

# A Critical Look at Gender and Feminism

On the occasion of the International Women's Day 2005, I wrote an essay in Mukto-Mona with the title "[International Women's Day - Celebrating Women's Achievements](#)" in which I was all gaga about the impressive list of achievements women have accomplished over the years. It may have been seen as condescending by many feminists to be listing women's achievement, as doing so may carry the veiled implication that there was/is any doubt about women's capability. That cynicism may have some justification. But the motive behind that essay was to open the eyes of many men (and also women) who quite surprisingly still have doubts about women possessing equal POTENTIAL as men in ALL aspects of life. This time my focus will be quite different in nature. I will focus on the critical views of women themselves on gender and feminism issues, or some aspects thereof. In almost all essays on women or gender issues, whether on the occasion of International Women's day or in other context, the focus(rightly) is on the discrimination, persecution perpetrated by men on women, highlighting women's potentials and achievements and last but not the least, on glorifying feminism. My essay as a contrarian one will try to dispel some myths and mistaken perceptions about women that persists among many, men and women alike. To dispel those myths and misperceptions I will heavily draw on comments and views of women themselves. News and factbites will also be used. I will also dwell on the criticism of women against women, feminists to be precise, and on comments or views by women that is usually attributed to men. It is surprising to learn that much of what we call "sexist view of women", is taken not just by men, but by women as well. Moreover, to drive home the point that women are equal to men, it is also relevant to show that women can be as bad as men, not just as good as men. It would be in the true spirit of equality between the sexes to do so, although in recent parlance (colloquially) "bad" sometimes means "good". So I will allow that latitude to the readers in interpreting "bad" or "good" in the context of gender issues. In this essay I will make the point that women are equally capable of committing vices (or virtues depending on the view one takes) that are normally attributed to men, at least by layfolks. I cannot overemphasize the fact that this essay is not anti-women or derogatory to women, but only tries to clinch the fact that men and women are really not that different after all. To avoid generating male vs. female controversy, I will only quote views by women, and facts from sources of either gender (facts do not depend on gender anyway).

The word feminism conjures up the noble idea of the struggle by women against the gender based discrimination, persecution, and inequity that have been perpetrated on women throughout history and continues in various degrees in all societies still today. Viewed in this very general and broad sense of the term feminism, all sensible people, men or women are champions of "feminism". After all discrimination, persecution, inequity are morally wrong, regardless of whether the basis for such wrongs be gender, race, language, religion whatever. Yet a 1997 poll revealed that 70% of women do not consider themselves as feminists although they agree with every major

feminist position (The exact source of this poll result will be quoted later). What can explain this apparently contradictory result? Feminism is not a simple unambiguous concept anymore, at least in USA. There are some aspects of contemporary feminism that many women do not agree with. That is why they do not wish to be identified with a blanket label of feminist.

Although various factions of feminism have been catalogged (as in the FAQ of alt.feminism and other databases), academic discussions/debates on feminism broadly divide feminism into two categories: (1) Equity feminism (2) Gender Feminism (Introduced by by feminist writer Christina Hoff Sommers in her book : "Who Stole Feminism: How Women Have Betrayed Women"). The first category reflects the goal of redressing the inequities and injustices perpetrated on female gender and achieve a total equality and equity between genders. Basically it is a subset of a broader human rights issue, that aims to abolish all forms of injustice based on race, gender etc. The second form goes beyond that and aims at proving a supremacy of one gender over another, and is based on not only glorifying one gender but degrading the other gender as well, in a systemic sense. This dichotomy roughly corresponds to the belief in a racial equality between whites and blacks as reflected in the civil liberties movement in the 60's by both blacks and whites and the radical supremacist ideas of KKK and black supremacist groups of that era.

The reason many women are unwilling to be seen as feminists as referred to in the poll above is because they have issues with those aspects of gender feminism, and since the term feminism is too broad and includes gender feminism, hence their uneasiness with being labelled as a feminist.

Anyway, back to the theme of this essay. I will list down some quotes and facts in three sections (A-C) with appropriate sources from books and and magazines :

#### **A. Women on Various Aspects of Gender and Feminism**

#### **B. News and Views of Women Exploding the Myth of Women's Innocence**

#### **C. Women on Female Sexuality:**

#### **A. Women on Gender and Feminism Issues:**

1. Sarah Boxer in "One casualty of the women's movement: Feminism", NY Times, December 14, 1997 said that most women do not consider themselves as feminists (about 70% in 1997) yet they agree with every major feminist position.
2. In a 1975 dialog, Simon De Beauvoir said : "No women should be authorized to stay at home to raise her children, women should not have that choice, precisely because if there is such a choice, too many women will make that choice.  
(From p-171, "Blank Slate: The Modern Denial of Human Nature" by Steven Pinker)
3. Both Wendy Shalitt in her book "A return to Modesty: Discovering the

lost virtue" and Danielle Crittendon in her book "What our mothers didn't tell us: Why happiness eludes modern women", advise women "to marry young, postpone their careers, and care for children in traditional marriages" (From p-339, Blank Slate - Pinker)

4. F. Carolyn Graglia in her book "Domestic tranquility: A brief against Feminism" theorized that women's maternal and sexual instincts are being distorted by the assertiveness and analytical mind demanded by careers. (From Blank Slate - Pinker)
5. Marian Kester Combs, a freelance writer for Washington Times & Chronicles wrote in "Estrogen Poisoning" in Chronicle, May, 1997 that "feminists are out to destroy femininity and motherhood. She contends that feminism should be called masculinism as that's what the feminists are trying to acquire, traits like dominance, aggression, profanity etc.
6. Suzanne Fields in "Warriors or Damsels in Distress?", The Washington Times, May 19, 1997 argues against women in combat forms in military. She says "it's a double standard of feminists to advocate such roles. They (feminists) want female soldiers to be seen as too weak to stand up to male superiors who harass them but strong enough to battle enemies. If a woman soldier cannot kick a male soldier where it hurts when he attacks her sexually, how can we expect her to protect herself, and her buddies against an enemy soldier?"
7. From p-352-353, Blank Slate - Pinker: The article "Parity as a goal sparks bitter battle" (C. Holden, Science, July 21, 2000, p-380) quotes from a presentation at the National Academy of Engineering by social scientist Patti Hausman who said that the reasons why more women don't choose careers in Engineering is because they don't WANT TO.

Patti Hausman's above observations were corroborated by Linda Gottfredson who said: "On average, women are more interested in (dealing with) people and men with things"

"Glass ceiling theory has been refuted largely by women themselves, like Hausman, Gottfredson, Judith Klinefeld, Cathy Young, Camille Benbow, economist Jennifer Roback, Felice Schwartz, Diana Furchtgott-Roth, & Christina Stolba, legal scholars Jennifer Braceras"

(My Note: Glass ceiling theory says that women face an invisible barrier in climbing up the corporate ladder beyond a certain level)

8. In "Women's Figures: The Economic Progress of Women in America", published by American Enterprise 1996, Diana Furchtgott-Roth and Christine Stolba disputes the allegation of widespread discrimination and provide statistics to back it up, refers to the allegation as an attempt to promote victim status of women.
9. Susan Au Allen, in April 1, 1997 issue of "Vital Speeches of The day", explains wage gap as being due to "personal choices". In 1992, she says that 75% of M.S. & PhD in Education went to females, 86% of M.S & PhD in Engineering went to males. Average monthly salary for

Education field is \$3048, and for Engineering majors is \$4045, a wage gap of \$1001, obviously due to personal choice.

10. From <http://www.equityfeminism.com/bookstore/ceasefire.html> :

"Into this fray steps Cathy Young whose book *Ceasefire* argues that men and women aren't all that different after all and that many of the problems often described in the media as men's or women's problems are, in fact, problems common to all humanity regardless of sex. As Young aptly puts it in the title of her first chapter, "Men are from Earth, Women are from Earth." That in many circles this is still a fundamentally radical idea is testament to how pervasive sexual stereotyping in all its varieties remains.."

11. From [http://www.taemag.com/issues/articleid.16520/article\\_detail.asp](http://www.taemag.com/issues/articleid.16520/article_detail.asp) :

*"We have a system of quality control in scholarship. It is called criticism. This has broken down when it comes to feminist research. Scholars are not correcting the faulty research for fear of appearing illiberal or "sexist." This has done terrible harm already."*  
( - Christina Hoff Sommers )

12. The title of the book by Christina Hoff Sommers: "The War Against Boys: How Misguided Feminism Is Harming Our Young Men" says it all, no quote is needed.

13. Daphne Patai writes in the introduction "Redefining the World" of her book "Heterophobia: Sexual Harassment and the Future of Feminism":

*"Women claim to be equal partners when that suits them, and claim to be entitled to special consideration when that suits them."*

"They insist on autonomy in maintaining or aborting pregnancies, but at the same time they determine the fathers' duties -- and rights, if any. Women claim child support. They can either demand or impede fathers' continuing involvement with their offspring, as the women see fit. [Do men have any reproductive rights?] The result is that women have advantages over men in child custody suits, having learned to use the legal system to readily get protection orders against men (on the flimsiest provocation) when that suits their purposes, just as they have learned to use charges of child sexual abuse and domestic violence."

(According to the editorial board of the publisher, *Heterophobia* is "A devastating expose of the way academic feminists are driving their wedge between men and women.")

14. From pages 409-410, "Sex: A Natural History" by Joan Allen Rodgers:

"For one thing most men do not rape or beat their wives. For another, women under certain - but rarely sexual circumstances are equally or

more violent toward spouses that are men. "But the facts are that half of all spousal murders in US are committed by wives and not all of them are in response to physical abuse by men. The 1985 National Family Violence Surevy supported by the National Institute of mental health shows that women and men are physically abusing each other in roughly equal numbers, and that women often use weapons to make up for their relative physical advanatge. A study on family violence published in 1986 in the Journal of Marriage and Family found that 1.8 million women assaulted by husbands and boyfriends, but 2 million men were assaulted by wife or girlfriend. The study also found that mothers abuse their children twice as often as do fathers in some surveys, and one reason this seems so shocking is because men who are taught to be manly are terrified to admit they have been abused by women, so their numbers are vastly underrated."

15. Elinor Buckett in "The Right Women" (1998) says feminist movement is over (Since it has succeeded) and says its no longer bought by majority women anymore. Women are not oppressed as the feminists clamour. She says signs of victory are all over. In newspapers,... Women's rejection of feminism should not be a cause of dismay, it should be a cause of celebration.
16. Mona Charen in Women's Quarterly, Spring '98 writes against feminists view and contends that biology is repsonsible for gender traits, not culture.
17. It was a woman political activist Phyllis Schlafly who formed a foundation called stop the ERA (Equal Rights Amendment)! In her book, "The Power of Positive Woman" she argues that women are not prepared to handle equal responsibility as men as they are not as strong as men and they cannot afford to lose the protective labor laws favouring women that would disappear if ERA was passed.
18. It is an irony that ERA has never been passed due to lack of non-ratification by majority US states even though it was passed by a male majority congress! Even women suffrage, which was passed in 1920 was opposed by a woman, Phyllis Bissell, a social reformer and lecturer.
19. Marianne Williamson in her book "Women's Worth", p-63 says "Most of us want a masculine man, but there's no way to have one unless we become feminine woman".
20. Then there are some women on the extreme end of the spectrum, who are inspired by Biblical passages and sincerely believe that happiness in marriage can only come through submission of wives to their husbands! Christina McClelland wrote in the Moody magazine (July/August 1998 issue) titled "The Ugly 'S' word" quoting biblical passages and citing her own happy marriage argued that submitting to the husband is the best guarantee for peace in the house.
21. From Newsweek February 14, 2005 (In Letters section):

I AM TIRED OF HEARING WOMEN IN THE sciences whine, I am a

Ph.D precandidate in atmospheric oceanic and space sciences fully funded with tuition and a stipend at the University of Michigan, while my husband is struggling financially to acquire his master's degree in mechanical engineering, course by course, because no one will fund him. I am the one being handed opportunities, in part because I am a woman. Many women who feel victimized by sexism in the sciences could use my circumstances as evidence that some women are given a break in order to get ahead, But by this rationale, my credibility will be challenged by those who assume I receive funding because I am a woman, not because of any measure of intelligence. I have worked very hard to get where I am, and am continuing to work harder than I ever thought I could as I proceed with my research and work toward my goal of achieving tenure at a prominent university. I do not find and have not ever found my gender to be a reason to whine.  
- Emily Mae Chistianson, Ann Arbor, Michigan

22. On p-89 of "Women's Worth", author Marianne Williamson: "We don't think about being kind and caring, we think about how we can hook a man. We don't think about his fears and problems, we think of our own and how we can get him to solve them. We don't think about him period - but about his money, his job, or his connections.
23. On p-124 of Anatomy of Love - Fisher: "Women are more interested in the status of a potential lover than his physical appearance."
24. Dr. Laura Allen, dept of Neuroendocrinology, UCLA: "Women want money, men want youth and beauty" (From p-209, Gender Shock - Phyllis Burke)
25. p-124, Deborah Blum, in "Sex on the Brain": "Monogamy requires fair and equal partnership. The stereotype "Men breadwinner, women as housekeepers" is not consistent with monogamy."
26. On p-28 in "The Manipulated Man" - Esther Vilar: "What besides money, can bind a women to a man?"
27. On p-117, Sex: A natural History : "Women have diffuse brain organization, in which some of the language capability reside on the right as well, as a result her feelings flow into words, his are clogged in the left brain. He feels the same feeling, he just can't get them out so easily."
28. On p-255, Sex on the Brain, Deborah Blum: Women are far more likely to "nuke" a strong woman than a man is, says psychologist Laurie Reidman of University of Minnesota.
29. On p-17, The Manipulated Man - Esther Vilar: "It is true that women gets progressively more elegant, more well-groomed, more "cultured", but her demands on life will always be material, never intellectual."
30. p-45, Vilar (Op cit): "Women are Stupid"
31. p-18, Vilar (Op cit):

"But In our time women are no longer subject to the will of men. Quite the contrary. They have been given every opportunity to win their independence and if, after all this time, they have not liberated

themselves and thrown off their shackles, we can only arrive at one conclusion; there are no shackles to throw off." (Note: Vilar's book was written in 1972)

32. Women on Esther Vilar: Julie Myerson (In Mail on Sunday) commented on Vilar's Manipulated Man:

"A wonderfully witty and intelligent kick in the pants for feminism."

33. In her Article "In Defense of Man", Heather Roscoe, former weekly columnist of American Partisan :

"Why men would ever want to live with most women the way they've been acting these last few decades is beyond me." (From Spintech magazine, August 12, 2000)

## **B. News and views of women exploding the myth of women's innocence:**

1. Patricia Pearson in her book "When She Was Bad : Violent Women & the Myth of Innocence" refutes the innocent image of women and exposes the dark side of women. Here is an excerpt from Amazon's editorial review:

*"Women commit the majority of child homicides in the United States; more than 80 percent of neonaticides; an equal or greater share of severe physical child abuse; an equal rate of spousal assault; about a quarter of child sexual molestations; and a large proportion of elder abuse...The rate at which infants are murdered by women in the U.S. is higher than the rate at which women are murdered by men." With carefully researched facts, fascinating case histories, and incisive argument, Patricia Pearson succeeds in demolishing the myth that women are not naturally violent."*

Larissa MacFarquhar wrote about the book in The New Yorker:

*She is a good reporter, and--no doubt in anticipation of conventional feminist objections--she has done the work necessary to back up even her most inflammatory ideas.*

Quote from the book:

*"Women can operate the system to their advantage. Donning the feminine mask, they can manipulate the biases of family and community ... in order to set men up. If he tries to leave, or fight back, a fateful moment comes when she reaches for the phone, dials 911, and has him arrested on the strength of her word: "Officer, he hit me."(p.142)*

2. Journalist Kate Fillion wrote two books refuting some myths about female superiority in many aspects. Her book "Lip Service: The Truth About Women's Darker Side in Love, Sex and Friendship" was a best seller. Here is an excerpt from the editorial review:

*"Most of us are so accustomed to thinking of women and men as psychological opposites that we don't even notice that our actual experiences contradict our beliefs." With this powerful introduction, Kate Fillion launches Lip Service, the #1 bestseller that explodes the myth of female virtue. Women are not morally superior to men, she argues, nor should they want to be."*

In her other book "Lip Service: The Myth of Female Virtue in Love, Sex, and Friendship" Kate Fillion tries to explode some more myths. Here is an excerpt from the editorial review by Donna Seaman:

*Journalist Fillion believes that we would all be much better off emotionally and culturally if we would stop paying lip service to that stale old myth about men and women being psychological opposites. According to our society's "sexual script," women are the "intimacy experts," adept at communicating and at love, hence morally superior. Men, by contrast, are reticent to a fault and reluctant to forge relationships. These absurd generalizations, Fillion argues, have become "barriers to equality." In an attempt to dismantle them, Fillion interviewed more than 100 women and men about everything from friendships to relationships, fantasies, sexual harassment, and the difference between rape and unwanted sex...This dose of reality is a healthy alternative to books, for instance, that describe men and women as creatures from different planets. As far as we know, we're all earthlings, splendid in our diversity."*

3. On p-182 of "Sex on the Brain", author Deborah Blum writes: "Women can be violent too! A woman shot her husband because he was on the phone too long and refused to hang up."
4. Army Specialist Megan Ambuhl was charged for abusing Iraqi prisoners. Also Lisa Girman was dismissed for mistreatment of Iraqi prisoners. She kicked a prisoner in the abdomen. (CNN, Jan 5'04, Lou Dobbs Tonight)
5. Rachel Simmons, author of "Odd girl out" talks about violence among girls on "American Morning"
6. Helen Fisher: "Women stab you in the back, men hit you on the face" (Discovery Channel, 9/4/03 "Science of the Sexes")

### **Woman promoting infidelity!:**

7. Excerpts from the book The 50-Mile Rule: "Your Guide to Infidelity and Extramarital Etiquette." by Judith E. Brandt (Featured in CNN)



Presents "Fidelity", Dec 20-1, 2003) Excerpts:

*"unless you have zero self-esteem or are just plain odd, you don't want to have sex with the same person forever and ever, you just don't"*

*"It is better to stay married while cheating than to walk out of marriage" (From CNN presents)*

8. From mukto-mona Message 18494:

"Arab women singers complicit in rape, says Amnesty report"

"While African women in Darfur were being raped by the Janjaweed militiamen, Arab women stood nearby and sang for joy"

9. Women killing their own babies to save their love life!

From

[http://www.crimelibrary.com/notorious\\_murders/women/index.html](http://www.crimelibrary.com/notorious_murders/women/index.html):

Amanda Hamm, 27 and her boyfriend, Maurice Lagrone Jr., 28, are charged with murder in the drowning deaths of her children, 6-year-old Christopher Hamm, 3-year-old Austin Brown and 23 month old Kyleigh Hamm. (December 2003)

From

[http://www.crimelibrary.com/notorious\\_murders/famous/downs/index\\_1.html](http://www.crimelibrary.com/notorious_murders/famous/downs/index_1.html):

Diane Downs, killed her 3 children in 1983 because they got in her way to her lover.

From

[http://www.crimelibrary.com/notorious\\_murders/women/routier/1.html](http://www.crimelibrary.com/notorious_murders/women/routier/1.html) :

Darlie Routier In 1997, a court found Darlie Lynn Routier guilty of probably the worst of human crimes: killing two of her natural children in cold-blood. Motive is still a mystery, but the prosecution painted her as a shrewish, materialistic young woman who, sensing her lavish lifestyle crumbling, slew her two sons Damon and Devon in a mad attempt to resuscitate her and her husband's personal economy.

### **Some Similar Incidents from Bangladesh :**

10. This is about a gruesome tale of a woman's dark side from our own backyard in Bangladesh. The Daily Janakantha of August 20, 2003 (Also The Daily Manab Zamin of that day) carried a report of one young women (Yasmin Begum) who strangled to death the 7 year old

child Jyoti of a woman in retaliation against the woman for trying to prevent Yasmin from having an affair with Jyoti's uncle.

### **Women aiding and abetting rape of women! :**

11. The Daily Star Editorial of February 14, 1998 (A Land of Rapists?) mentions that "On February 4, a girl creditor of a bank was raped by a bank officer with the help of a woman municipal worker.
12. The daily Star of March 19, 2004 reported that a Woman killed her own children after they watched her having sex with her husband's brother. (<http://www.thedailystar.net/2004/03/19/d40319012222.htm>)
13. **Sexual harassment of minors by women:**  
The following link contains an exhaustive list of news items about female sex offenders (with pictures):  
<http://www.freerepublic.com/~jasoncann/>

### **C. Women on Female Sexuality:**

1. On p-93, of Anatomy of Love - Helen Fisher: "All these data certainly lead one to suspect that women avail themselves of illicit lovers with relish, perhaps even as avidly as men"

On p-94 of Fisher(op cit) : "You may wish to argue that these women (and women in many other cultures) all engaged in prostitution for purely economic reasons. But many say they like the sexual variety. And the women who pursue this vocation are not alone. The animal kingdom is rife with loose females."

On p-95 of Fisher(op cit): "There is no evidence whatsoever that women are sexually shy or that they shun clandestine sexual adventures. Instead both men and women seem to exhibit a mixed reproductive strategy: Monogamy and adultery are our fare"

2. From p-122 of "What's Love got to do with it?" by Meredith Small:

"The difference between men and women in sexuality is not natural, i.e it is not true that men are genetically coded to have more sex than women, but simply a product of sexual repression by males, a policy that developed to control paternity ; without repression women would presumably have sex as often and with as many partners as men"

Meredith Small, op cit : "Women would be as interested in sex had they not had to fear a male stranger."

On p-157, Meredith Small(op cit): "In the short term, when women have the opportunity and freedom, I maintain that women are just as interested in sexual partners, and frequent sex, as men". "both men and

women compromise between two conflicting impulses."

3. Daylle Deanna Schwartz, in her book "All men are Jerks until proven otherwise", p-93 says:

"Although women may hesitate to admit it, many of us love sex far more than just the emotional gratification. Our reluctance to acknowledge the basic natural pleasure is related to messages that have taught us that its unladylike to enjoy sex too much"

4. On p-352 of her book "Sex: A natural History", Joan Rodgers says:

*"Every sexual anthropologist, from Alfred Kinsey to Helen Fisher, has concluded that given a level social playing field and absence of severe punishment, women, not men are the promiscuous sex, seeking variety.*

5. On p-381 of Sex: A natural History : "April Gorry of UCSB conducted studies of female white tourists (sex tourism) in Carribean found that women were more promiscuous there, choosing men of lower status than themselves, prioritizing male appearance etc.
6. On p-174 of "Female Sexuality" by Marie Bonaparte : "there is a slight masochism in women, which impels her to welcome and to value some measure of brutality on the man's part."
7. In her book "The Psychology of Women" (Two volumes) Helene Deutsch says :

*"Masochism, narcissism, and passivity are the three key characteristics of the female personality."*

(an entire chapter is devoted to female masochism)

8. From pages 79-80 of "Sex: A Natural History" by Joan Allen of Rodgers: "Survey shows that women disapproves casual sex far more than men, but still participate in it, a double standard that belies the biological roots of our stone age ancestors and is perhaps a frustrated bow to social conventions and male dominated social structures.

... "After all, in evolutionary terms, women, at least in developed world, have just as many resources or access to resources as men nowadays."

9. Quotes From Promiscuities by Naomi Wolf :

p -xxvi : "But anatomists and sex educators over the last 30 years have found more and more evidence that women are not only designed anatomically to be at least as sexually intense as men - but even that women's capacity for pleasure is extreme in a way we have yet to accept"

"That the male gender is more driven by lust - is a fairly recent historical invention. For most of recorded history, women's status as the more carnal sex was pretty much granted, so much so that women's presumed carnality was used to justify their persecution"

p-187: Hopi (Pueblos of N. Arizona) women dance naked ceremony. Clay phalluses then inciting men to passion and then to love making. Refers to Gutierrez: "When Jesus came, the corn mothers ran away"

- Aparthib