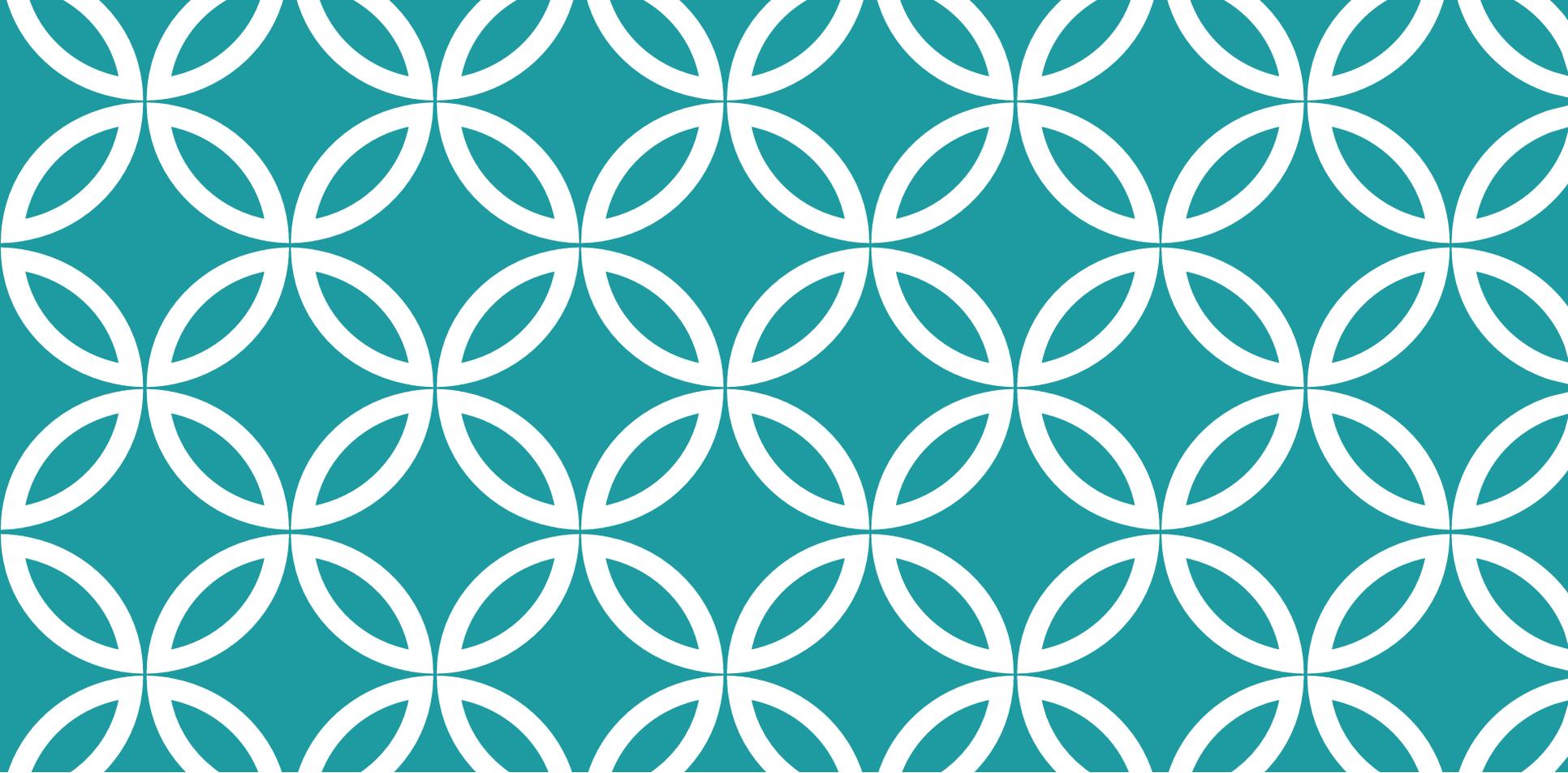


WHAT IS FEMINISM?

Dr. Jaydeep Rishi



No Feminism
Only Feminisms

FEMINISM: BASIC DEFINITION

The recognition that, virtually across time and place, men and women are unequal in the power they have, either in society or over their own lives, and the corollary belief that men and women should be equal; the belief that knowledge has been written about, by and for men and the corollary belief that all schools of knowledge must be re-examined and understood to reveal the extent to which they ignore or distort gender (Barbara Arneil).

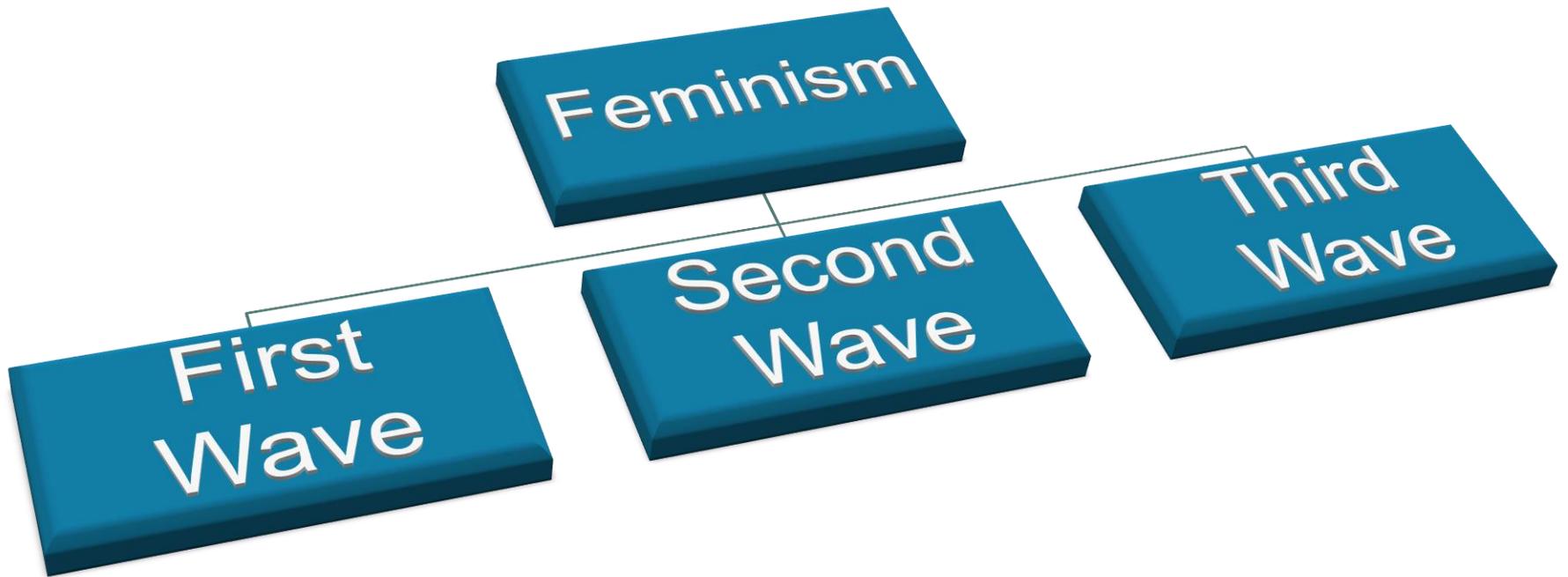
FEMINISM: KEY FEATURES

- Men and women never exercised equal power in society or in their lives
- Men and women should be equal
- Human knowledge so far has been by, for and about men
- All schools of knowledge must be re-examined

DUALISMS ON WHICH EARLY FEMINISM IS BASED

- Man
- Public
- Culture
- Rational
- Active
- Woman
- Private
- Nature
- Irrational
- Passive

MAJOR PHASES OF FEMINISM



THE THREE PHASES OF FEMINISM

- **First Wave Feminism** – Liberalism
- **Second Wave Feminism** – Based on dualism. Different theoretical frameworks but united by a commitment to sameness, equality, universality and scientific understanding.
- **Third Wave Feminism** – Challenges the dualism. Deals with difference, particularity, multiplicity, contradictions and identity.

FIRST WAVE FEMINISM



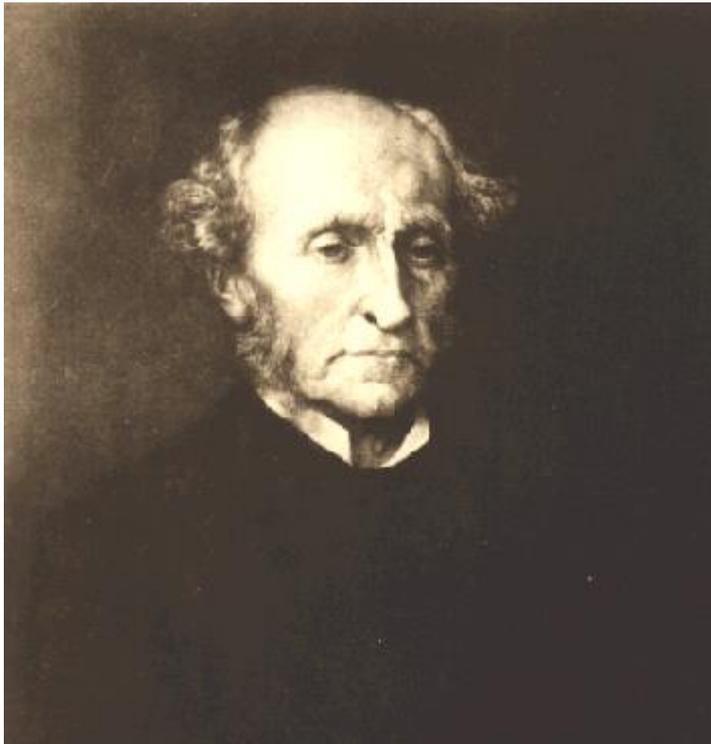
Mary Wollstonecraft

A Vindication on the Rights of Women (1792)

- Response to Rousseau who claimed women to be irrational
- Denial of reason to women denies them not only the right to citizenship but also basic humanity
- Heart of Wollstonecraft's argument – the liberal premise women have the capacity to reason but not properly educated to display right values and virtues
- Women's role in private sphere remains unchallenged – through proper education women can serve the familial duties much better

FIRST WAVE FEMINISM

John Stuart Mill



- Fought for women's right to vote
- Women's role only within private sphere reinforced
- Challenges the assumption that women should be excluded from citizenship on the basis of her irrationality or closeness to nature, emotion and instinct
- Wollstonecraft, Mill and all other white suffragists only spoke on behalf of white middle-class and upper-class women
- White women associated with 'culture' – Black women with 'nature'

SECOND WAVE FEMINISMS

The Pioneers

- **Liberal Feminism** – Betty Friedan
- **Existentialist Feminism** – Simone de Beauvoir
- **Socialist/Marxist Feminism** – Juliet Mitchell,
Sheila Rowbotham
- **Psychoanalytical Feminism** – Nancy Chodorow
- **Radical Feminism** – Kate Millet, Shulamith Firestone,
Adrienne Rich, Andrea Dworkin

LIBERAL FEMINISM

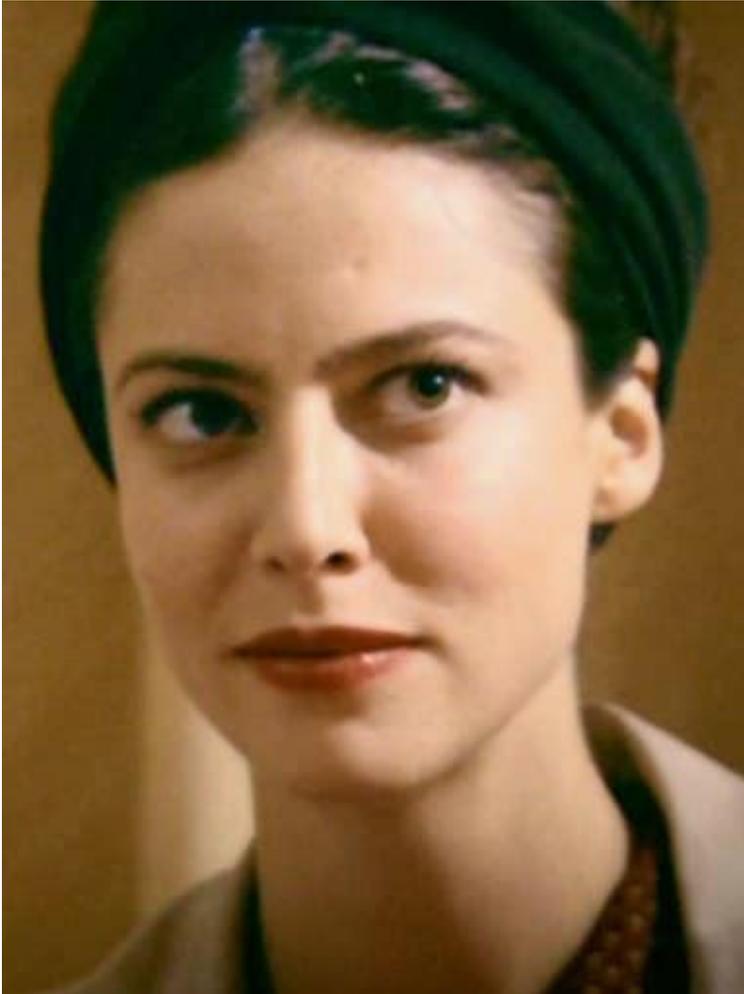
Betty Friedan

— *The Feminine Mystique*

- Talks about women who do not work outside home and hence confined to private sphere
- Need for greater education
- Move women into public realm of work and politics
- Concerned mostly with white middle-class women



EXISTENTIALIST FEMINISM



- **Simone de Beauvoir**

- ***The Second Sex***

- One is not born a woman but made one
 - Gender is socially constructed
 - Woman plays the role of the 'other'
 - Women must overcome 'biology' to enter the rational, cultural realm
 - Women should question their role in the private spheres as wives and mothers

SOCIALIST/MARXIST FEMINISM



Juliet Mitchell

Sheila Rowbotham



SOCIALIST/MARXIST FEMINISM

- Critique of traditional Socialist/Marxist theories for failing to account for the role of patriarchy
- Emphasizes the need to account for gender as well as class in Socialist theories
- ‘Reproduction’, nurturing, housework – all regarded as ‘unpaid’ work
- Need to dissolve ‘private’ sphere
- ‘Culture’ will overcome ‘Nature’ to bring the ‘ultimate revolution’

PSYCHOANALYTICAL FEMINISM

- **Nancy Chodorow**

- Studies oppression of women from the perspective of development of mind
- Critique of Freud's Psychoanalytical theory
- Role of mothering central
- Mothering neither natural, nor socially constructed but develops from early pre-conscious childhood experience
- Need for both men and women to involve in nurturing



RADICAL FEMINISM



Top (Left to Right):

**Kate Millett, Andrea
Dworkin, Adrienne Rich**

Bottom:

Shulamith Firestone

RADICAL FEMINISM

- The personal is political
- Politics defined as exercise of power, in whatever form, including violence
- 'Patriarchy' is the power that man have over women
- Patriarchal history is the history of exploitation of women's bodies by men
- The radical feminists challenge the underlying heterosexual assumptions in the public/private sphere
- They tackle the question of power and its relationship to politics exclusively in terms of men and women

THIRD WAVE FEMINISM

- Reaction to Second Wave Feminism
- Challenges universal female identity
- Celebrates 'Difference'
 - Difference between man and woman
 - Difference between women - heterogeneity
- Focuses on a post-structural interpretation of gender and sexuality – no fixed or intrinsic meaning
- Challenges the inherent dualism in the Western philosophy
 - multiplicity
 - The duality between mind & body, culture & nature, body politic & women's body to be rethought
 - Celebration of motherhood

THIRD WAVE FEMINISM

- Important influences:
 - **Queer Theory**
 - **Anti racism**
 - **Coloured women consciousness**
 - **Post-colonialism**
 - **Postmodernism**
 - **Transnationalism**
 - **Cyber-feminism**
 - **Ecofeminism**
 - **Transgender politics**
 - **Individualist feminism**

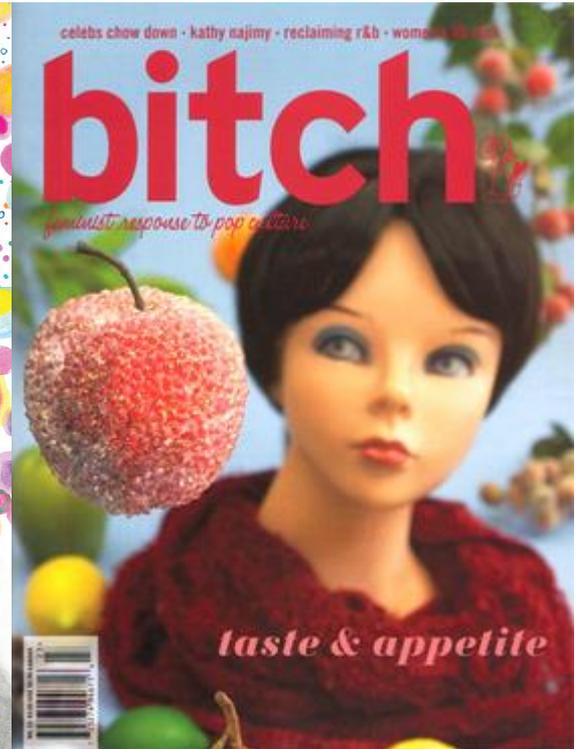
THE FORERUNNERS



Left to Right: **Gloria Anzaldúa, Cherríe Moraga, Alice Walker**

- The feminists of color in the 1980s played an important role in reshaping Second Wave Feminism
- Third-wavers claim their writings as the beginning of the third wave

IMPORTANT CONTRIBUTORS



- **Rebecca Walker** (top) and **Leslie Heywood** (bottom) shaped Third Wave Feminism
- Magazines like **Bust** and **Bitch** are major influences

CHARACTERISTICS

- **Celebration of Contradiction:** The celebration of the power and possibilities of contradiction is a central tenet
- **Pro-Choice, Any Choice:** The predominant third-wave vision is to allow women today to make whatever choices they want
- **Girly/ Lipstick Feminisms:** New feminisms advocated for “expressions of femininity and female sexuality as a challenge to objectification”
- **The Pro-Sex Party:** Argue vehemently against the policing of desire
- **Genderbending:** The third wave’s ability to embrace contradiction, and its refusal to fit into neat categories, makes it the perfect home for a new theory of transgenderism
- **Engagement with Popular Culture:** Engagement with popular culture as both producers and critical consumers

PROMINENT ISSUES

- **Race, Social class and Sexuality:** Central issues of Third Wave Feminism
- **Gender violence:** Artistic expressions such as *The Vagina Monologues* have generated awareness and action around issues relating to women's sexuality
- **Reproductive rights:** Access to contraception and abortion
- **Reclaiming derogatory terms:** To change the connotation of a sexist word rather than censor it from speech; words like *spinster, bitch, whore* and *cunt*
- **Rape:** Utility of the reclamation strategy - SLUTWALK - if victimized women are sluts, then all women must be, since anyone can be victimized regardless of what they are wearing

POST FEMINISM

- Describes a range of viewpoints reacting to feminism since the 1980s
- Not “anti-feminist”
- Post-feminists believe that women have achieved second wave goals
- They are critical of third wave feminist goals
- Other post-feminists opine that feminism is no longer relevant to today's society