



Empowerment or Entitlement? The Dual Faces of Feminism

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ABSTRACT:

This research paper examines the nuanced dynamics surrounding feminist empowerment and entitlement, exploring the dual faces of feminism within contemporary movements. Beginning with an introduction to the fundamental principles of feminism, the paper traces the historical evolution of feminist thought and activism, highlighting key milestones and shifts in ideology. It delves into empowerment discourses within feminism, exploring how feminist movements have empowered women by challenging traditional gender roles, advocating for reproductive rights, promoting economic independence, and fostering leadership and self-confidence. However, the paper also addresses critiques of feminist empowerment, particularly regarding perceptions of entitlement and challenges to inclusivity within feminist spaces. It investigates gendered expectations and entitlement, analyzing societal norms and stereotypes that influence perceptions of empowerment and entitlement within feminist discourse. Additionally, the paper examines media representations of feminist empowerment, exploring how mainstream media shapes public perceptions of feminism and its objectives. It offers a different perspective on feminism, emphasizing the importance of intersectionality and inclusivity in feminist activism. Finally, the paper reflects on future directions for feminist empowerment, discussing strategies for promoting inclusive and intersectional empowerment within feminist movements and the role of empowerment in advancing gender justice and social change. Through a comprehensive analysis of these themes, this research paper contributes to a deeper understanding of the complexities surrounding feminist empowerment and entitlement, urging for a more inclusive, intersectional, and effective feminist movement.

INTRODUCTION

Women have real reasons to fear feminism, and we do young women a disservice if we tell them that feminism itself is safe. It is not.

“To stand opposed to your culture, to be critical of institutions, behaviors, discourses –when it is so clearly not in your immediate interest to do so –asks a lot of a young person, of any person.” (Hogeland 1994)

At its best, feminism's challenge to individualism and narrow notions of freedom is transformative, exhilarating, and empowering. Feminism is a social and political movement that demands equal rights and privileges for men and women. It began as a fight against the stereotypes women face in society, and has become one of the most popular discourses today calling for equality between men and women. Contrary to popular belief, feminism is not about male and female 'identities', but about equality between them. Feminists argue that women should be paid the same as men for the same work. Therefore, feminism means equal rights and opportunities for men and women. I chose feminism for my term paper because I feel it is important to really understand and make it clear on what feminism really means. For me, feminism isn't about asserting women's superiority over men. It's frustrating to see the motion boiled all the way down to superficial stuff like setting 'feminist' in an Instagram bio while engaging in actions that contradict its principles, such as body shaming, which completely goes in opposition to what feminism stands for. To me, actual feminism is all about fighting for equality among genders. It is to know that being a feminist is not only a label – it is a dedication to fairness and inclusivity. Feminism is for all of us, regardless of your background or gender. The world now is full of confusion and misunderstandings diverting us from the true meaning, and it is critical to live real to its core values of equality and justice.

CHAPTER 1: HISTORICAL EVOLUTION OF FEMINISM

The belief in women's equality in politics, the economy, and culture is known as feminism, and it dates back to the oldest periods of human civilization. Generally speaking, feminism can be divided into three waves: first wave, which focused on voting rights and property rights; second wave, which prioritized equality and opposition to discrimination; and third wave, which emerged in the 1990s as a reaction against the second wave's alleged preference for white, heterosexual women. Feminism has an extensive and fascinating history that spans from Ancient Greece to the battle for women's suffrage, women's marches, and the #MeToo movement.



Despite not becoming widely used until the 1970s, the terms "feminism" and "feminist" were already widely used in popular culture; for example, Katherine Hepburn refers to the "feminist movement" in the 1942 movie *Woman of the Year*. Three waves can be distinguished in the history of feminism, according to the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries saw the first feminist wave, which was followed by the 1960s and 1970s and the 1990s to the present. These feminist movements gave rise to feminist philosophy. It can be seen in many academic fields, including feminist literary criticism, feminist history, and feminist geography.

The origins of feminism date back 24 centuries, to Plato's arguments for women's political and social equality. He claimed that women should be members of the highest class, able to rule and defend their own interests. Another instance is from the late 7th or early 8th century, when Vishnu wedded Andal, a well-known female Tamil saint writer. Some saw her heavenly act as a feminist gesture because it gave her autonomy and spared her from the typical responsibilities of a bride. For a significant portion of their existence, middle-class white women from Western Europe and North America led the majority of these movements. But once Sojourner Truth addressed American feminists in 1851, women of different races soon became involved. The Civil Rights Movement in the United States and the end of European colonialism in Africa, the Caribbean, and other regions of Latin America and Southeast Asia in the 1960s contributed to the acceleration of this trend.

First wave

The term "first-wave feminism" describes a protracted period of feminist activism in the United States and the United Kingdom in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Initially, its main goals were to oppose chattel marriage and the ownership of married women (and their children) by their husbands, as well as to advance women's equal contract and property rights. But towards the end of the 1800s, the main goal of activism was to acquire political power, especially for women's suffrage. Nonetheless, during this period, feminists like Margaret Sanger and Voltairine de Cleyre continued to actively advocate for women's economic, sexual, and reproductive rights. Florence Nightingale introduced female nurses into the military in 1854.

Second wave

Second-wave feminism refers to a phase of feminist action that combined political and cultural themes from the early 1960s and the late 1980s. Second-wave feminists concentrated on concerns related to cultural equality, like eliminating prejudice, while the first wave of feminists concentrated on suffrage. During this period, Chicago women who were disillusioned with the New Left published "Voice of Women's Liberation Movement" in 1968, which in turn paved the way for the establishment of the Chicago Women's Liberation Union in 1969. Even though it was made up, bra burning came to be connected to this movement. As a result of the liberation movement, more women are pursuing higher education, academic departments and courses focused on women's studies were established, and feminist ideas were introduced into disciplines including politics, sociology, history, and literature. This change in interests in education called into question the status quo, its norms, and its authorities. According to academic Imelda Whelehan, the second wave of feminism was a carryover from the first wave that included the suffragettes in the USA and the UK. From that point on, second-wave feminism has persisted and coexists with third-wave feminism. When comparing the first and second waves of feminism, academic Estelle Freedman notes that the first was primarily concerned with rights like the ability to vote, while the latter wave was more interested in addressing other equality-related concerns like eliminating discrimination.

"The Personal is Political" is a statement that was coined by feminist activist and novelist Carol Hanisch and has come to represent the second wave. Second-wave feminists urged women to recognise how thoroughly politicized some areas of their personal life were and believed that women's cultural and political disparities were intimately intertwined.

Third wave

The efforts and actions of the second wave, which young women saw as failing, gave rise to the last wave in the late 1980s. Additionally, it questioned the concept of the second wave of feminism, which placed an excessive emphasis on the role of white, upper-middle-class women. The structural interpretation of gender and sexuality was the primary focus of this period. It sparked discussions between feminists and people who thought there was no gender difference and that gender roles are a product of our social evolution. A significant portion of the ideology of the third wave is based on a post-structuralist understanding of gender and sexuality. Third-wave feminists frequently concentrate on "micro-politics" and question the second wave's view of what is and is not beneficial for women. The mid-1980s saw the beginning of the third wave. Leaders of the second wave of feminist

movements, including Maxine Hong Kingston, Gloria Anzaldua, bell hooks, Chela Sandoval, Cherrie Moraga, Audre Lorde, and many other black feminists, attempted to negotiate a place within feminist theory for the examination of subjectivities related to race. Internal arguments between different feminists—like psychologist Carol Gilligan, who maintains that there are significant differences between the sexes—and those who maintain that there are no inborn distinctions between the sexes are another feature of third-wave feminism.

Post Feminism

A variety of perspectives responding to feminism are referred to as post-feminism. Post-feminists are critical of third wave feminist aims but not "anti-feminists," believing that women have attained second wave goals. The phrase was originally applied to a reaction against second-wave feminism in the 1980s. It currently serves as a term for a broad spectrum of theories that dispute the concepts of the second wave and adopt critical stances towards earlier feminist discourses. According to certain post-feminists, feminism is obsolete in today's world. According to Amelia Jones, post-feminist writings from the 1980s and 1990s critiqued second-wave feminism by generalizing about it and portraying it as a single, monolithic movement.

Is there a fourth wave as well? Yes, in my opinion! Although it hasn't been stated explicitly, the current developments in the feminist movement can be referred to as the fourth wave of feminism. It's a technologically connected wave that flawlessly blends politics, psychology, and spirituality. These days, feminism discusses a wide range of topics, including acceptance of sex work, transgender rights, plus-size fashion, post-abortion gatherings, and male feminism. These days, social media is rife

with petitions addressing a wide range of issues pertaining to both male and female culture. "To Shave or Not to Shave" also demonstrates how the younger female age is coming to terms with body hair. These are all feminist actions.

Along the way, we are introduced to a number of significant personalities, including the poet Audre Lorde, who exposed the racial ignorance of mainstream feminism in the 1970s and 1980s, Flora Tristan, who made the connection between the oppression of women and the proletariat prior to Marx and Engels writing a letter, and Olympe de Gouges, who wrote the "Declaration of the Rights of Woman and the Female Citizen" and was executed by Robespierre. When black men received the right to vote before women, we were taught about bourgeois and working-class issues as well as the enraged racism of certain American feminists. God appears to us as an elderly man with a full beard who emerges from a cloud (and once, as a woman whose hair was in curlers). And we discover the narrative of a history that is still being created as of right now.



CHAPTER 2: EMPOWERMENT DISCOURSES IN FEMINISM

Feminist discourse focuses on empowerment, the central goal of the movement to liberate women from systems of oppression, promote their autonomy, agency and self-determination. This article explores the concept of empowerment in the feminism, where feminism questions gender norms, supports reproductive rights, promotes economic independence, leadership confidence and has looked at the ways in which progress has empowered women.



Feminism has generally tended to challenge and subvert traditional gender roles that relegate women to subordinate positions in society. Traditional gender roles refer to expectations and behaviors based on biological sex, which perpetuates stereotypes that limit women's rights and choices. Feminism has criticized these activities as limiting women's freedom and perpetuating inequality. Feminist activism and advocacy seeks to challenge traditional gender roles by promoting gender equality and dismantling discriminatory practices. Through awareness raising groups, protests and policy advocacy, feminists have worked to challenge societal norms that establish rigid gender roles and expectations. While challenging and advocating stereotypes, gender-neutral roles and opportunities.

Reproductive rights have been a cornerstone of feminism, representing the freedom of women to make decisions about their physical, sexual and reproductive health. Historically, patriarchal institutions and cultural norms violated contraception, pregnancy abortion and reproductive health care limitations often restrict women's reproductive options. Feminism plays an important role in advocating for reproductive rights, including safe and legal abortion, and access to comprehensive sex education. While challenging laws and policies limited, gynecologists have empowered women to take control of their reproductive destinies, make appropriate choices about their bodies, and pursue subsequent reproductive health and well-being.

Economic independence is another important aspect of women's empowerment, representing women's ability to achieve economic independence and stability. Historically, women were economically dependent on men due to lack of education, employment opportunities, and income. This dependency perpetuated gender inequality and reinforced the subordination of women in society. Feminism worked to promote women's economic independence through equal pay, equal workplaces, and access to education and training by challenging discriminatory practices and policies such as affirmative action, family-friendly workplace policies and the ability to be held at the recommended. Increased.

Leadership and confidence are important components of women's empowerment, enabling women to assert themselves, advocate for their rights, and effect social change. Historically, women have been excluded from positions of leadership and power, and relegated to activism at low levels in the public and private sectors. This exclusion undermined women's self-confidence and perpetuated inequalities of power and influence. Feminism has fostered leadership and confidence in women by providing opportunities for skills development, mentorship and networking. Through initiatives such as women's leadership programs, women's organizations, and community activism, feminism has empowered women to step into leadership roles and assert their voices in decision-making processes. Global feminist movements that emphasized bridging the personal and political spheres and challenging "accepted categorizations that were developed by disciplines that are basically dominated by men" (sociology, for example) gave rise to feminist theory. (Lengemann & Neibrugge-Brantley, 1988, as mentioned in Sadan, p. 138) "The goal is to create alternative concepts which can help to explain the world as it appears to its invisible and disadvantaged subordinate subjects." Payal Shah (2011) provides a succinct overview of some of the feminist literature (Young 1988; Molyneux 1985) that emerged in the 1980s to define empowerment and the empowerment approach to development.

"...the notion of empowerment attempts to balance a short term objective of improving the quality of life for females with the long term goal of challenging patriarchal and political-economic inequality, resulting in large-scale social transformation."

Power is defined by Moser (1989) as "the right to determine choices in life and to influence the direction of change through the ability to gain control over crucial material and nonmaterial resources." This definition is consistent with the empowerment approach to development that emerged from "emergent feminist writings and grass-roots organization experience of Third World women".

Stated differently, this notion of power relates to a person's capacity for decision-making (Kabeer 2001). Therefore, empowerment refers to the methods by which someone who has been denied the capacity (and authority) to make decisions gains that capacity (and power) (Kabeer 2001).

Although there is a lot of ambiguity in the scholarship on human development, it is still helpful to look at the various meanings that are attached to the term "empowerment," both explicit and implicit, in order to try and draw conclusions about how meaning can and has influenced both the process and the goal of empowerment. It is true that authors who use terms like "women's empowerment," "gender equity," or "female autonomy" are not always referring to the same concepts.

More precisely, we can consider the usefulness of procedures that might generate, encourage, or permit empowerment among diverse groups as well as comprehend and critique policies and initiatives that aim to empower people. We can begin by examining the definition of empowerment in various discourses and literatures related to human development.

The phrase "empowerment" first appeared in the realm of international development, and it is credited to the feminist movement in the Global South. The 1987 release of *Development, Crises and Alternative Visions: Third World Women's Perspectives* (Sen and Grown 1987) marked a watershed in the concept's history. This book is the product of the collective reflection of feminist scholars, activists, and political figures from the Global South who came together to form the Bangalore-based network known as DAWN (Development Alternatives with Women for a New Era). It presents general guidelines for a fresh perspective on women's roles in development. Soon, this strategy would be known as the "empowerment approach" (Moser 1989).

Conclusion

My research paper "Empowerment or Entitlement? The Dual Faces of Feminism" delves into the complexities surrounding feminist movements, shedding light on empowering and problematic aspects of women's activism. Through qualitative research and theories on critical analysis, the research reveals valuable insights.

A key finding of the study was the importance of embracing diversity and inclusiveness in feminist movements. Acknowledging the intersecting experiences of individuals across race, class, sexuality, and other identities promotes solidarity and reinforces the effectiveness of feminism. Giving priority to diversity and inclusion provides feminists can create just and inclusive spaces to promote empowerment.

However, the study also revealed challenges related to excluded opportunities in feminist spaces. Paradigms of elitism, gatekeeping, and priorities undermine the movement's goal of inclusion and advocacy, necessitating the need to address these issues that inhibit power allowing marginalized communities to promote an inclusive and just women's movement. Focusing on communication in feminist activism has emerged as an important way to understand and address the interlocking pressures faced by individuals and to prioritize the voices and experiences of marginalized communities, feminists can work toward far-reaching and meaningful social change to advance gender justice and equality for all. Strategies to encourage positive change among women's groups include providing open dialogue, testing hierarchy, prioritizing diversity and representation, and focusing on marginalized communities' voices by actively working to break down oppressive structures and practices to create a more empowering and inclusive movement.

Feminism is an ongoing journey of learning, evolution, and change. Embracing humility, openness to expression, and a commitment to ongoing education and reflection are essential to navigating the complexities of power and domination inherent in feminism.

In conclusion, the paper reveals two faces of feminists and emphasizes the importance of embracing diversity, confronting authority, focusing on networking, promoting accountability, and committing to continuous learning and advances have been made in the field of feminism. By addressing these complex issues with honesty, humility, and flexibility, feminists can work to create a more just, equitable, and inclusive world.

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