

Feminists

1. Liberal Feminists.

Liberal feminists focus on gendered relationships and gender inequalities in society. They are interested in the reform of a patriarchal society.

They argue that men still dominate the higher echelons of the medical professions and this is linked to the lack of power women have. The introduction of the pill gave women some control of their own bodies but there is still a lack of power regarding childbirth, abortion and contraception.

Task: Discuss to what extent do you think that more equality would help to address the lack of power for all women?

Hint: Consider social class.

2. Marxist feminists

Marxist feminists focus on the inequalities that exist between women from different social classes. Doyal argues the NHS meets the needs of the working class in terms of health provision free at the point of access but also meets the needs of the capitalist class by ensuring workers are fit to go to work.

Marxist feminists agree with liberal feminists that society is patriarchal and there are wide ranging inequalities but they argue these cannot be addressed by reform of the patriarchal system. Doyal (1995) argues the capitalist system itself needs to be radically altered.

3. Radical feminists

Radical feminists argue the dominant male ideology of the medical profession is used to control women. Pregnancy for example has become medicalised rather than pregnancy and childbirth being seen as a natural process.

Ehrenreich and English (1978) argue women have historically been oppressed and exploited by men. They argued that since women needed to reproduce it was considered dangerous for women to engage in activities that might prevent this.

Black feminists and postmodern feminists have also contributed to the explanations of health and disability.

Both raise the issue of intersectionality arguing it is not possible to focus on gender without considering social class and ethnicity.

Black feminists

Black feminists argue there is an intersectionality between gender, class and ethnicity. Collins has written extensively about the importance of addressing intersectionality.

This occurs in all areas of society including health and illness where, for example black women find themselves employed at a lower level than white women on lower pay and with less status.

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Other issues raised by black and Asian sociologists include language, male doctors/female patients and poor take up of preventative services. Much of the research in this area has and is being done by male sociologists such as Nazroo.