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## The F-Word: Do We Still Need Feminism in 2016?

by Brittany Anderson

(Sociology 1120)

Even as a well-educated Western society in the year 2016, we still need feminism. Although women's suffrage and equal rights are no longer the driving forces of feminism, like in the first and second waves of feminism in America, it is still needed in 2016. Feminism is needed because females and males are not seen as equals on any platform, the over-sexualization of women's bodies is still seen as normal in mainstream media, and society maintains an incorrect idea of what feminism really is and what it stands for. This incorrect opinion of feminism is not held by one race, age, or gender. Feminism was needed both when it was first started in the late nineteenth century in the first wave, and today, however for different reasons.

The history of feminism in the United States is typically divided into three different waves, with each wave having a different political background and a different set of goals. The first wave of feminism took place from the late nineteenth to early twentieth centuries and was driven mainly by middle-class white women. "It emerged out of an environment of urban industrialism and liberal, socialist politics. The goal of this wave was to open up opportunities for women, with a focus on suffrage" (Rampton 2014). First wave feminists worked not only for suffrage, or the right to vote, but also for the right to an education, the right to work, the right to work safely, the right to the money they earned when they worked, the right to divorce, custodial rights to their children and the right to govern themselves and their own bodies (J.A. Fisher 2013). America saw *women* acting in a way previously unseen (public speaking, demonstrating, stints in jail), which challenged the "cult of domesticity" previously surrounding women. Discussions about the vote and women's participation in politics led to an examination of the differences between men and women as they were then viewed (Rampton). Ever since its beginning, feminism has been rooted in challenging a women's place in culture and society compared to a man's.

The second wave of feminism spanned from the 1960s to the 1990s and was initiated by women of color and third-world women (Krolokke, Sorensen 2005). "In this wave, sexuality and reproductive rights were dominant issues, and much of the movement's energy was focused on passing the Equal Rights Amendment to the Constitution guaranteeing social equality regardless of sex" (Rampton 2014). A noted radical group during this time, the Redstockings, performed extreme public acts to oppose the oppression of women. One of these acts happened as a result of the Miss America beauty pageants (1968/1969). The Redstockings held a counter pageant to display the cattle-like showing of women (Rampton). Through many other public displays of disagreement they displayed their beliefs that all men receive economic, sexual and psychological benefits from male supremacy, and that all men have oppressed women (Yates 1975). During this wave, however, the voices of feminists were not seen as important because of other serious issues plaguing the world, for example the war in Vietnam and the struggles of Black Power (Rampton).

The third wave or phase of feminism began in mid-1990 and continues to present day. It is driven by post-colonial and post-modern thinking. In this phase many constructs have been destabilized, including the notions of a "universal womanhood;" through the filters of body image, gender, and sexuality. Women of this wave have stepped onto the stage as strong and empowered, eschewing victimization and defining feminine beauty for themselves as subjects, not as objects of a sexist patriarchy (Rampton). The driving forces of the women and men involved with the three separate waves of feminism throughout history have all worked towards lessening the oppression of women during their time. Be it during the first wave focusing on women's suffrage, the second sexuality and reproductive rights and the third focusing on

body, gender and sexuality.

All three waves of feminism have faced criticism throughout time. The third wave of feminism (present-day) faces something that its ancestors never did; the role of mainstream media within feminism. The opposition of feminism is heard loud and clear within today's society. Many people say that feminism is not needed, have an unclear view of what it truly is, or think that feminists are against all men. Feminism is currently the sixtieth most looked up word in the world. Feminism is defined as the belief that men and women should have equal rights and opportunities (Merriam-Webster 2015). The feminist paradigm focuses on women's empowerment and draws attention to intersectionality and the matrix of domination and multiple oppression due to race, class, and gender; sexuality, sexual orientation, and age (Lindsey 2014:14-45).

The Carls Jr. 2009 television advertisement features the former Mrs. Salman Rushdie sitting on a brownstone stoop in a clingy sundress hiked up mid-thigh, cramming the giant burger into her educated maw and sucking barbecue sauce from her fingers and wrists. Let's not mince onions here: This is sex with a burger. Note the tagline of the commercial: "More than a piece of meat." This was the *cri de coeur* of feminism back in the day, and though it refers to the burger, it is also a tweak of conscience to males slobbering over the accomplished actress-author-chef. Take that, you objectifying pig. Also, in a culture in which glamour and beauty have been so thoroughly yoked to anorexia, isn't it great to see a sexy woman eat like a stevedore? (Neil 2009) Feminism is however, about realizing how women are portrayed and objectified in the media. The fact that it is being rationalized that a company is basically selling a burger as sex is why we need feminism. Women are not objects. They are not solely for the use of sex and ogling their bodies.

The representation of women in the media has always been exploitative. It has, throughout the years, reduced women to being nothing more than objects to be won, prizes to be shown off, and playthings to be abused. It has also created a definition of beauty that women compare themselves to. Men compare the women in their lives to what they see on television screens, in magazines, and on billboards. Both the self and society has suffered because of the objectification, sexism, exploitation and assessment (Berberick 1-15 2011).

One of the major issues with modern-day feminism is the misunderstanding of what it stands for, and a false connotation of overall extremism. Here is a prime example, in a quote by Rush Limbaugh, who has the ear of millions: "Men are mean, men are evil, men are uncivilized, men are brutes, men are whatever. They will attack you verbally. They will attack you physically. They do not respect you. That's the point. Feminism was gonna take care of "Boys will be boys will be boys no matter what." That's what feminism set out to do was to change that, because "boys being boys" was not right. "Boys being boys" was bad for women and feminism was gonna stamp that out ("The Massive Failure of Modern-Day Feminism"). This is not what feminists stand for. The media incorrectly portrays feminism in a man-hating light.

The popular "#INeedFeminismBecause" social media hashtag, which explains how individuals benefit from feminism in their daily lives, is combated by the hashtag "#IDon'tNeedFeminismBecause." Some of these hashtags include "...because my son should not be made to feel less simply because of his gender." "Because I adore men. I think women who are asking for the same rights as men are lacking of fantasy and ambition. I've never been discriminated as a women." "Because I don't need something that demonizes men. I don't need something that tells me the actions of a slut are okay, and then that the possible evidence of those actions can be thrown away like they were nothing but a clump of tissue" (AU news 2014 on behalf of @womenagainstfem). It is not one age, gender, or race that does not understand the need for feminism. Most of these individuals have a false sense of what feminism is and what it stands for in a modern-day society.

To get an authentic view of feminism in an unbiased average-American's eyes, we look at UrbanDictionary.com's definition of "Feminism." Many of the individual user-made definitions are

correct, correct being the aforementioned Merriam-Webster definition, however one entry in 2014 states, “Feminism: Was originally a good idea but now has changed into a hate group that spreads false statistics and propaganda, for example going to prison for 14 years for yelling at your wife and being labeled as a rapist for having sex with a drunk girl.” Feminism is not understood by the masses. Feminism is needed because without people understanding what it is and what it stands for, we cannot have equality between the sexes.

“There’s a disparity not because female engineers are making less than male engineers at the same company with comparable experience,” the Republican National Committee said this month. “The disparity exists because a female social worker makes less than a male engineer.” But a majority of the pay gap between men and women actually comes from differences within occupations, not between them—and widens in the highest-paying ones like business, law and medicine. Take doctors and surgeons. Women earn 71 percent of men’s wages—after controlling for age, race, hours, and education. Women who are financial specialists make 66 percent of what men in the same occupation earn, and women who are lawyers and judges make 82 percent (Miller 2014). In the big picture, in 1979, women working full time earned 62 percent of what men earned; in 2012, women’s earnings were 81 percent of men’s (BLS 2014).

We still need feminism in 2016. As a society we do not understand what modern-day feminism is and what it stands for. Although women’s suffrage and equal rights are no longer the driving forces behind feminism, as they were in the first and second waves, it is still highly relevant today. Feminism is needed because females and males are not seen as equals on any platform, the over-sexualization of women’s bodies in mainstream media, and societies incorrect idea of what feminism really is and what it stands for. Feminism was needed both when it first started, before the first wave, and today, however for different reasons. Until women cease to be used as over-sexualized objects by the media, until all sexes are seen and treated as equals, feminism will remain relevant and needed.

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