

Feminist Legal Studies

A close engagement with law has long been a core dimension of feminist activism. However, it is only since the late twentieth century that a distinct and vital body of academic literature addressing the nature, effects, and limits of that engagement has emerged. In particular, from the 1980s onwards, a critical mass of scholarship has accumulated, establishing feminist legal studies not just as a recognizable subdiscipline, both of law and of feminist or women's studies, but also as a terrain of substance and complexity, the exploration and understanding of which requires increasingly sophisticated navigation skills. As research in and around the area flourishes as never before, this new title in the Routledge Major Works series, Critical Concepts in Law, meets the need for an authoritative reference work to make sense of a rapidly growing and ever more complex corpus of literature, and to provide a map of feminist legal studies as it has emerged, developed, and diverged over the last thirty years. There are many ways of classifying feminist thinking within and beyond law. A typical method is to divide work into competing political or theoretical camps (such as liberal feminism, socialist feminism, and radical feminism). Another way, more common in law, is to organize feminist perspectives around issues such as abortion, equal pay, and pornography. A third treatment would be to focus on epistemologies (for example, feminist empiricism, standpoint theory, and postmodernism). However, the editor of this reference work, an internationally renowned scholar, eschews these increasingly sterile approaches and instead offers a view of feminist legal studies as a dynamic process of engagement with law which takes different forms and emphases at different points and contexts. Feminist legal studies does not, she argues, comprise a static set of ideas; it is rather an ongoing conversation. For this reason, the material gathered here in this four-volume collection is, to a considerable extent, organized chronologically, starting with the key feminist issues and interventions of the early 1980s. The collection then progresses thematically to reflect the shifts and turns of feminist legal thought. The content of the material is explicitly inter-jurisdictional, and reflects the global nature of feminist legal scholarship and, in particular, current thematic preoccupations. With a comprehensive introduction, newly written by the editor, which places the material in its historical and intellectual context, Feminist Legal Studies is an essential work of reference and is destined to be valued by scholars and students of feminist law—as well as those working in allied areas—as a vital one-stop research resource.

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