

Is Feminism Still Necessary?

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The rights of women have come a long way in the past century and this has resulted in debates around the world concerning whether it is still relevant in today's world. Feminism is the belief in economic, social and political equality of the sexes (Brunell & Burkett, 2018). Throughout history, women were restricted to the domestic sphere where they were denied the right to study, own property and to participate in public life. In France, at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, women were still forced to cover their heads while in Germany, a man had the right to sell a wife. Even at early 1900s in Europe and the United States, women could not hold an elective office and could not vote (Brunell & Burkett, 2018). These things are no longer present in the modern world and women arguably enjoy equal rights to men. Worth mentioning is that although feminist theory originated in the USA, diverse institutions across the world have demonstrated commitment towards women's interests and rights (Brunell & Burkett, 2018). Some groups feel that women are now treated equally to men and hence feminism is no longer needed. The opposing side believe that inequalities are still evident in diverse aspects of our daily lives, and some even argue that feminism is needed now more than ever. This essay explores these debates by highlighting the diverse arguments and perspectives, and concludes by answering the question "Is feminism still necessary?"

Today, women have more economical, social and political rights than ever before but they have to deal with the effects of gender inequality on a daily basis. Pay inequality, victim-blaming, body-shaming and sex-shaming are some of the things that women even in the developed world have to deal with every day (Enochs, 2015). The situation is even worse in the developing world where women still have to fight for the right to education and cope with harsh health threats such as female genital mutilation (FGM) (Enochs, 2015). Even with increased public education on the negative effects of FGM, some communities especially in Africa still do it and argue that they are protecting their cultural heritage (Williams, 2018).

They dismiss these studies as ‘evil ways of the white man.’ On the political sphere, again in the developing world, some male politicians publicly disregard their female counterparts and state that women cannot lead properly. Clearly, the struggle of women rights is still not over hence feminism is still needed.

Another reason in support of feminism is that gender inequality has negative effects on women’s health and that equal pay for work is yet to be achieved (Enochs, 2015). Biologically, women are twice more likely to suffer from depression and anxiety than men, and given that societal pressures such as gender inequality and sexism have a significant contribution to these conditions, feminism is still relevant. Indeed, poor mental health is one of the major causes of health problems such as heart disease, COPD and diabetes meaning that a fight against gender inequality is a fight against these health conditions (Enochs, 2015). Specific to the developing world, FGM affects a woman’s sex life and in some cases, the victims end up dying due to lack of proper medical attention after the procedure. According to Gray (2017), women make 78 cents to a man’s dollar on average for doing the same job. When it comes to women of color in the U.S., the situation is worse as evident from a 2013 report that on average, an African-American woman makes 64% while a Hispanic woman make 59% of what a man makes (Gray, 2017). These statistics mean that until the wage gap has been closed, feminists still have goals to accomplish.

According to Stevens (2012), 50% of the American workforce is women and more than 50% of degree earners are female, but gender equality has not yet been achieved. Although the number of female graduates is that high, only 28% of full professors in the U.S., 3.8% of Fortune 500 CEOs and 16% of congress are women. Further, 92% of plastic surgery clients, 85% of domestic violence victims and 90% of rape victims are women (Stevens, 2012). These statistics support the fact that feminism is still relevant. Although feminists do not work to increase the number of male victims, these statistics indicate that women have a long way to

go in achieving their desired equality levels. Indeed, one in three women have experienced sexual harassment at work and women are paid lower wages for doing the same job as their male counterparts on average (Dicker & Piepmeier, 2016). When it comes to promotions, capable women are less recognized and are mostly passed over. This hinders them from joining the workforce in the first place because of fear of exclusion based on gender. Clearly, feminist movements have not achieved their purpose even though it has achieved some important things such as the Equal Pay Act. Injustices that feminists fight are still evident even though on a smaller scale. Feminism has ensured that women are equally treated in the workplace and that sexual harassment and objectification cases are handled seriously. However, this does not mean that feminism movements should stop because making changes from an individual perspective will be extremely difficult.

Groups with the opinion that feminism is no longer necessary argue that it has always been a movement for the privileged, white women. In early feminist movements in the UK, only women who had graduated from universities were allowed to vote or own property. In the USA, suffragettes argued that only white women should be allowed to vote to ensure that people of color did not have much influence (Bacchi & Eveline, 2015). It is true that feminism has resulted in numerous positive impacts when it comes to gender equality, but at times, these benefits have been granted more to white and heterosexual women. In the United Kingdom, modern feminist movements have failed to clearly define their objectives. These movements have had inconsistent tendencies and have developed superficial campaigns against tampon tax and 'manspreading.' In fact different branches of feminist movements have demonstrated to hold prejudiced and contradictory views. This is one of the arguments brought forward against modern feminism.

Another argument against modern feminism is that the movements are 'whiny' and that women exaggerate their disadvantages to get an upper hand in their fight (McKenna, 2016).

Radicals even state that these movements are designed to put women in such a position that they can oppress men. They argue that although it is true that women are generally disadvantaged by patriarchy, men on the other hand are also hurt by gender norms. By nature, men are brought up to suppress all their emotions except aggression while women are expected to be sensitive and nurturing. Arguably, feminism movements of today are designed in such a way that men have to be extremely cautious in everything they do or say concerning women. Every gender has its own challenges hence attributing almost all challenges that women face to gender inequality is unfair and invalid.

According to Kathy Caprino from Forbes (2017), there are millions of people across the world who believe that there should not be equal rights and opportunities for men and women. She also states that thousands of people believe that equality for men and women has already been achieved. Lastly, she states that there thousands of others who find feminism as a movement that do not align to their values or beliefs (Caprino, 2017). For example, others refer to the Bible and state that in the beginning, God first created man and only created a woman from the ribs of the man. From the Old Testament, several instances indicate that men were regarded as superior to women in different aspects. Beliefs of other religions such as Islam and Hindu also illustrate that men and women are not equal and that they are created for different purposes.

Feminism forces all inequalities to be analyzed from the lens of gender discrimination and sex (McKenna, 2016). For example, intersectional feminists advocate against non-white women earning less than white women and ignore that white women still earn more than nonwhite men. They are selective in what they acknowledge as long as it brings out the female gender as oppressed. For example, they acknowledge and mention in numerous instances that bisexual women have higher chances of experiencing sexual violence than women of other sexualities. However, they fail to address or acknowledge that 40% of homeless youths in UK

are LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender) (Murray, 2016). This shows that feminist groups are selective in issues they choose to address which further supports the argument that feminist movements tend to be 'whiny' and exaggerate their disadvantages. Clearly, oppressions that do not directly relate to sexism are ignored by feminists despite the fact that feminist movements are established to fight against inequality (Murray, 2016). Therefore, for problems of inequality to be effectively solved, new movements are needed to deal with other kinds of discrimination such as homophobia and racism. It is also worth mentioning that this movement should not be a subset of the existing feminist movements that only take care of white, middleclass, straight women.

From the above discussion, it is clear that feminism is still necessary, but feminist movements need to adjust how they handle or approach issues. Although a lot has been achieved in the past 100 years in relation to equality between men and women, some form of inequality is still evident in today's world hence feminism still has objectives to achieve. In developing nations, women still have to fight for education rights and against health issues such as FGM. Even in the U.S., inequality is still manifested in the workplace through wage inequalities, low number of senior positions held by women and high cases of sexual harassment. Furthermore, there is a close relationship between a woman's mental health and chances of some health conditions such as heart disease and diabetes. Given that societal pressures related to gender inequality and sexism are the major contributor to poor mental health in women, feminist groups still have a role to play in ensuring that these cases are at the least possible levels. Therefore, feminism is still necessary. Groups holding an opposing perspective to this criticize how these movements are handled but do not give a convincing argument concerning why we do not need feminism. Therefore, feminist movements need to change their attitude towards other kinds of discrimination and ensure that their activities are directed to one major purpose, that is, to achieve equality.

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