

Antifeminism

Antifeminism (also spelt **anti-feminism**) is broadly defined as opposition to some or all forms of feminism. This opposition has taken various forms across time and cultures. For example, antifeminists in the late 19th century and early 20th century resisted women's suffrage, while antifeminists in the late 20th century in the United States opposed the Equal Rights Amendment^{[1][2]}

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Overview

Sociologist Michael Flood argues that an antifeminist ideology rejects at least one of the following general principles of feminism:

- That social arrangements among men and women are neither natural nor divinely determined.
- That social arrangements among men and women favor men.
- That there are collective actions that can and should be taken to transform these arrangements into more just and equitable arrangements, such as those in the timelines of woman's suffrage and other rights.^[3]

Canadian sociologists Melissa Blais and Francis Dupuis-Déri write that antifeminist thought has primarily taken the form of an extreme version of masculinism, in which "men are in crisis because of the feminization of society"^[4]

The term *antifeminist* is also used to describe public female figures, some of whom (such as Naomi Wolf, Camille Paglia, and Kate Roiphe) define themselves as feminists, based on their opposition to some or all elements of feminist movements.^[5] Other feminists label writers such as Christina Hoff Sommers, Jean Bethke Elshstain, Katie Roiphe and Elizabeth Fox-Genovese with this term^{[6][7]} because of their positions regarding oppression and lines of thought within feminism.^[8]

The meaning of antifeminism has varied across time and cultures, and antifeminism attracts both men and women. Some women, like those in the Women's National Anti-Suffrage League, campaigned against women's suffrage. Emma Goldman, for example, was widely considered antifeminist during her fight against suffragism in the US. Decades later, however, she was heralded as a founder of anarcha-feminism.^[9]

Men's studies scholar Michael Kimmel defines antifeminism as "the opposition to women's equality". He says that antifeminists oppose "women's entry into the public sphere, the re-organization of the private sphere, women's control of their bodies, and women's rights generally." Kimmel further writes that antifeminist argumentation relies on "religious and cultural norms" while proponents of antifeminism advance their cause as a means of "'saving' masculinity from pollution and invasion". He argues that antifeminists consider the "traditional gender division of labor as natural and inevitable, perhaps also divinely sanctioned."^[10]

Antifeminist stances

Some antifeminists view feminism as a denial of innate differences between the genders, and an attempt to reprogram people against their biological tendencies.^[11] Antifeminists also frequently argue that feminism, despite claiming to espouse equality, ignores rights issues unique to men. Some believe that the feminist movement has achieved its aims and now seeks higher status for women than for men via special rights and exemptions, such as female-only scholarships, affirmative action, and gender quotas.^{[12][13][14]}

Some antifeminists have argued that feminism has resulted in changes to society's previous norms relating to sexuality, which they see as detrimental to traditional values or conservative religious beliefs.^{[15][16][17]} For example, the ubiquity of casual sex and the decline of marriage are mentioned as negative consequences of feminism.^{[18][19]} Some of these traditionalists oppose women's entry into the workforce, political office, and the voting process, as well as the lessening of male authority in families.^[20] Antifeminists argue that a change of women's roles is a destructive force that endangers the family, or is contrary to religious morals. For example, Paul Gottfried maintains that the change of women's roles "has been a social disaster that continues to take its toll on the family" and contributed to a "descent by increasingly disconnected individuals into social chaos"^[21]

History

19th century

The "women's movement" began in 1848, most famously articulated by Elizabeth Stanton and Susan B. Anthony, asking for voting rights and many other rights, such as education, job liberties, marital and property rights, and the right to choose whether to be a mother or not.^[22] However, by the end of the century, a cultural counter movement had begun. Janet Chafetz identified in a study 32 first-wave antifeminist movements, including those in the 19th century and early 20th century movements.^[23] These countermovements were in response to some women's growing demands, which were perceived as threatening to the standard way of life. Though men were not the only antifeminists, men experienced what some have called a "crisis of masculinity"^[24] in response to traditional gender roles being challenged. Men's responses to increased feminism varied. Some men even subscribed to feminist ideology, but others went the other direction and became decidedly antifeminist. The men who believed in this model cited religious models and natural law to emphasize women's need to return to the private sphere, in order to separate men and women to keep women from outwardly challenging men in public.^[24]



American antisuffragists in the early 20th century

In the 19th century, one of the major focal points of antifeminism was opposition to women's suffrage, which began as a grassroots movement in 1848 and spanned for 72 years.^{[25][2]} Opponents of women's entry into institutions of higher learning argued that education was too great a physical burden on women. In *Sex in Education: or, a Fair Chance for the Girls* (1873), Harvard professor Edward Clarke predicted that if women went to college, their brains would grow bigger and heavier, and their wombs would atrophy.^[26] Other antifeminists opposed women's entry into the labor force, their right to join unions, to sit on juries, or to obtain birth control and control of their sexuality^[10]

The pro-family movement appeared in the late 19th century, by about 1870.^[27] This movement was intended to halt the rising divorce rate and reinforce traditional family values. The National League for the Protection of the Family, formerly known as the Divorce Reform League, took over the movement in 1881.^{[27][28]} Samuel Dike was one of the founders of the League, and was

considered an early expert on divorce. Through his efforts, the League garnered attention from pro-family advocates. It underwent a shift from fighting against divorce to promoting marriage and traditional family.^[27] Speaking on behalf of the League in an 1887 address to the Evangelical Alliance Conference, Samuel Dike described the ideal family as having "one man and one woman, united in wedlock, together with their children".^[27] This movement built the foundation for many pro-family arguments in contemporary antifeminism.

Early 20th century

Women's suffrage was achieved in 1920, and early 20th century antifeminism was primarily focused on fighting this. Suffragists scoffed at antisuffragists. Anna Howard Shaw, president of the National American Woman Suffrage Association (NAWSA) from 1904 to 1915, presumed, perhaps unfairly, that the antisuffragists were merely working under the influence of male forces.^[29] Later historians tended to dismiss antisuffragists as subscribing to the model of domestic idealism, that a woman's place is in the home. This undermines and belittles the true power and numbers behind the antisuffrage movement, which was primarily led by women themselves.^[29] Arguments employed by antisuffragists at the turn of the century had less to do with a woman's place in the home as much as it had to do with a woman's proper place in the public realm. In fact, leaders of the movement often encouraged other women to leave the home and participate in society.^[29] What they opposed was women participating in the political sphere.

There were two reasons antisuffragists opposed women participating in the political realm. Some argued that women were already overburdened. The majority of them, however, argued that a woman's participation in the political realm would hinder her participation in social and civic duties. If they won the right to vote, women would consequently have to align with a particular party, which would destroy her ability to be politically neutral. Antisuffragists feared this would, in fact, hinder their influence with legislative authorities.^[29]

Mid 20th century

In 1951, two journalists published *Washington Confidential*. The novel claimed that Communist leaders used their men and women to recruit a variety of minorities in the nation's capital, such as females, colored males, and homosexual males. The vast popularity of the book caused such a buzz that the Civil Service Commission had to create a "publicity campaign to improve the image of federal employees"^[30] in hopes to save their federal employees from losing their jobs. This ploy failed once the journalists linked feminism to communism in their novel and ultimately reinforced antifeminism by implying that defending the "white, Christian, heterosexual, patriarchal family" was the only way to oppose communism.^[30]

Late 20th century

Equal Rights Amendment (ERA)

The Equal Rights Amendment is a perennially proposed amendment to the United States Constitution that would grant equal rights and opportunities to every citizen of the United States, regardless of his or her sex. In 1950 and 1953, ERA was passed by the Senate with a provision known as "the Hayden rider", making it unacceptable to ERA supporters.^{[31][32]} The Hayden rider was included to keep special protections for women. A new section to the ERA was added, stating: "The provisions of this article shall not be construed to impair any rights, benefits, or exemptions now or hereafter conferred by law upon persons of the female sex." That is, women could keep their existing and future special protections that men did not have. By 1972, the amendment was supported by both major parties and was immensely popular. However, it was defeated in Congress when it failed to get the vote of thirty-eight legislatures by 1982.^[33] Supporters of an unaltered ERA rejected the Hayden rider, believing an ERA containing the rider did not provide for equality.^[34]

Jerome Himmelstein identified two main theories about the appeal of antifeminism and its role in opposition to the ERA. One theory is that it was a clash between upper-class liberal voters and the older, more conservative lower-class rural voters who often serve as the center for right-wing movements; in other words, this theory identifies particular social classes as more inherently friendly to antifeminism. Another theory holds that women who feel vulnerable and dependent on men are likely to oppose anything that

threatens that tenuous stability; under this view, while educated, independent career women may support feminism, housewives who lack such resources are more drawn to antifeminism. Himmelstein, however, says both views are at least partially wrong, arguing that the primary dividing line between feminists and antifeminists is cultural rather than stemming from differences in economic and social status.^[35] There are, in fact, similarities between income between activists on both sides of the ERA debate. As it turned out, the most indicative factors when predicting ERA position, especially among women, were race, marital status, age, and education.^[36] ERA opposition was much higher among white, married, older, and less educated citizens.^[36] Women who opposed the ERA tended to fit characteristics consistent with the Religious Right.^[37]

Val Burris, meanwhile, says that high-income men opposed the amendment because they would gain the least with it being passed; that those men had the most to lose, since the ratification of the ERA would mean more competition for their jobs and possibly a lowered self-esteem.^[33] Because of the support of antifeminism from conservatives and the constant "conservative reactions to liberal social politics", such as the New Deal attacks, the attack on the ERA has been called a "right-wing backlash".^[33] Their methods include actions such as "insults proffered in emails or on the telephone, systematic denigration of feminism in the media, Internet disclosure of confidential information (e.g. addresses) on resources for battered women^[4] and more.

Abortion

Abortion remains one of the most controversial topics in the United States. *Roe v. Wade* was passed in 1973, and abortion was utilized by many antifeminists to rally supporters. Antiabortion views helped further several right-wing movements, including explicit antifeminism, and helped right-wing politicians rise to power.^{[38][39]} Antiabortion writings, as well as conservative commentary in the late 20th century criticized the selfishness and self-centeredness of the feminist movement regarding abortions.^[39]

21st century

Some current antifeminist practices can be traced back to the rise of the religious right in the late 1970s.^[5] *BBC* and *Time*, among others, have covered the 2014 social media trend "Women Against Feminism". These antifeminists contend that feminism demonizes men (misandry) and that women are not oppressed in 21st century Western countries.^{[40][41][42][43][44][45]}

British newspaper *The Guardian* and the website *Jezebel* have also reported on an increasing number of women and female celebrities rejecting feminism and instead subscribing to humanism.^{[46][47]} As a response to a pro-feminism speech by Australian Labor Senator Penny Wong,^[48] several women who identify as being humanist and antifeminist argued in an article for the *Guardian* that feminism is a discriminatory ideology and continues to portray women as victims.^[46]

In response to the social media trend, modern day feminists also began to upload similar pictures to websites such as Twitter and Tumblr. Most used the same hashtag, "womenagainstfeminism", but instead made satirical and bluntly parodic comments.^[49] In November 2014, *Time* magazine included "feminist" on its annual list of proposed banished words. After initially receiving the majority of votes (51%), a *Time* editor apologized for including the word in the poll and removed it from the results.^{[50][51]}

Organizations

Founded in the U.S. by Phyllis Schlafly in 1972, Stop ERA, now known as "Eagle Forum", lobbied successfully to block the passage of the Equal Rights Amendment in the U.S.^[52] It was also Schlafly who forged links between Stop ERA and other conservative organizations, as well as single-issue groups against abortion, pornography, gun control, and unions. By integrating Stop ERA with the thus-dubbed "new right", she was able to leverage a wider range of technological, organizational and political resources, successfully targeting pro-feminist candidates for defeat.^[52]

In India, the Save Indian Family Foundation is an antifeminist organization^[53] opposed to a number of laws that they claim to have been used against men.^[54]



Symbol used for signs and buttons by ERA opponents

The Concerned Women of America (CWA) are also an antifeminist organization. Like other conservative women's groups, they oppose abortion and same-sex marriage and make appeals for maternalism and biological differences between women and men.^{[55][56]}

The Independent Women's Forum (IWF) is another antifeminist, conservative, women-oriented group. It's younger and less established than the CWA, though the two organizations are often discussed in relation to each other. It was founded to take on the "old feminist establishment".^[56] Both of these organizations pride themselves on rallying women who do not identify with feminist rhetoric together. These organizations frame themselves as being by women, for women, in order to fight the idea that feminism is the only women-oriented ideology. These organizations chastise feminists for presuming to universally speak for all women. The IWF claims to be "the voice of *reasonable* women with important ideas who embrace common sense over divisive ideology".^[66]

The alt-right movement is antifeminist.^[57]

Reasoning

According to Amherst College sociology professor Jerome L. Himmelstein, antifeminism is rooted in social stigmas against feminism and is thus a purely reactionary movement. Himmelstein identifies two prevailing theories that seek to explain the origins of antifeminism: the first theory proposed by Himmelstein, is that conservative opposition in the abortion and Equal Rights Amendment (ERA) debates has created a climate of hostility toward the entire feminist movement.^[35] The second theory Himmelstein identifies states that the female antifeminists who lead the movement are largely married, low education, and low personal income women who embody the "insecure housewife scenario" and seek to perpetuate their own situation in which women depend on men for fiscal support. However, numerous studies have failed to correlate the aforementioned demographic factors with support for antifeminism, and only religiosity correlates positively with antifeminist alignment.^[35] Thus, Himmelstein concludes that antifeminism is a conservative religious reaction against the progress of modern feminism.

Authors Janet Saltzman Chafetz and Anthony Gary Dworkin, writing for *Gender and Society*, argue that the organizations most likely to formally organize against feminism are religious. This is because women's movements may demand access to male-dominated positions within the religious sector, like the clergy, and women's movements threaten male-oriented values of some religions.^[23] The more successful a feminist movement is in challenging the authority of male-dominated groups, the more these groups will organize a countermovement.^[23]

University of Illinois at Chicago sociology professor Danielle Gifort argues that the stigma against feminism created by antifeminists has resulted in organizations that practice "implicit feminism", which she defines as the "strategy practiced by feminist activists within organizations that are operating in an anti- and post-feminist environment in which they conceal feminist identities and ideas while emphasizing the more socially acceptable angles of their efforts".^[58] Due to the stigma against feminism, some activists, such as those involved with Girls Rock, may take the principles of feminism as a foundation of thought and teach girls and women independence and self-reliance without explicitly labeling it with the stigmatized brand of feminism. Thus, most women continue to practice feminism in terms of seeking equality and independence for women, yet avoid the label.^[58]

Motivations

Antifeminism might be motivated by the belief that feminist theories of patriarchy and disadvantages suffered by women in society are incorrect or exaggerated,^{[3][40]} that feminism as a movement encourages misandry and results in harm or oppression of men; or driven by general opposition towards women's rights.^{[10][59][60][61]}

In a study of 126 American students, antifeminist men were found to value their own power more than nonfeminist or feminist men did. Antifeminist women were not found to have the same difference from other women, suggesting some antifeminist men may oppose feminism because they fear losing their power or sense of power in society.^[62]

See also

- École Polytechnique massacre

- [The Manipulated Man](#)
- [Manosphere](#)
- [Men's rights](#)
- [MGTOW](#)
- [Sexism](#)
- [Social justice warrior](#)
- [Who Needs Feminism](#)

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