never matched by community practice. Here, Fourier’s views were again the most radical, for he demanded a total end to all
specialisation and the entire division of labour: he argued that work could be fulfilling and creative only if it were freely chosen, and that an ideal community must be organised to allow all individuals to move freely from one occupation to another. He did seem to think that some jobs will naturally be more attractive to women and implied that they should care for very small children, but he also insisted that in any occupation at least some of the workers should be of the sex that does not normally perform it (Grogan, 1992). This meant that no man or woman would be bound to one task for life and that domestic tasks, like all other work, would be the willingly performed expression of creativity rather than mindless drudgery. In practice, however, Fourier’s elaborate ideas were never systematically applied, and, despite the claims of men to the contrary, it seems that responsibility for domestic life remained firmly with the women in all the communities. In this context, it is perhaps not surprising that they should consistently be less enthusiastic in their support than the men; this was often taken as a sign of women’s political backwardness, but as Barbara Taylor has argued it had less to do with any innate partiality for individual wash-tubs than a fear, often justified, of becoming embroiled in a hard life over which they would have too little control, and in which they would bear the brunt of utopian impracticality. (Taylor, 1983:250)

However, as indicated at the beginning of this section, the impact of utopian socialism and its importance for feminist theory was not limited to the experience of the communities, but became linked in the 1830s and 1840s to a revival of interest in feminist issues which, although short-lived, was international in character. Thus, for example, Frances Wright had contacts in England, France and America, while there were many direct links between Owenites in England and French feminists inspired by the ideas of Fourier and Saint-Simon (Gleadle, 2000b). The ferment of ideas around the time of the revolutions which swept across much of the European continent in 1848 also had a clear impact on the American feminists discussed in the next chapter (Anderson, 1998).

The Saint-Simoniennes (female followers of Saint-Simon) are of particular historical significance, both because they involved unprecedented numbers of working-class women and because of their affinity with some late-twentieth-century feminist thought. As well as firmly identifying the link between sexual and class issues, they rejected liberal arguments based on equal rationality, making their claims for women on the basis of their essential difference from men, and they saw sexual repression as central to women’s subordination. They also took the unprecedented step of holding women-only meetings and setting up their own newspaper, which only
published articles by women. Claire Moses argues that they were therefore asserting women’s cultural autonomy and establishing what ‘was most likely the first consciously separatist women’s liberation movement in history’ (Moses, 1998:140. See also Moses and Rabin, 1993; Forget, 2001). Although she too drew on Saint-Simonian ideas to argue that women were both different from and superior to men, the Frenchwoman Flora Tristan took a rather different line on political activity, arguing that working men must be persuaded both to rise up in protest at their current situation and to liberate working women (Moon, 1978; Landes, 1988; Grogan, 1992; Cross, 1996).

In the early 1840s, Tristan was to be disappointed by most French workers’ apparent indifference to both socialism and feminism, while even socialists frequently expressed suspicion of feminist concerns. Such tension between socialism and feminism was also apparent in England, where Owenism had, by the 1830s, built up a considerable basis of working-class support strongly linked to the cooperative and trade union movements. Owenism never became a mass movement on the scale of the Chartist campaign for the vote, which reached its peak at about the same time, but its feminism posed problems for working-class supporters at a time when the idea of the male breadwinner and domestic wife was becoming increasingly popular amongst the working class. Women had been widely involved in political activity such as food riots and strikes earlier in the century, but with increased sexual competition for jobs they became excluded from trade union activity, and although they played an active role in both Chartist and Owenite organisations, particularly in the earlier years, this was often in support of male activity and did not necessarily involve any kind of feminist consciousness. By the 1850s, political involvement by working-class women had sharply declined and active hostility to feminism had increased (Florent, 1988).

Nevertheless, for a brief period, socialism and feminism had been united not only with each other but with the idea that it is only by transforming personal life that wider political and socio-economic changes could occur, and that such personal change itself can only succeed in the context of wider social transformation – so that the personal, the political and the socio-economic are inextricably linked and intertwined. Although latent in all utopian socialist theories, especially those of Owen and the Saint-Simoniennes, these interconnections were given their most sustained analysis in the work of Anna Wheeler, a leading socialist feminist lecturer, and her friend William Thompson (1775–1844), a leading Owenite and economist, who gave feminism a centrality lacking in other male writers; their most direct analysis of women’s situation is to be found in the splendidly entitled Appeal of One Half of the Human Race, Women, Against the Pretensions of the Other Half, Men, to Retain Them in Political
and Thence Civil and Domestic Slavery (although as noted in relation to Wollstonecraft, the slavery analogy is problematic).

Wheeler and Thompson’s Appeal on Behalf of Women

The Appeal was formally a reply to James Mill’s Article on Government (published 1824) in which Mill had claimed that, because women have no interests separate from those of their husband or father, they have no need for independent political representation. As such, it ridiculed Mill’s logic and vigorously restated the liberal case for equal rights; here, Wheeler and Thompson went well beyond Wollstonecraft’s tentative ideas on representation to insist that women are entitled to full political rights including representation and participation in affairs of state. Women’s intellectual capacity is, they argued, at least as great as men’s, and biological differences can never be an argument against political rights. At present ‘the law has erected the physical organisation into a crime’ (Appeal:171), but in fact, they asserted, the consequences of female biology are much less incapacitating than the diseases of excess to which male legislators are prone, while

is it possible to conceive that legislative power lodged exclusively in the hands of women could have produced atrocities and wretchedness equal to those with which exclusive male legislation has desolated the globe? (Appeal:131)

However, Wheeler and Thompson were not simply liberal feminists, and although they claimed equal political and legal rights for women, they argued that these could become meaningful only when common ownership and cooperation replaced private property and competition as the basis of social organisation. Until such time, they claimed, women would still be disadvantaged, for formal equality takes no account of actual difference of condition (such as responsibility for child-rearing), so that men will in practice be more successful than women and ‘Superiority in the production or accumulation of individual wealth will ever be whispering into man’s ear preposterous notions of his relative importance over woman’ (Appeal:198). Economic independence for Wheeler and Thompson therefore involved far more than Wollstonecraft’s insistence that women have the right to follow a career, for it included the independence of a wife from her husband. This, they argued, could only be achieved in a cooperative society in which the full worth of women’s contribution would be appreciated, and in which there would be no motives for men to practise injustices or for women to submit to them – for only without the distorting influences of possession and property could men and women relate to each other as free and equal human beings.
However, although women’s oppression was therefore seen as a product of capitalism reinforced by unequal laws, Wheeler and Thompson also saw it as based on men’s selfishness:

Whatever system of labour ... whatever system of government ... under every vicissitude of MAN’s condition he has always retained woman his slave. (Appeal:196)

This led them to an analysis of the ways in which men have kept women as their slaves, which has clear affinities to the radical feminist analysis of patriarchy and oppression in personal relationships, discussed in Chapters 9 and 10. Thus, they argued that a husband (a man ‘who has admitted a woman to the high honour of becoming his involuntary breeding machine and household slave’) does not simply use legal or physical coercion to dominate his wife, but insisted on controlling her mind, demanding her love as well as her obedience and ‘exacting from her trained obsequiousness the semblance of a voluntary obedience’. They saw the family too as a means of male domination, where women are ‘isolated and stultified with their children, with their fire and food-processing processes’ and reduced by their despotic husbands ‘to a state of stupidity and apathy, rendering them incapable of a greater degree of happiness than that of the brutes’ (Appeal:63, 66, 180 and 70).

All this is strong stuff and provides an analysis of power in personal and family relations which is far removed from Wollstonecraft’s ideal of the ‘domestic citizen’. However, it did not lead Wheeler and Thompson to condemn the male sex in perpetuity or to advocate the kind of separation envisaged by some late-twentieth-century radical feminists (and by Mary Astell; see above). Rather, they believed that the true interests of the sexes could be reconciled, for if women were free, then men would find the pleasures of equal companionship far outweighed those of despotism; on a larger scale, the ending of relations of dependency and possession in personal life would make possible a new and higher order of society and

As women’s bondage has chained down man to the ignorance and vices of despotism, so will their liberation reward him with knowledge, with freedom and with happiness. (Appeal:213)

This conclusion blends liberal, socialist and radical analyses as it shows the interconnections of political, economic and personal power, and as such it has much in common with later socialist feminist analysis. It also frequently bears a startling resemblance to the ideas put forward by John Stuart Mill (the son of James Mill), in his famous On the Subjection of Women some 24 years later; and it is based on a philosophy, utilitarianism,
which is usually associated with liberal theory but which Wheeler and Thompson used throughout their analysis. The implications of this will be discussed in the next chapter, but at this stage it is important to note that Wheeler and Thompson’s use of utilitarian theory suggests that liberal concepts may be more flexible than some feminists have claimed, and not necessarily incompatible with other approaches.

Although the utopian socialists failed to achieve their aims, and they have generally been seen as merely an eccentric footnote to the history books, their ideas represent an important, if brief, alliance of liberal, socialist and feminist ideals that challenged the distinction between the private and the public and saw the interconnections between legal, political, economic and personal subordination. As we shall see in the next chapter, they also had a direct influence on some later mainstream writers. Nevertheless, for the next 150 years, liberal campaigns for political and legal rights were often separate from socialist preoccupations with the class struggle, while the idea of personal oppression frequently disappeared from the agenda; it was only towards the end of the twentieth century that these strands were to be drawn systematically together again.
 Abbey, Ruth, 253
 abortion, 37, 114, 119, 130, 137, 159, 179–80, 199, 200, 261, 278, 286
 see also reproduction; reproductive rights
 Ackerly, Brooke, 256
 Adam, Barbara, 265
 Adams, Abigail, 15
 Adams, John, 15
 affirmative action, 143, 144–5
 see also all-women shortlists; quotas
 Akkerman, T., 8
 alienation, 58, 67, 191, 201–3
 all-women shortlists, 145, 211
 see also affirmative action; quotas
 Althusser, Louis, 191, 205, 206
 anarchist feminism, 92, 99–101
 Andersen, Margaret, 250
 Annas, J., 47
 Anthony, Susan, 39, 42
 Anzaldua, Gloria, 247
 Archer, Louise, 232
 Armand, Inessa, 113
 Astell, Mary, 7, 10–12, 13, 18, 28
 Attwood, L., 113
 Aune, Kristin, 280, 281
 austerity, 263, 269, 275
 Aveling, Eleanor Marx, 105–6
 Aziz, Razia, 245

backlash, 138
 Baker, Ella, 102
 Banks, O., 87
 Banyard, Kat, 280
 Barre, François Poulan de la, 8
 Barrett, Michelle, 66, 67, 68, 206–7, 208, 226
 Bates, Laura, 278, 280, 285

Beard, Mary, 6, 287
 Beauvoir, Simone de, 2, 124–32, 135, 181, 217, 227
 Bebel, August, 104–5, 106, 109, 111, 112
 Bellamy, Edward, 95
 Bentham, Jeremy, 50, 52
 Bernstein, Eduard, 107
 Besant, Annie, 90
 Beyoncé, 286

binary thinking, 4, 23, 143, 144, 149, 153, 214–7 passim, 222, 223, 227, 234, 293, 299–300
 Bindel, Julie, 291, 292
 birth control, 40, 72, 88, 90–1, 99, 100, 107
 see also abortion; contraception


Blanc, Julien, 286
 Blatch, Harriet Stanton, 77
 bluestockings, 13
 Braun, Lily, 106–7
 Brenner, Johanna, 212
 Brown, Wendy, 230
 Browne, Stella, 91, 103
 Brownmiller, Susan, 176, 177
 Budgeon, Shelley, 277
 Bulbeck, Chilla, 238
 Bussemaker, Jet, 150
 Butler, Josephine, 45, 55, 72
 Butler, Judith, 219, 209, 213, 217–21, 222–8 passim, 249, 258
 Byron, 71
Caldecott, L., 181
Caldecott, L., 181
Cameron, David, 274–5
Campbell, Beatrix, 263
capabilities approach, 257–8
capitalism/capitalist society
  and domestic labour, 101, 102–3, 147, 192–3
  and liberal feminism, 40, 55, 147
Marx and Engels on, 22, 57–69 passim, 184
and patriarchy, 195–7, 185, 284
and women’s employment, 60, 62, 105, 192, 194–5
capitalist patriarchy, see capitalism and patriarchy
Carbin, M., 251
care, 254–5, 257, 264–7
  paid care work, 239, 263, 265, 266, 281
Carlyle, Thomas, 52
Carmichael, Stokely, 156
Carter, Jimmy, 256
Casey, Mark, 229, 232
Catt, Carrie Chapman, 76
Ceausescu, N., 119
CEDAW, see United Nations
  Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women
Chakraborty, Mridula, 273
Chambers, Clare, 260
Chartist campaign, 26
chastity, 37, 45, 59, 62, 80, 81, 172, 177
child abuse, 170, 175, 259
child allowance/benefit, see family allowance
childcare
  collective/state supported, 24, 61, 62, 63, 69, 105, 114, 118, 153, 190, 195, 199, 210, 211, 241, 254, 255, 268, 281
  liberal views on, 35, 50, 140, 139, 169, 254
  and men, 79, 50, 89, 118–9, 140, 152–3, 165, 168–9, 203, 207
radical feminist views on, 68–9
see also motherhood; maternity/family/parental leave
Cho, S., 251
Chodorow, Nancy, 168–9
choice, problematic/constrained
  nature of, 4, 141, 143, 180, 200, 223, 258–61, 262, 269, 275, 281, 282
Christian religion, 3, 7,
Christie, Bridget, 282
Chun, J., 252
cis women, 292–5 passim
citizenship, 14, 17, 20, 34, 35, 121, 143, 148, 171, 223, 229,
  264, 265, 269
motherhood and domesticity as forms of, 19, 28, 32, 33, 152
Civil Rights Act, 136
Cixous, Hélène, 216
class and feminism/women’s
see also intersectionality
Clinton, Hilaire, 251
Cochrane, Kira, 278, 279, 280, 282
Collard, A., 181, 182
Collins, Patricia Hill, 78, 152, 230, 232, 241, 242, 244, 245–6, 247, 274, 278
colonialism, 123, 233
Communist Party (United States)
  101–3, 123
Condorcet, A., 14–15, 16
Connell, Raewyn, 224–5, 289, 295, 296
consciousness raising, 12, 37, 157, 204, 274, 278, 280, 285
Conservative feminism, 274–5
Conservative Party, British, 274–5
Contagious Diseases Acts, 45, 52, 54, 71, 72
contraception, 63, 67, 90, 91, 126, 131, 178, 179–80, 200, 266
see also birth control
INDEX

Cooke, Marvel, 102
Coole, Diana, 51, 227, 231
Cooper, Julia, 71, 74, 77–8, 248, 250
Cooper, Selina, 103
Corday, Charlotte, 16
Cott, N., 85
Courtney, Martin, 286, 287, 288
Crenshaw, Kimberle, 241, 243, 247, 249–52 passim
Criado-Perez, Caroline, 287
cyberfeminism, 283–5, 288
see also online feminism
cybersexism, 287–8
Daly, Mary, 187, 216
Daniels, Jessie, 284, 285
Davis, Angela, 241
Davis, Flora, 149
Davis, Kathy, 249
Davis, Kathy, 249
Davy, Zowie, 292
Declaration of Independence, American, 13, 34
Delphy, Christine, 170
Derrida, J., 214, 217
Descartes, R., 7
Diderot, A., 14
Dietz, M., 152
difference/equality debates 7, 16, 19–20, 25, 36, 42, 47, 48, 73–5, 88, 142–4, 149, 222–3
see also ‘womanly qualities’/‘womanly virtues’
Dinnerstein, Dorothy, 168–9
division of labour, 24–5, 58, 67, 197, 201, 203
domestic labour debate, 191–3, 195
domestic violence, 4, 32, 36, 53, 63, 153, 170–1, 184, 225, 238, 242, 243, 246, 251, 255, 256, 257, 270, 225
domestic work
collectivisation of, 61, 69, 79–80, 95, 105, 107, 112–3, 114–5, 190, 199
liberal feminist views on, 48–50, 135, 140–1, 147, 171, 254
Marxist and socialist views on 23, 25, 65, 89, 101–3, 170, 191–3, 198–9, 262, 300
women’s responsibility for, 25, 33, 48, 49–50, 98, 105, 113, 121, 122, 131, 134, 141–3 passim, 193, 223–4
radical feminist views on, 169–70
social importance and value of, 13, 19, 49–50, 80, 91, 101, 192–3, 209, 254, 262
and men, 23, 60, 113, 140, 141, 223–4
see also care; childcare; division of labour; Wages for Housework; motherhood
drag, 218, 289
dual systems, 195–7, 206
Dudden, Faye, 41
Dworkin, A., 162, 163, 176–7, 180, 186
Eastman, Crystal, 90, 103
Ebert, Teresa, 199–200, 230
eco-feminism, 165, 181–3
Edenheim, S., 251
education, feminist demands for, 6, 7, 15, 18, 32, 33, 34, 38–9, 54, 135
Eisenstein, Zilla, 35, 38, 150, 187, 262
Ellis, Havelock, 117
Emerson, R., 23
employment/employment rights, 18–9, 73, 85, 87–8, 121–2, 131, 137, 262–3, 265, 266, 299
feminist demands for, 3, 18, 32, 34, 44, 45, 56, 79, 131, 275, 300
liberal feminist views on, 34, 47, 49, 135, 136–7, 139, 143, 145–6, 147
postmodernism and, 222–3
radical feminist views on, 184–5
Engels, Friedrich, 22, 57, 58, 59–64, 65, 66, 80, 104, 105, 111, 112, 116, 193, 197, 198
INDEX

Enlightenment, Scottish, 152
Enlightenment, the, 13–15, 16, 17, 20, 23, 47, 52, 214
equal pay 79, 84, 89, 114, 142, 195
Equal Pay Act (Britain) 137
Equal Pay Act (United States), 136
Equal Rights Amendment (ERA), 84, 135, 138, 143
see also liberalism; liberal feminism
equality/difference debate, see difference/equality debate
ethic of care, 151–3, 168, 169, 181, 220, 254
Evans, R., 56
Everyday Sexism Project, 278, 280, 285
existentialism, 125–8
Facebook, 270, 278, 282, 285, 287, 288
Faludi, Susan, 138, 139, 274
family allowance, 87, 88–9, 91
family leave, see maternity/family/parental leave
family
black feminist views on, 240–1, 246
liberal/liberal feminist views on, 30, 39, 37, 53, 54, 135, 136, 139, 140–1, 253, 257
pro-family feminists, 167–8
and women’s subordination, 23, 24, 28, 98, 100, 158, 167–71
fascism, 81, 94
Fawcett Society, 254, 280, 283, 286, 292
Fawcett, Millicent, 74, 87, 88, 89
Federici, Silvia, 257, 263, 264
female genital cutting, ix, 141, 162, 235, 238, 255, 256, 258, 259–61, 269, 270, 278, 286
see also vaginal cosmetic surgery
female genital mutilation (FGM) see female genital cutting
feminine mystique, 134–5, 156
femininity, 10, 127, 216, 218, 221, 276, 291, 293, 294
construction of, 18, 125, 129, 130, 134, 136, 217–8, 225, 227
and black women, 41, 240
Feminist International Network of Resistance to Reproductive and Genetic Engineering (FINRAGE), 180
feminist liberalism, 3, 253–62 passim, 270
Feministing, 286
Ferguson, Ann, 164, 196, 201
Ferguson, K., 99
Fernandez, Maria, 284–5
Ferraro, Geraldine, 137
Figes, Eva, 157–8
Firestone, Shulamith, 157, 171, 178, 180–1, 281
First International Workingmen’s Association, 40, 64
force-feeding, 79, 94
Foreman, A., 201–2
Foucault, Michel, 214, 215
Fourier, S., 22, 23, 24–5
fourth wave feminism, 267, 271, 278–82, 292
Fraser, Nancy, 208–9, 250, 262–3, 264, 267, 295
French, Marilyn, 204
Freud, S., Freudian, post-Freudian, 117, 126, 134, 168, 178, 205, 215
Friedan, Betty, 103, 134–7, 139, 145, 147, 156, 177, 186
Gage, Frances, 41
Garrison, Ednie, 276
gay politics and rights, 208, 209, 221, 222
Gender Recognition Act (UK), 290, 293
gender
as performance, 217–9 passim, 223–4
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gender (Continued)
see also femininity; masculinity; sex/gender distinction; ‘woman’/‘women’ as identity category
Genet, Jean, 159
George, Lloyd, 82
Gilligan, Carol, 152
Gillis, Stacey, 284
Gilman, Charlotte Perkins, 96–9
Gimenez, Martha, 64, 208, 266
Godwin, William, 21
Goldman, Emma, 99–101, 172
Gouges, Olympe de, 16
Gournay, Marie de, 8
Gramsci, A., 118, 191
Greenham Common peace camp, 181
Greer, Germaine, 157
Griffin, Susan, 181
Grimké, Sarah and Angelina, 34, 46
Grimshaw, J., 152
Halperin, David, 221
Hancock, Ange-Marie, 249, 250
Haraway, Donna, 283–4
Hardie, Kier, 93
Harding, Sandra, 204–5
Harstock, Nancy, 204
Hartmann, Heidi, 196
Hegelian, 67
Hekman, Susan, 230
Hennessy, Rosemary, 231
Henry, Astrid, 271–2
heterosexism, 208–9, 217, 220, 245, 248, 276
heterosexuality
as norm, 63, 130, 145, 220, 227, 229 critiques of 172–4, 175, 177
Hill, Anita, 242, 272
Hines, Sally, 293, 296
hip-hop 246, 277
Hippel, T. von, 14
Hird, M., 225
Hirschmann, Nancy, 50, 149, 204, 255
Hitler, A., 81
Hobbes, T., 9
Hollaback, 286
homosexuality, 63, 100, 200, 245, 291
see also gay politics and rights; gay/same-sex marriage; heterosexism; lesbians, lesbianism
hooks, bell, 41, 239, 245
housework see domestic work; Wages for Housework
human rights, 133, 235, 137, 253, 237, 255–7, 259
Hunt, Karen, 93–4
Hurdis, Rebecca, 247
Ibsen, H., 72
identity politics, 208, 209, 220, 221, 232, 245, 248, 250, 262, 295–6, 296
ideology, 66, 118, 176, 205–8, 227, 237
imperialism, 109, 123, 156, 233, 237; cultural, 163, 233, 258
Independent Labour Party, 80
indigenous women, 15, 234, 238, 239, 244
Inman, Mary, 101–2, 123
International Council of Women of the Darker Races, 86
intersectionality, 5, 243, 244, 245, 247–52, 279, 298
intersex/intersexuality, 225, 289
Irigaray, Luce, 216
Islamophobia, 259, 260
Jackson, Stevi, 229
Jaggar, Alison, 149, 201–2, 211, 238
Jeffreys, Sheila, 90, 261, 263, 291–2, 294
juissance, 216
Marxist views on, 57, 59, 212
Kantola, Johanna, 225
Kennedy, John, 135
Kent, Susan Kingsley, 89
Kittay, Eva, 254
Klausen, Jytte, 145
Klein, Viola, 124
Koedt, Anna, 172
Kollontai, Alexandra, 104, 111, 113, 114–20
Kristeva, Julia, 216
Kruks, Sonia, 227
Krupskaya, Nadezhda, 112
Labour Party, British, 3, 87, 90, 93, 145, 210, 211
Lacan, Lacanian, 214–7 passim
Landry, Donna, 208
Lansbury, George, 93
Lawrence, d.H., 159
League of Women Voters, 86
Leeds Revolutionary Feminist Group, 173
Lee-Lampshire, Wendy, 64
Leland, S., 181
Lenin, V., 109, 112–3, 117
lesbians/ lesbianism, 4, 81, 90, 130, 145, 172, 174, 175, 180, 208, 221, 227, 268, 269, 275, 290, 294
see also gay politics and rights; gay/same-sex marriage; political lesbianism
Levine, P., 45
Levy, Ariel, 276, 281
Lewis, Gail, 250
criticisms of, 20–1, 34–6, 47–56 passim, 133–8, 142–53, 154, 251, 253, 259, 270, 274, 299, 300
see also equal rights feminism; feminist liberalism
see also neo-liberal, neo-liberalism
Lipsitz, G., 252
Lister, Ruth, 143, 201–11
Lloyd, Genevieve, 151
Locke, J., 9
Lombardo, Emanuela, 249
Lorde, Audre, 174, 240
love, 20, 21, 61, 65, 66, 100, 116, 117, 135, 159, 265, 266, 267
and women’s oppression, 28, 54, 168, 171, 172, 201, 202
free love, 23, 37, 72, 99, 100, 275
love power 67, 201
love labour, 265
Lovibond, S., 229
Luxembourg, Rosa, 105, 106, 107, 109
Lykke, Nina, 249
Lynch, Kathleen, 264–5
Macaulay, Catherine, 15
Mackay, Finn, 280–1
MacKinnon, Catherine, 175, 176–7, 184, 203–4
Maclean, G., 208
Maier, Charles, 145
Mailer, Norman, 159
Marat, 16
Marcuse, Herbert, 191
marriage, 9, 11, 20, 48, 49, 59, 63–4, 97
feminist critiques of, 21, 24, 37, 95, 97, 128, 170, 171
women’s rights in, 19, 32, 36, 43, 49, 53, 71, 120
gay/same sex 222, 268
forced, 235, 255, 256, 269
Marsh, S., 102
Martinez, Elizabeth, 249
see also Marxist feminism
Marxist feminism, 3, 57, 64–9, 78, 101–3, 104–20, 123, 190–209, 212, 227, 262, 266, 267, 298 see also socialist feminism/ socialism and feminism
masculinity, 127, 217–8, 221, 224, 225, 281, 291, 294
maternity/family/parental leave, 135, 143, 153, 195, 268, 281
Matsua, Mari, 248
McCall, Lesley, 248, 251, 252
McDuffie, Eric, 103
McIntosh, Mary, 207
McLaughlin, Janice, 229, 232
McRobbie, Angela, 211
Men
as beneficiaries of existing inequalities, 28, 35, 113, 126, 130, 147, 169, 196, 199
as beneficiaries of future equality, 28, 51, 74, 95, 138, 281
as the enemy/oppressors, 12, 28, 35, 38, 80, 81, 157, 157, 164–6, 173, 176, 177
as feminist supporters/potential allies, 14–15, 19, 26, 35, 95, 136, 165, 166, 178, 188, 245
Mendus, S., 52
Mies, Maria, 193, 197
Mill, James, 27, 28, 43, 50
Mill, John Stuart, 30–1, 43, 46–56, 57, 66, 73, 74, 75, 171
Millett, Kate, 157–61, 164, 167, 168, 175, 177, 185
Mirza, Heidi, 245
Mitchell, Hannah, 93, 103
Mitchell, Juliet, 205–6, 207
Mohanty, Chandra, 234–5, 237–8, 239
Moi, Toril, 132
Monro, Surya, 292, 294, 295–6
Montesquieu, C., 14
Moraga, Cherie, 164, 247
Moraga, Chine, 247
Moran, Caitlin, 276, 287
More, Hannah, 13
Morgan, Joan, 246
Morgan, Joan, 246
Morgan, Lewis, 59
Morgan, Robin, 158, 186
Morrison, Frances, 22
Moses, Claire, 26
motherhood, 19, 28, 32–3, 35, 36, 88, 90, 98, 100, 118–9, 128, 132, 181
Murray, Judith 15
Mussolini, B., 81, 94
Narayan, Uma, 258
Nash, Jennifer, 250
National Association of Colored Women, 72
National Organization for Women (NOW), 136, 137, 138, 144, 146, 271, 286, 292
National Union of Women’s Suffrage Societies (NUWSS), 74, 88
native American women, see indigenous women
New Deal, 86
New Left, 156
New Right, 138
NOW see National Organization for Women
Nussbaum, Martha, 49, 54, 226, 228, 257–9, 260
O’Brien, Mary, 179, 200
Obama, Barak, 251
Occupy, 3, 270, 279
Offen, K., 13
Okin, Susan Moller, 139–41, 147, 153, 171, 237, 253, 254
online feminism, 282–3, 285–8
see also cyberfeminism
Owen, Robert, Owenism, Owenites 22, 23–6 passim, 207
pacificism see war, women’s opposition to
Paglia, Camille, 139
Pankhurst, Christabel, 75, 78–82, 94
Pankhurst, Emmeline, 75, 79, 93, 94
Pankhurst, Sylvia, 76, 77, 94–5
INDEX

parental leave, see maternity/family/paternal leave
parody, 218, 226, 228
Parrenas, Rhacel, 263
Pateman, Carol, 19–20, 140, 142, 151, 223
Patterson, Louise Thompson, 102–3
Pelletier, Mme, 124
Penny, Laurie, 279, 281, 282
Peoples, Whitney, 277
Perry, F., 12
‘personal is political’, 38, 157, 159–60
see also public/private distinction
Phillips, Anne, 144–5, 194, 226, 259, 261
Pierce, Julianne, 284
Pizan, Christine de, 6
Plant, Sadie, 284
Plumwood, Val, 182
political lesbianism, 173, 177, 227
political representation of women, 144–5, 153, 154, 195, 211, 266, 269
political rights
feminist claim for, 3, 14, 16, 18, 19, 27, 34, 35–6, 40, 41, 42, 44–9 passim, 51, 53, 56, 73–82, 92, 93, 106, 107, 111, 112, 133
won by women, 82–3, 114, 121
Pollert, Ana, 161–2, 197
pornography, 4, 7, 172, 174, 175–7, 225–6, 261, 263, 267, 275, 276, 281–2, 287
postcolonial feminism, 4–5, 166, 246, 233–9, 251, 257, 258, 284, 293, 298
postmodernism/poststructuralism/poststructuralist, 213, 214, 217, 226, 273
see also postmodernism
Poulantzas, N., 191
power feminism, 138, 274
prostitution, 21, 37, 45, 61, 72, 97–8, 177, 259, 275, 276
Proudhon, P.-J., 124
psychoanalysis/psychoanalytic theory, 126, 149, 168–9, 181, 191, 205–6, 214, 215
public/private distinction, 9, 10, 19, 28, 68, 139, 141, 148–9, 183, 214, 240, 253, 299
see also ‘personal is political’
Queen Victoria, 56
queer politics/queer theory, 49, 208, 218, 220–2, 228–9, 277, 290, 292
Querrelle des femmes, 6, 7
quotas, 144, 145, 146, 184, 275
racism, 158, 163, 178, 204, 238, 241, 242, 244, 246, 252, 273, 274, 276 of white feminists, 5, 33, 40–1, 42, 163–4, 239–40
see also slavery, analogy with women
radical feminism/radical feminists, 4, 12, 30, 34, 35, 37, 38, 53–4, 56, 68, 80, 81, 99, 100, 125, 128–9, 130, 132, 139, 143, 148, 151–2, 153, 155–88, 189, 190, 196, 199, 203–4, 205, 216, 225, 227, 230, 280–1, 290–1, 294, 295, 299
Rake, Katherine, 254
rape, 4, 37, 40, 41, 63, 172, 173, 175, 176, 159, 161, 200, 241, 243, 255, 270, 286, 288
Rathbone, Eleanor, 71, 87, 88–9
Rawls, John, 139, 140, 141, 148, 253, 254, 257
Raymond, Janice, 290–1
reason and rationality
women’s capacity for, 8, 10–11, 13, 14, 17–8, 32, 47, 73, 77–8, 150
feminist critiques of, 10, 20, 35, 52, 81, 128, 150–3, 182, 185–6, 227
Reclaim the Night, 177, 240, 278, 280
INDEX

Redfern, Catherine, 279, 280, 281
Redstockings manifesto, 157
Reich, W., 191
Reid, Marion, 44, 49, 55
religion
  feminist critiques of, 24, 39, 158, 185
  Christianity and feminism, 3, 6, 7, 9, 16, 30, 31–3, 39, 82
  fundamentalist, 141, 229
Islam, 259, 260
reproduction, 52, 90–1, 100, 151–2, 161, 178–83, 234, 246, 257, 263
  and Marxism, 65–6, 67, 119, 178–9, 197–203, 205, 207, 208, 211, 212, 263, 266–7, 267
  see also abortion; birth control; contraception; reproductive rights
reproductive rights, 163, 178, 211
reproductive technology, 67, 91, 165, 178, 179–80, 199, 200, 202, 266
reserve army of labour, 194, 195
Rich, Adrienne, 161, 162, 181
Richards, Janet Radcliffe, 139, 144
Richardson, Diane, 229, 232
rights,
  see equal rights; employment/employment rights; human rights;
gay politics and rights;
  political rights;
  reproductive rights
Riot Grrrls, 273, 276–7
Roiphe, Kate, 139
Rojas, Maythee, 244, 245
Roosevelt, Eleanor, 86
Roszak, Betty and Theodore, 158
Rousseau, J.-J., 14, 17, 18, 20
Rowbotham, Sheila, 91, 122, 159, 210
Rubin, Gayle, 156
Rubinstein, D., 72
Ruddick, Sarah, 152
Russell, Dora, 103
sado-masochism, 174, 275, 276, 292
Saint Simon, H. de, Saint-Simonniennes, 22, 25, 26
Sapiro, Virginia, 20
Sartre, Jean-Paul, 125, 126, 132
Scandinavian nations, 195, 210
  see also Sweden
Schreiner, Olive, 103
Schurman, Anna Maria von, 8
Schuster, Julia, 282
Scott, Joan, 16, 142, 150, 222–3
Sedwick, Eve, 221
Seely, Megan, 271, 273, 274
Segal, Lynne, 169, 173–4, 181, 206, 210, 216, 227, 231
Seneca Falls Convention, 34–5, 36, 40, 42, 73, 75
sensibility, 13, 20
separate spheres, 43, 44, 48, 87, 136
  see also division of labour, gender
separatism/women-only organizations, 11, 12, 25–6, 37, 42, 81, 109, 113, 114, 115, 130, 165–6, 169, 174, 182, 183, 206, 211, 290, 291, 294
Sex Discrimination Act (UK), 137
sex/gender distinction, 129, 213, 217–8
  see also femininity; gender; masculinity
sex/sexuality, 20–1, 36–7, 45, 52–3, 72, 90, 99, 100, 130, 203, 215, 216, 217–23, 275–6 passim, 227, 228–9
socialist/Marxist views on, 23, 24 59, 61, 62–3, 65, 66, 67, 100, 116–8, 171–8, 197, 199–201, 202, 204, 205, 207
  and exploitation/oppression of women, 36–8, 45, 53, 54, 80–1, 203, 287
  see also sexual violence
sexual harassment, 60, 137, 175, 185, 186, 242, 272, 287
sexual violence, 139, 153, 159, 170–1, 175–8, 234, 241–2, 269, 287
  and women of colour/black/indigenous women, 33, 77, 234, 241–2, 246
  see also sexual harassment; rape
Shanley, M., 50
Shin, Y., 252
Shiva, Vandenna, 182
Siegel, Deborah, 271
sisterhood, 30, 155, 163, 167, 174, 234, 245, 273, 283, 298
strategic, 232
slavery, analogy with women, 21, 27, 33, 40, 43, 102, 156
movement to abolish, 13, 32–4, 34, 40, 76
slut walks, 278, 286, 288
Smith, Ellen, 245
Smith, H., 12
Smooth, Wendy, 249
Snyder, Claire, 271–8 passim
Social Democratic Federation, 93
Social Democratic Party (German) (SPD), 103, 104, 105–9
social reproduction, 200, 207, 211, 212, 267
see also reproduction and Marxism
socialist feminism/socialism and feminism, 3, 21, 22–9, 76–7, 78, 80, 92–99, 101, 103, 124, 131, 145, 150, 170, 190–1, 195, 209–12, 262–7 passim, 281, 284, 285, 293, 298, 300
see also Marxist feminism
solidarity, 46, 114, 117, 118, 130, 166, 245, 247, 248, 249, 270, 296–7
Sommers, Christina Hoff, 139
Spender, Dale, 100, 161, 185–6, 283, 287
Spivak, Gayatri, 235–7
Squires, Judith, 222, 223, 231, 256
Stalin, J., Stalinist, 104, 111, 115, 116, 119, 191
standpoint feminist theory, 12, 66, 203–5, 241, 244
Stanton, Elizabeth Cady, 2, 30, 31, 33, 34–43, 46, 47, 53, 54, 73, 75, 77
state
and anarchism, 99–100
and liberalism/liberal feminism, 139, 141, 146–7, 149, 154, 260
and radical feminism, 91, 146–7, 183–4
and socialism/Marxism, 68, 91, 146–7, 210–11
and postmodernism, 224–6
Stewart, Maria, 30, 31–4, 35, 36, 41, 72, 74
Stone, Lucy, 38
Stopes, Marie, 90
Stryker, Susan, 293
subaltern theory/women, 236–7
suffrage campaign, 3, 42, 53, 73–84, 93, 94
see also political rights
Sullivan, Oriel, 224
Sweden, 224
see also Scandinavian nations
Tanner, Leslie, 158
Taylor, Barbara, 25, 186
Taylor, Harriet, 44, 46, 49, 52, 54, 55
temperance movement, 13, 32, 72–3, 74, 95–6
Tennyson, Alfred, 43–4
Thatcher, Margaret/Thatcherite, 135, 138, 210
Third Way, 211
Thomas, Clarence, 242, 272
Thompson, William, 22, 26–9, 43, 49, 51, 54, 55, 57, 171
time, 263, 265–6
time-use studies, 193, 224
toleration, 141, 258–62
trade unions, 26, 73, 80, 93, 101, 108, 115, 195, 209, 210, 211, 256
transgender/transsexual issues and politics, 3, 4, 221, 225, 268, 269, 272, 273, 279, 288–97, 298
Tristan, Flora, 22, 26
Tronto, Joan, 152
Trotsky, L., 113, 114, 115
Truth, Sojourner, 41, 248
Twitter, 270, 282, 285, 286
UK Feminista, 280, 283
United Nations 1995 World Conference on Women in Beijing, 193
United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), 256
United Nations, 256, 257, 260  
utilitarianism, 28–9, 52–3, 74, 75, 78  
utopian socialism, 22–29, 39, 44, 48, 55, 59, 100, 107, 203  
vaginal cosmetic surgery, 260, 270  
see also female genital cutting  
Valenti, Vanessa, 286, 287, 288  
Verloo, Mieke, 249, 250  
Victoria, Queen, 56  
Vintges, Karen, 128  
vio\lence, male, 4, 7, 45, 55, 137, 168, 175, 199, 225, 229, 269, 278–81 passim, 286, 300  
see also domestic violence; rape; sexual violence  
Vogel, Lise 64, 112, 191, 198–9, 200  
Voltaire, F., 14  
votes for women, see political rights; suffrage campaign  
Wages for Housework, 89, 192  
Wainwright, Hilar, 210  
Walby, Sylvia, 164, 256  
Walker, Alice, 272  
Walker, Rebecca, 272, 273  
Walter, Natasha, 138, 139, 159, 165, 261, 274  
Wandor, Michelle, 158  
war, women’s opposition to, 74, 81–2, 83, 109, 152–3  
see also eco-feminism  
Washington, George, 15  
Weedon, Chris, 238  
Weigland, Kate, 103  
welfare feminism, 85–91, 93, 95, 121, 143  
Wheeler, Anna, 22, 26–9, 43, 49, 51, 54, 55, 57, 171  
Wilding, Faith, 260, 284, 285  
Willard, Frances, 95  
Williams, Joan, 54–5  
Wilson, K., 235  
Wilson, Kalpana, 235  
Wolf, Naomi, 138, 139, 165, 274  
Wollstonecraft, Mary, 2, 10, 15, 16, 17–22, 23, 27, 28, 32, 33, 34, 35, 36, 39, 40, 49, 71, 72, 100  
‘Wollstonecraft’s dilemma’, 19–20, 142, 223  
‘woman question’, the, 57, 74, 77, 103, 104, 106, 111, 1132, 113, 115, 116, 189  
‘woman’/‘women’ as identity category, 1, 4, 12, 41, 129, 166, 213, 214, 217–8, 220, 229, 232, 273, 294, 298–9  
Woman’s Bible, the, 39  
‘womanly qualities’/‘womanly virtues’, 35–6, 44, 45, 46, 57, 74, 77–8, 83, 96, 97, 98, 129, 143, 152, 168, 181, 182, 222, 299  
Women’s Co-operative Guild, 73, 87  
Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom, 83  
Women’s Party (British), 79, 81  
Women’s Party (United States), 79, 82, 84, 85, 102  
Women’s Social and Political Union (WSPU), 75–6  
Woodhull, Victoria, 37, 40  
Woodhull, W., 273  
Woodhull, Winifred, 273  
Wright, Frances, 22, 24, 25  
Young, Iris, 144, 197, 208  
Yuval-Davis, Nira, 247, 248, 250, 297  
Zalewski, Marysia, 227  
Zarnov, L., 277  
Zeisler, Andi, 271, 275, 276  
Zetkin, Clara, 104, 105–10, 111, 112, 114  
Zhenotdel (Women’s Department), 113, 115–6