



Gender Inequality Hinders Feminism from Being Thoroughly Achieved

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Abstract: Feminism has promoted for decades of years, which aims to dismantle gender inequality in the society. However, seen from the current social conditions, gender inequality has always been a social problem that is difficult to address. This essay believes that gender inequality is caused by different social expectations on men and women. Only when the society treat men and women in the same way, can feminism truly achieve its ultimate goal.

Keywords: feminism, gender inequality, social expectations

1. Introduction

Feminism has long been a popular topic that is discussed by the public. The trend of feminism can be first seen in the mid-1800s - which they did not realize or categorize it as feminism - the suffrage movement. Then more movements followed up afterwards, such as women's liberation movement in the late 1960s and 1970s; Black feminism in the mid 1900s; The feminist sex war in the late 1970s; Riot Grrrls in the early 1990s. However, nowadays, more ideals that have been expressed have skewed away from the core idea that feminism is advocating for. Ideals that pictured a woman as independent and focused on her careers, preferably a "boss". By expressing the ideal of a "boss-woman", it also implicitly criticize housewives. Thus, this arouse many opposition and question against the movement. The core idea that have been advocating is "the belief in social, economic, and political quality of the sexes" (Brunell & Burkett, 2024). Thus, in simpler language, feminism is the advocacy for gender equality, aimed at dismantling gender inequality and the structures that upholds it, such as rigid social expectations, gender-inequalities in workplaces, and education access. However, gender inequality has never been removed. Thus, this essay argues that feminism has not yet realized due to ever-present gender inequality.

2. Gender Inequality

Different social expectations on men and women are the rooted reason for gender inequality. In relative to men, women has been always requiring to shoulder more but acquire less at home and work. In society, women have been expected to be working while taking care of the whole family, especially children; yet no-one asked where is the husband (Cerrato & Cifre, 2018). Social expectations for women have a lot of requirements and they change rapidly. Dated back to the end of World war II, "The Feminine Mystique" explains that in post-World War II United States life, women were encouraged to be wives, mothers, and housewives — and only wives, mothers, and housewives (Friedan, 2013). Then, during the Cold War women are requested by the society by their patriotic duty to the society on their positive influence on their children by teaching and guiding them and so on. Till nowadays, women are required to be able to take care of the family and work, in simpler terms, combining career and family.

However, ironically, women's unemployment rate is higher than men, due to a lack of suitable job opportunities and lack of access to existing opportunities (Lahtinen, Sirniö & Martikainen, 2020; Tur-Prats, 2021). Also, according to the U.S Department of Laborer, glaring gap in which women's median annual earning equates to only 78% of men's median annual earnings (The World Economic Forum, 2023). The International Labour Organization (ILO) estimates that "out of every five jobs created for women, four are within the informal economy, whereas for men, the ratio is two out of every three jobs" (The World Economic Forum, 2023). Informal work is characterized as a lack of legal protections, social security, and decent working conditions, and poses numerous challenges for women's economic and social well-being. This ties back to the significant observation made by Claudia Goldin, the Nobel prize winner in economy in 2023, that "female participation in the labour market did not exhibit an upward trend over the entire period, bur rather a U-shaped curve" (Goldin, 2024). In other words, economic growth ensuing in varied period did not translate to reducing gender difference in labor market. This is one of the generalized inequality women is facing in workplaces, the inequality of opportunities and limited choices given to them.

The major challenges towards women, according to Goldin, is the fixed ideas like the ones expressed by countless school districts that "once a woman married, she would have to resign" or the nepotism rules that "married women are

prohibited to work at universities or in federal or state government if their spouse was employed there”. The bigger ones is the once that were not explicitly stated. Nonetheless, Goldin also described an interesting phenomena she observed in the distribution of greedy job and flexible job between sexes. Greedy work, according to Goldin (2021), refers to work where employees work long and unpredictable hours in exchange for extremely high hourly wages. This requires employees to have extremely high professional commitment, such as “working at any time and place” and “being on call”. In a world that is full of “greedy work”, gender equality in the family is costly.

Goldin observed that in workforce women generally takes the flexible job and man who takes the greedy job, which she reflects as “they throw gender equality under the bus”. This is because in traditional concepts, family labor and raising children are regarded as women's natural duties, and working hard to earn money to support the family becomes the responsibility of men. Under the action of such long-term social expectations, married men and women naturally sorted themselves into positions like this. Thus, in longer term, this sorting contributes to the gender pay gap(UBS). However, the distribution of flexible and greedy jobs between sexes also ties back to the rigid social expectations that is asking from women, which is combination of their career and family. For example, when a child is sick; school nurse called; need to attend to a parent-teacher conference, it is usually mother who undertakes these tasks, but seldom the father. Thus, under circumstances like those, women will unavoidably shifted to a firm with less demanding hours or even leave the workforce (Harvard Business Review). Goldin has also observes that “this earning difference between men and women in the same occupation, largely arises with the birth of the first child”(Muth, 2023).

The continuous development of modern society has led to the integration of male and female professional roles. Goldin (2014) points out that the integration of male and female roles means that the gap between male and female participation in the labor market, higher education, working hours and labor remuneration has narrowed. However, within the same profession, greedy work still discriminates against women. If this discrimination persists, the energy women put into participating in the labor market will not be rewarded to the same degree. Based on this, Goldin gives her suggestion on a solution to the gender gap pay, namely, when economic inequality would start to miraculously decrease, which sadly will not happen soon, then would change aspects of the greedy works (Gavett, 2021). In particular, the economic recession caused by COVID-19 has had a greater impact on women's employment and labor force participation than men, because the epidemic has further increased women's family care work, and declined the female labor participation rate because of the recession of the service industry (Goldin, 2022). Obviously, gender inequality will never disappear but may upswing unless different social expectations on men and women can be removed thoroughly. Under this circumstance, feminism cannot achieve its purpose of removing gender inequalities in society.

3. Conclusion

Overall, feminism cannot be thoroughly achieved due to ever-present gender inequality. Different social expectations on men and women are the rooted reason for gender inequality. This has not been changed too much. Compared with men, women has been always requiring to shoulder more but acquire less at home and work. As a result, gender inequality still exists in the society. As a result, feminism still fails to achieve its purpose of removing gender inequalities in society.

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