However, while it is certainly the case that women have a monopoly on childbirth, there is no biological reason that this should extend beyond the period of suckling children – instead, this insistence is cultural.

Feminists advocate ‘symmetrical families’, where both parents share equally in domestic work and child-rearing, allowing the man to spend more time with their children than would otherwise be possible, and freeing the woman from a life of domestic servitude.

More radical families have also suggested the idea that the duty for child-rearing could be handed over to the community or to the state, or it could be undertaken by relatives in an ‘extended’ family – the Kibbutz system in Israel operated communal child-rearing until the end of the 1980s.

Feminists have challenged the idea that biology is destiny by distinguishing between sex and gender:

- Sex refers to the binary biological distinction between man and woman (although even this is questioned, since while most of the population possess either XX or XY chromosomes, there are some intersex individuals who have XXY chromosomes or some other non-typical variant)
- Gender, meanwhile, is a cultural term, referring to the differences between the contrasting stereotypes of ‘masculine’ and ‘feminine’ – as Simone de Beauvoir wrote in *The Second Sex*, “Women are made, they are not born.”¹³
- Feminists deny that there is a logical or necessary link between sex and gender, and so while biological sex may have granted women the unique ability of childbirth, it is cultural gender stereotypes which create the idea that women must be solely responsible for child-raising.
- Furthermore, it is from these gender stereotypes that the idea of the dominant male and the submissive female are arrived at – they are not a biological fact, but rather a cultural, or even political, construction.

Most feminists hold the idea that human nature is androgynous, since biological differences are relatively minor and are not binary, so sex differences are minimal and gender differences are entirely constructed – the goal of feminism is to move beyond regarding men and women as a product of their sex or gender, but rather to understand them as individuals and restore a sense of personhood.

This distinction between sex and gender proved vital to the feminist cause, not only proving that social roles determined by sex were baseless and unnecessary, but also illustrating the processes and mechanisms through which women were ‘engendered’ and therefore oppressed.

However, this sex/gender distinction has been opposed by two main groups of feminists:

- **Difference feminists**
- **Postmodern feminists**

*Difference feminists* have argued that there are essential differences between men and women, leading to the notion of sex essentialism – in this sense, social and cultural characteristics of gender are seen to draw upon and reflect deeper biological sex differences; this has led some TERFs (Trans-Exclusionary Revolutionary Feminists) to argue that trans women are not true women – see Germaine Greer: “Just because you lop off your dick and wear a dress does not make you a fucking woman” – since while trans women may be able to partially adopt the social and cultural gender role of femininity, they are not able do so in full since it is an augmentation of a biological reality which they lack.

*Postmodern feminists*, such as Judith Butler in her 1990 book *Gender Trouble*,¹⁴ have challenged the very existence of distinct and binary categories of ‘sex’, preferring the spectrum approach favoured by postmodernist thinkers – they note that where sex is defined by capabilities, i.e. ability to give

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