Short Descriptions of Theoretical Perspectives on the GABI

Below are very brief overviews of each of the eleven theories on the GABI (Gender Attitude and Belief Inventory). Two useful sources for additional information about these theories are *Feminist Thought: A More Comprehensive Introduction* by Rosemarie Tong and *Gender Inequality: Feminist Theories and Politics* by Judith Lorber.

**Physiological** theorists believe that biological differences determine the social differences between men and women. They often focus on biological differences dealing with reproduction, hormones, or the brain.

**Sociobiological** theorists believe that men and women’s social roles have evolved over time as to best help them pass on their genes. Different strategies are beneficial to men and to women since they face different challenges to successful reproduction. This perspective is sometimes referred to as *evolutionary psychology*.

**Structural functionalist** theorists believe that society is a system of complementary parts which work to maintain the whole; gender helps to structure social life by providing complementary roles for men and women. Boys and men are socialized to be instrumental while girls and women are socialized to be expressive. It is efficient for society that these different roles are present in each (heterosexual) family.

Each of the next eight theories (i.e., the feminist theories) refers to “inequalities” rather than “differences,” as the first three theories did. They all believe gender is an important distinction in society, men and women are unequal in society (in other words, sexism and patriarchy exist), and these inequalities *can* and *should* be changed; however, they differ in important ways as explained below.

**Liberal feminists** believe that men and women both are disadvantaged by society’s gender expectations. They advocate working within institutions to “level the playing field” through changing laws, education, and socialization to bring about gender equality.

**Marxist feminists** believe that the oppression of women stems primarily from capitalism, which exploits women’s labor and is upheld through women’s unpaid domestic labor. They believe that economic inequalities are the most central form of inequality. Therefore, eliminating capitalism would get rid of gender inequalities.

**Socialist feminists** believe that women’s oppression is inseparable from class oppression. Therefore, to bring about gender equality, we must work to eliminate both capitalism and patriarchy.

**Radical feminists** believe that women are oppressed by our patriarchal society. They do not believe that men are oppressed. They seek a fundamental reorganization of society because our existing political and social organization is inherently patriarchal.
Separatist feminists, like radical feminists, believe that women are oppressed by our patriarchal society. They, however, believe that we can’t get rid of this problem if women and men are together. In order to achieve equality, women need to separate themselves from men. Some believe this is a temporary stage while others see this as a permanent goal.

Cultural feminists, like radical feminists, believe that women are oppressed by our patriarchal society. They, however, focus on empowering women through valuing, emphasizing, and encouraging the positive qualities traditionally associated with women, such as nurturance, caring, cooperation, relationships with others, childbirth, morality, peace, pureness, and women’s connection to nature and the earth.

Multicultural feminists believe that many inequalities are important in society today, not only gender. In addition to gender inequalities, they focus on race, ethnicity, and class—and sometimes also add sexuality, nationality, age, disability, and others. They believe that people experience gender differently depending on their location in the structures of race, ethnicity and class. Therefore, there is no universal female experience. This perspective is sometimes referred to as black feminism, multiracial feminism, or womanism.

Post-modern feminists believe that gender and sex are multiple, constantly changing, and performed by individuals. There are many (i.e., more than two) genders and sexes. They focus on creating social change through challenging the existence and blurring the boundaries of these categories. This perspective shares many ideas with queer theory.