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Assimilationist equality frame feminisms and Transformative Integrative Feminisms

The analysis here distinguishes between assimilationist or equality-frame feminisms and integrative or transformative feminisms.

The defining value of assimilationist or equality-frame feminisms is equality, which may be understood in more or less radical (liberal or socialist) terms.

Integrative transformative feminisms, by contrast, are committed to specifically feminist, women associated values as well as to equality. Since they propose these values as alternatives to the dominant ones, these feminists can challenge not just women's exclusion from social structures and rewards but the very nature of these structures and rewards. They are full politics that go beyond pressure for a single group and address the whole of society.

Almost all liberal reform feminists are assimilationist in approach (though not without contradictions)

However, there are both assimilationist and transformative feminists who self-identify with all other categories of feminism, i.e. Black, radical, socialist, Third World, lesbian, Indigenous and eco-feminist.

The alternative value core of integrative feminisms in all their variety is the holistic, egalitarian, life-centered rejection of dominant androcentric, dualistic, hierarchical, profit-centered ideology and social structures. These feminisms refuse the oppositions that patriarchal relations presume and structure between the personal and the political, public and private, means and ends, reason and emotion, psychological and social, knower and known, production and reproduction, individual and community, society and nature. Committed to developing new political forms that reflect their holistic values, they attempt to integrate these oppositions as part of their struggles to build a new world.

Articulating integrative values involves affirming the work, characteristics, and concerns that are relegated to women, marginalized and trivialized in industrial, patriarchal society. These feminisms not only name and resist diverse women's oppression but also name and affirm diverse women's strengths and worth.

Integrative feminists believe that women should be relieved of their unequal share of responsibility for the reproduction of life and society not only, so women can engage in what are currently male-associated activities, but so that women's life-oriented work and concerns can become the organizing principles of the whole of society and its numerous and varied communities.

To move beyond challenging not only women's condition but general social structures and values, diverse women acknowledge their specificity as women (their differences from men) as a major resource in their politics.

Integrative feminisms, affirm women's equality with men and their differences from men, that is, both women's equality and women's specificity. These characteristics, so often understood as static opposites, become dynamic contradictions to be lived and transformed in practice.

When diverse women's specificity is named as a strength as well as a source of oppression, differences among women can be understood not only as divisions to be overcome but as resources to be celebrated and used in struggle. The apparently contradictory facts of women's commonality and women's diversity thus also become necessary aspect of each other – to be affirmed and transformed together.

These transformative feminisms are 'integrative feminisms' because

1. they are essentially anti-dualistic, refusing the fragmentation of industrial patriarchal society;
2. they integrate resistance to all dominations as essential aspects of women-defined feminist politics;
3. the life-centered values they endorse in opposition to dominant separative values are integrative ones such as community, sharing, nurturing, and cooperation; and, most important,
4. these are dialectical politics in which the apparently opposed principles of women's equality and specificity, their commonality and diversity become dynamic contradictions that, far from being mutually exclusive are mutually constitutive, each transformed by the other. For instance, equality is understood differently when it coexists with specificity and difference. When equality no longer necessarily implies sameness, difference need no longer imply inequality.