WHY DO WE NEED FEMINISM

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Abstract

The revival of feminism in recent years has demonstrated that many women still remain profoundly disturbed by the nature of relationships between the sexes. The present paper aims to discuss several issues of feminism from the present times, while also keeping in focus the development of the phenomenon since it first appeared. Considering that the rights women demanded back then have been given to them (at least theoretically), the need for feminism nowadays might seem futile. By making references to only a few present events regarding women and their status in society, one will clearly see that feminism deals with serious problems that need to be dealt with as soon as possible.

Keywords: gender, feminism, patriarchy, inequality, rights.

Contemporary society is still characterized by sexual inequality and an ideology of masculine superiority. Masculinity is idealized or accorded preeminence, and thereby becomes more desirable. Institutions still perpetuate female inferiority ("the glass ceiling"), societies are still patriarchal, based on male supremacy. Sexism is still perpetuated although there are more and more psychoanalytic feminists and gender theorists that challenge the sex/gender dichotomy. How was this duality of sex established?

The revival of feminism in recent years has demonstrated that many women still remain profoundly disturbed by the nature of relationships between the sexes.

The main assumption is that sexual inequality is rooted within the social structure itself through the allocation by society of segregated roles for each sex. The very existence of activities and responsibilities maintain an imbalance of powerbetween the sexes. Therefore, it is important to concentrate on the women's movement-building responses to gender inequality but also on the women's 'place' in the society, in other words, on the 'place' and 'role' the society is willing to offer to their women. Does America, for instance, the most democratic country in the world still perceive the polarity of male and female spheres? And if this is the case, are these private and public spheres still segregated when they should be valued equally? Has the status of American women changed since the enactment of the Nineteenth Amendment (1920) that was seen as a major victory on the suffrage fight and a major stride in the struggle for sexual equality?

Today, undoubtedly, it seems reasonable to argue that the social world is the creation of both males and females, and that any full understanding of human society and any viable program for social change will have to incorporate the goals, thoughts and activities of the "second sex". Then why is woman still defined in the twenty-first century "the second sex", "the Other" (Simone de Beauvoir wrote "The Second Sex" a century ago, i.e. in 1949)? "The Other" is seen as different biologically and inferior and hence,

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never fully integrated. Women vs. men, teenagers vs. adults, disabled vs. abled, people of mixed ethnicity are such liminal categories. The historical or socio-cultural contexts place them in the mainstream or in the marginal, "the Other" category.

Everywhere, even in societies where women have achieved considerable social recognition and power, as is the case of America, they are still facing male domination, being excluded (or not considered trustworthy) from certain economic or political activities or responsibilities. Why do women, in American society as elsewhere accept a subordinate standing? How, and in what kinds of situations, do women exercise power? How do women help to shape, create, and change the private and public worlds in which they live? [2]

Blue or pink? Cars or Barbie dolls? The gender differences between men and women are pointed out to us from the very beginning of our lives. What we are taught from an early age concerning what we are supposed to like, how we are supposed to act and even what we are supposed to know, is information that leads to the belief that there is a certain way a boy has to act, and a certain way a girl has to act. You must know how to throw a punch, you must be passionate about sports and cars, and you must be independent. Moreover, the way you look should always look spotless, you must know how to cook and clean, you should be passionate about clothes and makeup, and you must avoid at all costs being an old maid. There are elements on the list that have to be ticked if you are a girl and others if you are a boy. This idea is present in each stage of our lives, the inequalities between sexes are constantly there, telling one what he or she is expected to say, think, or do.

If we are to look back in time, at the beginning of feminism, we can see several demands that women had: from the right to vote, the right to own property, the right to divorce, or the right to work, it is obvious that what they were asking for were basic civil rights. All these seem to have been fulfilled along with the evolution of society. Why is it then that nowadays we still see feminists battling for their rights and for their freedom?

A normal life for a woman back in the 1950's consisted of nothing but staying home and looking after her husband and kids. Never having been encouraged to pursue an education and a career, women back then knew from an early age that their only goal was to find a good man, marry and form a family. Generally, this caused serious consequences for a woman's mental and physical health. It is known that the lack of personal accomplishments and dedicating their entire lives to their families led to women being institutionalized with serious mental problems. To be more precise, it seems that most patients in mental institutions in the 1950s were housewives (Friedan 295).

Luckily, nowadays women have the opportunity to choose their own paths in life: whether it is to form a family or to have a career, or even both, today women have the freedom to lead the lives they want to. So from an overview, one can say that feminism has accomplished its purpose and should be a finished chapter in human history. Sadly,

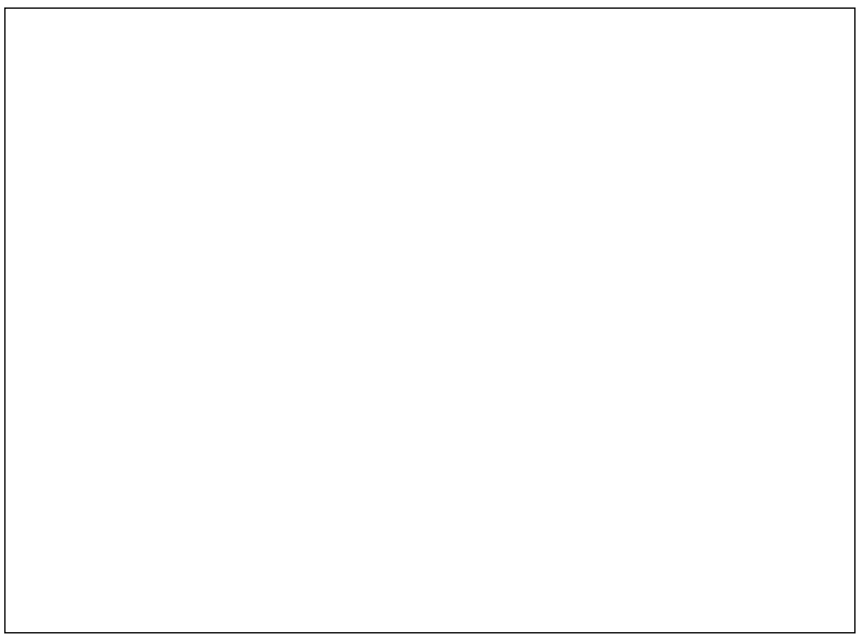
[2]Some elements from this article also appeared in "Gender and Individualism in American Culture" (Ștefanovici, 2009).

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women still face inequality in the workplace, in the household and in society. The present paper will list only several of the issues women are confronted with nowadays, issues that prove feminism is still needed in our society.

First of all, women fought for the fundamental right to be considered and treated as human beings, not objects. While in some aspects this has been accomplished, we now face the objectification of women in other domains as before. Women in comparison with men have always been portrayed as weak, emotional, timid and dependent. Simone de Beauvoir argued that women had been defined purely in relation to men and not as autonomous beings: "Man is defined as a human being and a woman as a female — whenever she behaves as a human being she is said to imitate the male." She is the creation of man, what man decides her to become; she is thus called 'the sex', a sexual object and not a human being. She is molded by him, he cannot be shaped by her. We face the inessential in front of the essential. "He is the Subject; he is the Absolute. She is the Other." (317)[3]

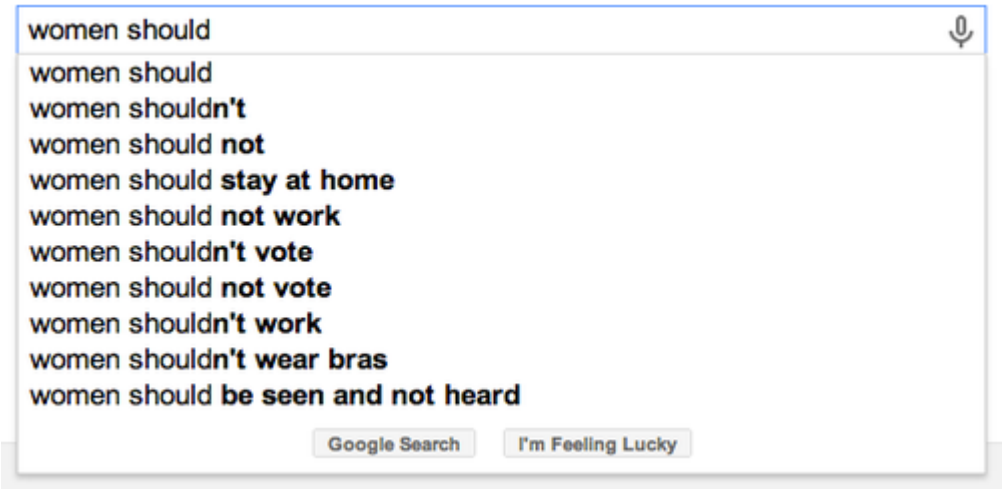
The media nowadays bluntly exploits women and this can be seen on every channel, on every newsstand and in every ad. It does not take much to see the striking difference between how men are perceived and how women are perceived. One of the most famous magazines, *The Rolling Stones*, offers us a great example. One does not even have to open it; the cover shows enough to make one notice the gender inequality: while all the men on the cover express power and confidence from their expressions (because, of course, their faces are the only parts of their bodies captured in the photo), then women, who are mostly half naked, are used on the cover because they are *sex sells*.



[3]*Feminist and Gender Theories,* https://www.sagepub.com/sites/default/files/upm-binaries/38628_7.pdf. (pp 312-380)

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Online media also gives an overview of the difference between men and women. Simply by typing 'women' into the Google search bar, one can get an insight of how much society has truly 'evolved':



It seems that the hope for women to be seen as human beings, and not as objects, has not yet been fulfilled. Actually, it seems quite obvious that society portrays women as sexual objects that should aim to please the man. What is most alarming about this is that this idea seems to be implemented in the minds of young boys, who at very early ages react in a negative way towards girls, expecting them to say yes to whatever they ask for. A very recent case in the U.S. shows a sixteen year old high school student who got stabbed by a fellow classmate because she refused his invitation to the prom. Incidents such as this one should alarm people that there is something very wrong with the information children receive about male and female relationships. Many schools in America have policies regarding girls' outfits, considering them dangerous for the eyes and minds of young boys. This leads to the problem of rape culture. As mentioned before, it seems that the idea that women are men's properties is still transmitted through the media. What is even more disturbing is the fact that in most cases, the blame is cast on the rape victim and not on the rapist. The Steubenville High School rape case from 2012 is a perfect example of how biased and manipulative the media can be. A girl was raped by two football players and during the trial, journalists and media people chose to mourn the loss of the boys' futures: "Incredibly difficult, even for an outsider like me, to watch what happened as these two young men that had such promising futures, star football players, very good students, literally watched as they believed their lives fell apart...when that sentence came down, [Ma'lik] collapsed in the arms of his attorney...He said to him, 'My life is over. No one is going to want me now.'"[4] Although the two rapists were sentenced to juvenile detention, the way in which this case had been handled shows how corrupt and biased the media is.

[4] http://gawker.com/5991003/cnn-reports-on-the-promising-future-of-the-steubenville-rapists-who-are-very-good-students

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The general idea concerning rape culture is that if the victim had been dressed in a certain way or had consumed certain substances, it was her fault. What is wrong with this idea is the fact that unless someone clearly consents to having sexual intercourse, their physical appearance, whether they are sober or not, whether they are generally sexually active or not, does not matter. There are so many cases in which the rapists are portrayed as victims that were seduced by a woman or a young girl, as if they have no control over themselves and they cannot say to when given the opportunity. Even more, in situations in which the victim is an underage girl, she is still seen as the one to blame because she put herself in that situation, when in reality, the rapist, who is over the age of 18, is supposed to be the one with enough common sense and enough clarity to be able to stop whatever is happening.

Women seen as men's property is still a valid concept and it can be spotted in the more recent 'friendzone' phenomenon. This is based on the idea that a man doing nice things for a girl who is not repaying him sexually is being 'friendzoned' by the said girl. Men seem to take real offence in this, but never stop and think about how ridiculous they are. Being nice and polite to a girl who later does not express her gratitude through sexual favors clearly shows that men's egos are the most fragile things in the universe.

Even in schools, in sexual education courses, the teachers spend hours telling girls what is appropriate to wear and what not, while not spending any time talking to boys about the concept of consent. And this is exactly why feminism is still needed.

Songs such as "Blurred Lines" by Robin Thicke, in which he clearly sings about how consent is a relative thing, are played on every radio station and on every music channel without any problems. We talk about equality but if we are to take the example of Kurt Cobain and Courtney Love; they both dealt with illegal substances and generally had the same lifestyle, but, while he is seen as a hero she is anything but. If we are to think what was Audrey Hepburn known for, most people will say her looks because they know nothing about how she spent her teenage years doing ballet to secretly raise money for the Dutch resistance against the Nazis or how after her film career she got involved in humanitarian work and became a goodwill ambassador for UNICEF, winning the presidential medal of freedom for her efforts. And this is why feminism is still needed.

Even nowadays, the kitchen is considered to be a woman's place, yet the overwhelming majority of restaurant chefs are male. Fashion and clothes and make up are considered to be girly hobbies and passions, yet the top earning designers and CEOs in the fashion industry are men. Even in the fields that are supposedly dominated by women, you see men leading the companies and cashing in the profits.

Gender marketing is a strategy used by major corporations in which the differences between men and women are being exploited for financial gains. Most products on the market that are divided for men and for women are actually the same thing, with differences only in appearance, texture and smell. For example, Dove created a special soap bar just for men because it seems that their original soap, the oval one with the golden dove on it, was too feminine and men refused to buy it. Now there is a squared

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shape soap bar, with a black and gray packaging, exclusively for men. This is just one example from the many thousands of products that exploit gender differences for their own benefit.

The issue of feminism is a very complex one, this paper only touching a few of its problems. Still, it is worth appreciating the fact that many women in the past fought for what women today have, but the road towards equality is a long and difficult one that will require perseverance and determination.

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