



## **THE NEGATIVE IMPACTS OF MODERN FEMINISM**

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Feminism, a multifaceted socio-political movement, has long been a driving force in advocating for gender equality and dismantling oppressive structures. Its roots extend deep into history, but it has evolved through different waves, each characterized by the unique challenges faced by women in their eras. The various waves of feminism have brought the community together and changed U.S. society as they worked together to address gender inequality. Though it is a movement that aims for unity, modern feminism has not reached that point yet. Despite its noble intentions, contemporary feminism, characterized by its radical ideologies and divisive opinions, is unintentionally contributing to societal discord and gender polarization, ultimately dividing U.S. society.

### **The First Three Feminist Waves**

Feminism is divided into four primary waves that emerged from different timelines and highlighted issues within U.S. society. The first wave focused on legal women's rights and suffrage; the second wave acknowledged reproduction rights and workplace equality; the third wave, a correction to the second wave, focused mainly on white and straight women.

The first wave of feminism emerged in the late 19th to early 20th centuries. This wave of feminism occurred during an environment of urban industrialism and liberal, socialist politics. It relates to the first women's rights convention in Seneca Falls in 1848. Here, women's rights activists Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Lucretia Mott drafted the basis of the movement and its ideology, the Declaration of Sentiments. "The Declaration of Sentiments was the Seneca Falls Convention's manifesto that described women's grievances and demands. Written primarily by Elizabeth Cady Stanton, it distilled the importance of the Seneca Falls Convention: for women to fight for their constitutionally guaranteed right to equality as U.S. citizens' " (History.com, 2024). The document begins with 19 "abuses and usurpations" that list the laws that put women under oppression by men. It emphasizes that women were under unwanted and unfair control from the government, which was male-led. After 11 listed solutions, the declaration "demanded women be regarded as men's equals." (History.com, 2024)

The second wave of feminism, which occurred in the 1960s and 1980s, focused on reproductive rights, workplace equality, and gender-based discrimination. Significant achievements during this wave include the establishment of the Equal Pay Act, legalized abortion, and more extensive awareness of women's suppression. The accomplishments of the first wave made it possible for the second to conduct such significant changes.

The third wave of feminism in the 1990s addressed the limitations and critiques of the second wave. It emphasized diversity and intersectionality and brought awareness to the different forms of oppression based on race, sexuality, and class. Unlike the previous waves, this third wave presented the feminists' backlash against the privilege of white and straight females.

### Wave Four: Modern Feminism

Protests and the use of social media characterize the fourth wave of modern feminism. It began in December 2012 when a young woman in India was gang raped, which sparked protests and international attention. This wave is often titled “cyber-feminism” because of its effective use of social media to address issues like campus sexual assault, transgender rights, slut-shaming, and online misogyny and to promote security among young women worldwide.

Many social media platforms, including apps like “Instagram” and “Facebook,” played a significant role in the spread of the fourth wave. One example is the #Metoo movement. “The *#Metoo movement* was founded in 2006 by Tarana Burke to support survivors of sexual violence, particularly young women of color from low-wealth communities, to find pathways to healing” (globalfundforwomen.org, 2021, p.1). Appreciating the considerable popularity of social media, actress Alyssa Milano used social media platforms to share her experiences of sexual assault and abuse using the phrase “Me Too.” She encouraged others to post their experiences, creating a trend with the hashtag #MeToo. The media widely spread these messages, which shed light on the premise of feminism.

Social media has helped spread feminism and attracted many diverse opinions and interpretations. Feminist language and activism have been appropriated and exploited by various media for their purposes, often without a genuine commitment to advancing feminist ideals. This phenomenon raises questions about authenticity, sincerity, and the commodification of social justice movements. In recent years, there has been an increase in films representing the feminist rhetoric representing women in movies and giving them prominent character roles. Recent films such as *Wonder Woman* (2017) and *Barbie* (2023) featured a strong female lead. *Barbie* was controversial as it conveyed an “anti-male” message (The Economic Times, 2024). The movie

portrayed a world of Barbies leading, and the Kens were valued as objects. “*Barbie* has sparked considerable cultural debates about patriarchy, feminism, consumerism, and more” (Hay, 2023, p.1).

### **Radical Ideologies in Modern Feminism**

The umbrella of different goals and concepts within the feminist movement has been controversial, as many people view them as “radical” ideologies. *Radical ideologies* are systems of ideas and beliefs, especially one that forms the basis of an economic or political theory and policy that advocates for a significant, fundamental, and complete change. In modern feminism, there has been a group of feminists that have a set of radical ideologies focusing on changing the system of society.

Radical feminism is a philosophy emphasizing the patriarchal roots of inequality between men and women, or, more specifically, the social domination of women by men. Radical feminism views patriarchy as dividing societal rights, privileges, and power primarily along the lines of sex and, as a result, oppressing women and privileging men. (Lewis, 2020)

While radical ideologies within modern feminism aim for a more robust, balanced power structure and advance social justice, they have also created a stir in the feminist community. Radical feminist perspectives sometimes create exclusionary practices and beliefs that undermine intersectional solidarity.

Radical feminism has also sometimes been criticized for its lack of intersectionality, seeing women as a homogeneous group, collectively oppressed by men, without taking into account the different experiences of oppression suffered by racialized women, women with disabilities, women in prison, migrant women, etc. (Coattais, p.10)

This results in divisions within the feminist movement and hinders collective efforts to aim for gender equality further.

The modern feminist movement has taught young women to disregard other valued priorities and instead focus on getting promotions and salary increases. “This movement has pressured women into feeling as though they are not doing enough if they choose motherhood, which is the primary role of a married woman with kids, over a career” (Viewpoint, 2023. p.1).

Many mothers who are part of the movement feel intense oppression towards raising their children, especially sons, in a particular way that discriminates against them. Mothers in the movement disagree with this new form of feminism and have spoken out about this issue. In a recent interview with *Allure*, Shakira, a Colombian singer and songwriter, stated that her sons hated the movie *Barbie* (2023).

They felt that it was emasculating. Moreover, I agree, to a certain extent. I’m raising two boys. I want ’em to feel powerful too [while] respecting women. I like pop culture when it attempts to empower women without robbing men of their possibility to be men also to protect and provide. I believe in giving women all the tools and the trust that we can do it all without losing our essence and femininity. I think that men have a purpose in society, and women also have another purpose. We complement each other, and that complement should not be lost (Vanity Fair, 2024, p.1).

Not only are the perspectives of these radical feminists debatable, but the tactics, such as aggressive confrontations or extreme forms of protest, further create arguments in the community. Ignoring societal norms and taboos, public order, and safety, protests such as topless protests have brought much attention to the movement, but they conveyed a very different idea. “Naked protests disrupt societal expectations and challenge deeply ingrained patriarchal norms

regarding female bodies and their visibility” (Mandana, 2023, p.1). These topless protests or naked protests are a form of reclaiming bodily autonomy and challenging societal norms around women’s bodies and sexuality. “They have been key to reclaiming agency and autonomy over the female body by exposing it in its most vulnerable and natural state” (Mandana, 2023. p.1). These protests aim to highlight double standards and discrimination against women’s bodies while asserting the right to self-expression. Still, many viewed this as disrespectful and too much. “The political message is often lost, indeed undermined, by the same widespread salacious interest in the naked female body that garners so much media coverage” (University of Cambridge, 2013. p. 1). Going topless as a woman sparked many adverse reactions from the audience, and that is how it created more discord within the community, as some people disagreed with the nature of the protest. “‘I believe in protest, too, but you can’t take your shirt off and walk around in front of other people’s children,’ said resident David Cort, who is helping head up the recall effort against Mayor Bob Stephens” (Bradley, 2015, p.1). Some were encouraged to engage in more of these types of protests.

### **Cyber-Feminism Affects Gender Polarization and Societal Discord**

As discussed, the fourth wave of feminism, cyber-feminism, uses digital media extensively, which can be a double-edged sword. On the one hand, digital media platforms can create a space for feminist activism, organizing, and expression, allowing small voices to be heard and spreading awareness for gender equality. However, cyber-feminism can also contribute to gender polarization and societal discord. “The polarity of gender structures the division of labor into masculine and feminine” (Rockwell, 2020. p.1). *Gender polarization* refers to the strict division of society, roles, behaviors, and attributes into specific categories based on gender. Feminism and gender polarization go hand in hand as they create a motive for the

movement. “Feminist theory now aims to interrogate inequalities and inequities along the intersectional lines of ability, class, gender, race, sex, and sexuality, and feminists seek to effect change in areas where these intersectionalities create power inequity” (eku.edu, p.1).

Although the feminist community may use digital platforms to spread awareness of the movement, it also has the potential to reinforce gender polarization from online harassment. The online harassment of the movement can serve to silence feminist voices, bring out misogynistic attitudes, and strengthen traditional power dynamics.

As women are often among the starkest critics of government’s corruption, attacks against women in politics are often a way to silence opposition and maintain undisputed power. The dismantling of media independence, freedom and pluralism perpetuated by Orbán’s [Prime Minister Viktor Orbán of Hungary] ruling party and the establishment of a media conglomerate for the purposes of spreading pro-government propaganda are clear examples of this strategy. (Meco & Hesterman, 2021, p.1)

Online harassment may also reproduce gender stereotypes and exclusionary practices within digital spaces, limiting opportunities for gender diversity and inclusivity. For example, posts that advocate for gender equality may be targeted with misogynistic language and threats of sexual violence. At the same time, men could also be targets as they may be questioned about their masculinity, reinforcing the concept of gender norms. “Yet social media can also potentially undermine the movement through online harassment and disinformation, constant self-comparisons and body image issues driven by societal beauty standards, and weakened critical thinking” (Kamei, 2022, p. 1). The spread of misinformation and persuasive rhetoric on digital media platforms can divide society along gender lines and discord among different

groups. Since digital media is a space where everyone can share their opinions on what they want, it can stir up many disagreements.

Social media platforms can create discord in the online aspect of society and bring attention to some real-life vital issues that may cause discord in the movement. One of the main issues that cyberfeminism brought up that caused societal discord was the idea of intersectionality. First enunciated by Kimberlé Crenshaw in late 1989 (unwomen.org, 2020), “The concept of *intersectionality* describes how systems of inequality based on gender, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, gender identity, disability, class and other forms of discrimination ‘intersect’ to create unique dynamics and effects” (CIJ.com, p.1). Feminism works to improve the norms of this concept, but not all feminists agree with it. Some in the feminist movement might not be thoroughly familiar with intersectionality. Without a clear understanding of this concept and how it affects the feminist movement, one may fail to recognize the importance of this issue, creating the possibility of future discord. Some individuals may also be resistant to change. Intersectionality challenges the inner framework of the original feminist ideology. People who are resistant to change or invested in maintaining the status quo within the feminist movement may be unwilling to embrace this concept, leading them to disagree with the rest of the feminist movement, viewing it as disruptive or unnecessary.

Not only does cyberfeminism contribute to intersectionality, but it also brings arguments along the view of the approach of gender and sexuality. Feminism has led the public eye toward the many traditional gender norms, addressing the corrupt and unfair structure behind them, but it has sparked quite a debate in the movement. There have been many debates within social media platforms about the new ideas and beliefs feminists are bringing in with gender and



sexuality. By expanding the definition of womanhood or manhood, feminism disrupts the status quo and is prone to more division in society.

### **Conclusion**

While feminism has historically been a powerful force for advocating gender equality and challenging oppressive structures, the evolution of modern feminism has brought about unintended negative impacts. Feminism shines a bright light on the patriarchal structures that form the concept and norms behind the movement. Still, it also brings out radical ideologies that divide the movement and further create more issues within the movement. The root of the radical ideologies comes from the resolution that gender equality can be gained from the elimination of all male supremacy, which is highly influenced by digital media. Social media platforms are areas where the movement can be exploited but also criticized, creating disputes about topics like intersectionality and the way society approaches gender and sexuality due to feminism.

Future research should focus more on understanding what aspects of the movement impact societal dynamics and explore strategies to foster greater unity and collaboration within the movement. Additionally, understanding the intersections among social justice movements, such as LGBTQ+ rights, racial rights, or economic rights, could provide valuable insights into building coalitions and advancing collective goals. Modern feminism has undoubtedly made significant changes in advancing gender equality and challenging particular structures, and it is also crucial to acknowledge that it negatively impacts our society. Feminism should not be about what an individual thinks or wants to achieve. It is a community that comes together to achieve the same goal and lift each other for the better.

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