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An Analysis of the State of Feminism in the United States Feminism in theUK Today

Haedar Akib, Anwari Masatip

Abstract: *Feminism is the attempt to reduce or eliminate patriarchy, or male rule by birthright. While this struggle for gender equality may seem straightforward, there are different "strains" of feminism that advocate different approaches to achievingfeminist goals. The prevailing literature surrounding the state of modern feminism is vast —- often varying by the author's political values, age relative to the early women's rights movements, and beliefs about whether or not sex-based equality has been achieved. This paper, developed primarily from scholarly literature about modern feminism, will integrate findings from interviews with six women (three who are current students at Gettysburg College and three who are recent college graduates in the workforce) about their perceptions of feminism in orderto introduce a theory of Postfeminist Dualism that aims to describe the state of feminism today. Postfeminist Dualism posits that there exists a divide between women who work intersectionally to reclaim the liberatory nature of traditional feminism and those who use the principles of feminism to justify personal advancement.*

Keywords feminism, postfeminism, intersectionality, feminist

theory, neoliberal feminism.

Introduction

While problematic for its exclusion of women of color's efforts in the mainstream feminist dialogue and its failure to acknowledge the entire scope of feminist history, the feminist wave metaphor provides an adequate foundation of the progress of movements for women's equality in United States' history. Feminist scholars tend to agree that the first wave achieved suffrage for women, the second wave focused on social, economic, and cultural equality, and the third wave

ecame a movement for sexual liberation and individual strides toward equality; however, there is no consensus as to whether or not American society is currently situated in a fourth wave, a state of post-feminism, or dominated by neoliberal feminist ideals. Woman 1, a student at Gettysburg College who is pursuing a minor in Women's, Gender, and Sexuality Studies, has been educated extensively about the wave metaphor. She Balanda 2 believes feminism has moved past the wave model to focus specifically on contemporary issues. In her opinion, the current feminist agenda should encourage women to run for elected offices in the attempt to achieve an equal number of men and women in government, work to eliminate the gender wage

gap especially for women of color, and validate women's experiences of sexual harassment and assault. Historically speaking, each wave has focused on a singular goal, and Woman 1 believes that modern feminism must acknowledge the multitude of hurdles that women face and how these challenges can differ based on race, class, gender, sexuality, and ability. Additionally, the wave metaphor implies a strict time frame for surges of feminist activism to this point. Woman 1 suggests that it is impractical to define the struggle for equality as something with a start and end point, as it is an ongoing endeavor to address a variety of issues. Feminist scholar Nancy Hewitt has transformed the wave metaphor to expand on its usefulness by transitioning from oceanic waves to radio waves. The radio wave model allows for a more detailed examination of all varieties of feminist action over time. Hewitt explains, "Radio waves allow us to think about movements in terms of different lengths and frequencies that occur simultaneously; movements that grow louder or fade out, reach vast audiences across oceans or only a few listeners in a local area…" (Hewitt 2012, 668). While Hewitt recognizes the prominence of the oceanic wave metaphor, she prefers the intricacies that the radio wave metaphor can insert into dominant feminist dialogue. Hewitt's updated analysis of the usefulness of

eminist waves indicates a growing trend among those educated in feminist theoryto reject the traditional wave model.

Postfeminism, the idea that the goals of feminism have been achieved and the movement is no longer needed, is a concept that has been visible in both academic and media narratives. In a chapter entitled "'Postfeminism' or 'ghost feminism'" from their book Feminism and Popular Culture: Investigating the Postfeminist Mystique, Rebecca Munford and Melanie Waters argue that feminism is not completely "dead," but it does not manifest in the same way as it has previously (Munford and Waters 2014, 18). Munford and Waters cite the 1998 cover of Timethat read "Is Feminism Dead?" and Phyllis Chesler's 2005 book The Death of Feminism as prominent examples characterizing the decline of feminist activism. In their analysis, Munford and Waters note a decline in "victim feminism," or women who shape their identity through a lens of powerlessness. They reference the postfeminist theory of Denfeld and Wolf, who comment that the "gains forgedby previous generations of women have so completely pervaded all tiers of our social existence that those still 'harping' about women's victim status are embarrassingly out of touch" (qtd. in Munford and Waters 2014, 28). These authors argue that there is no longer anything that makes women unequal from men and that women need to

move beyond their roles as martyrs to capitalize on the rights they do have. In both the contemporary feminist literature and the interviews, women were hesitant to admit that that inequalities still existed between men and women. Instead, women are more likely to suggest that theyface "gender-based obstacles" (Aronson 2003, 909). These obstacles range from feeling scared to walk home alone at night to being expected to complete a second-shift job of housework and child-rearing. Women 3, who will be attendinglaw school next fall, argued that there is nothing in the constitution that makes women less equal than men, believing that anything unfair is an individual problem; "If you feel like you are being treated Balanda 4 unequally, do

omething about it," she said (Interviewee 3). She also does not believe that women are viewed as lesser than men overall, but that some individual people may still hold these views because of their culture or religion. Opposition to the "F" Word Before feminism was equated with victimhood, second wave feminists undertook widespread political activism. Many women believed that inequalites they have experienced could be remedied with legislation. The liberal feminist movement focused on legislating issues such as gender relations in the public sphere, unequal decision-making in the private sphere, domestic violence, sexual

assault and rape, and discrimination in education and the workforce (Funk 2013, 182). After many of these issues were at least partially remedied, the word "feminism" began to have negative associations — particularly in the late 1990s. In her analysis of feminism in the United States during that time frame, Christine Farnham notes that feminists are perceived as a different breed than other humans, quoting Rebecca Walker's satiric description of a feminist as being one who "live[s] in poverty, critique[s] constantly, never marr[ies], censor[s] pornography, and/or worship[s] the goddess" (qtd. in Farnham 1996, 7). Additionally, Farnham discusses the results of a study which indicated that support for feminism decreased significantly when the survey question included the word "feminist" was used as opposed to the phrase "women's movement." The negative connotation associated with the idea of feminism has created a considerable group of women who are in support of feminist goals but reject the label of "feminist." Woman 5, an interior designer currently residing in Utah, was the only interviewee who did not mention the trend of rejecting the word "feminism." "People are Balanda 5 not scared to say they are feminists anymore," she said, "I think it used to be looked upon as a bad thing" (Interviewee 5). When asked if she considers herself a feminist, Woman 4, a government

consultant, said, "'Feminist' can be a loaded word, so I don't typically apply it to myself of my own accord. I just demonstrate that I'm a feminist in my work by encouraging

y female colleagues and supporting them in their career progression, the same as I do for my male colleagues" (Interviewee 4). This remark illustrates the increasing tendency of women who believe in the goals of the feminist movement, but refuse to use the label to describe themselves. The "I'm not a feminist, but…" paradox applies to the growing number of women who are in support of gender equality but do not self-select to identify as feminists (Aronson 2003, 915; Moi 2006, 1735). For these women, the militant stereotype of feminists is not appealing, and they do not want to be viewed as "man-hating." While she believes that a feminist movement does exist in 2019, Woman 4 notes that, in the workplace, more progress can be made when avoiding the "F" word. Citing her professional experience, Woman 4 has noticed that instead of advocating for "feminism," companies prefer to use language around "equality," aterm that encompasses characteristics such as gender, sexuality, disability, and skill sets. She argues that "equality" "eliminates any controversy around the term 'feminist' which has different associations for different people, based on their interactions with feminism" (Interviewee 4). This

example reiterates the trend of hostility towards feminists and resistance to the idea of feminism in general. Since the stereotypes of women who espouse feminist ideals are incredibly unfavorable, many people deliberately avoid being associated with the word. Balanda 6 In several interviews, women who were comfortable calling themselves feminists credited female role models for instilling feminist beliefs in them. Woman 2 said, "My mom is the breadwinner of my family and always has been. She's taken on the role of an executive for a massive banking business without a college degree, and focused her life on having a career and family both" (Interviewee 2). Woman 6 credited feminist role models not only for showing her the merits of feminism, but for also making her comfortable to speak up and advocate for herself whenshe feels that something is unjust. She said, "I am fortunate to have felt the strong influence of many feminists in my life. They have been pivotal in shaping my

houghts and turning those thoughts into action in order to speak up when I see even the smallest microaggression or unjustice," (Interviewee 6). In "Gender RoleModels… Who needs 'em?!," Stephen Hicks suggests that gender role models seem to be a "need" for child development (2008, 56). The nature vs. nurture theory confirms that children can learn and be influenced by behaviors that they observe, and this paradigm can translate

directly to views on feminism; if girls (orboys) are surrounded by people (family, teachers, etc.) who do not buy into to gender norms and treat girls' intelligence as valid to the same extent as boys' from a young age, they are likely to have positive recollections and associations with feminism and gender equality during adolescence. The same argument can be used to explain political affiliation. Children tend to subscribe to the same political ideology as their parents (at least until college), and, since beliefs about feminism often stem from political affiliation, children tend to have similar beliefs about feminism as their parents. This theory is not sure-fire, however, as some children divert from their parents' beliefs with access to higher education and liberal media. Balanda 7 The interview responses illustrate a direct correlation between political party and identification with the word "feminism." Those who affiliated with the Republican party either did not identify as feminists or suggested that, since they agree with gender equality, they are technically feminists, but they rarely use the word to describe themselves. Those who were registered Democrats were enthusiastic to call themselves feminists and specifically remarked that feminism must do more to advocate for all women.This party-line identification is not anecdotal. According to a study published by the University of Michigan, among those sampled (undergraduate

women) who were registered Democrats, 73.6% identified as feminists. Among those who were registered Republicans, only 8.3% identified as feminists (Cooperstock 2010, 21). The Democratic Party tends to espouse more liberal and progressive values, and this most likely accounts for the drastic differences between Democratic and

epublican women and their feminist identifications. Feminism Is for Men, Too The abandonment of the word "feminism" has resulted in a new and expanded definition of the movement. In "Feminism Today -- The Personal is Still Political," Anna Farmer claims that feminism has to be about women and men. She writes, "Women shouldn't be judged for wearing, say, heavy makeup and spiky heels. And men shouldn't be judged for choosing to stay home with the kids" (Farmer 2008, 5). Therefore, she believes that the notion of "women's equality" should be framed instead as a fight to dismantle gender roles. In addition to advocating for the equality of women, Woman 1 believes the feminist movement must tackle the problematic nature of gender itself. She lamented that men are still shamed for expressing their feelings and explained how she and her boyfriend have worked Balanda 8 toward an equal relationship by encouraging each other to be open with their emotions. They also alternated who pays for each date so as not to perpetuate the

idea that the man must financially support the woman in a relationship. Woman 2, another student at Gettysburg College, creditsher father for refusing to embody gender norms. She says, "My dad took on the tasks of a 'mom:' he cooked, he cleaned, he drove my brother and me to sport practices, and he was never ashamed of it" (Interviewee 2). Woman 2 admires herfather's willingness to adopt these traditionally-feminine roles. She says, "He wasalways proud to be a nurturing figure to us, and sort of broke a lot of societal conventions and stereotypes. I don't think a lot of men would step up the way my dad did, so his dedication to my family also affected my strong feminist values— he taught me that gender roles are ridiculous and don't actually exist beyond social conception" (Interviewee 2). Modern feminists must move beyond solely advocating for women's advancement and move towards diminishing gendernorms — for both men and women. For women specifically, though, gender roles are the primary barrier to equality; if society continues to expect women to be the

rimary domestic homemaker, they will never be on a level playing field with men.

In addition to acknowledging that harmful gender stereotypes perpetuate sexist oppression, feminist theory must incorporate a

critical intersectional perspective. In "Feminist Theory Today," Kathy Ferguson argues that one must commit to feminism as a political and intellectual endeavour. Thus, feminism must reject the male/female dichotomy and the hierarchy that these labels create if they are to make progress toward equality, freedom, and justice for all. She writes, "feminist theory pursues 'both/and' rather than 'either/or' thinking; focuses on Balanda 9 becomings rather than beings; and works to change, as well as to understand the world" (Ferguson 2017, 271). Thus, feminist studies must encompass race, ethnicity, and sex as well as historical, aesthetic, and global perspectives to understand the oppression of all peoples -- not solely the white women around whom feminist discourses have been framed (Henry 2006, 1720). Woman 1 vehemently advocated for the concept of intersectional feminism. As one of the student program coordinators for the Gettysburg College Women's Resource Center, she has been forced to educate herself on intersectional ideas so she can best represent the issues experienced by all women. Each year, the Gettysburg College Women's Center produces a performance of The Vagina Monologues, Eve Ensler's play that addresses topics such as sex, relationships, and violence against women. This year, the Women's Center staff decided to incorporate an original aspect to the play, entitled "Our Voices," which allowed

all women on campus to have a platform for their unique stories to be told to reflect issues that are discussed in Ensler's original Vagina Monologues. In the "Our Voices" section, Gettysburg College women performed monologues they had written that approached topics such as transgender identity, immigrant status, and the experiences of women of color. At the conclusion of the entire production, the Director of the Women's Center announced to the audience that the Women's

enter would no longer be sponsoring a production of The Vagina Monologues because it does not represent marginalized voices. Woman 1 said, "We are striving to create an environment in which all women feel valued and empowered to share their story, and not just those who are white and cisgender" (Interviewee 1). Balanda 10 The decision to eliminate The Vagina Monologues from the Women's Center's programming marks an increasing tendency of white liberal feminists to embrace intersectional perspectives. Even though intersectionality is an explicit framework that aims to acknowledge the overlapping oppressions of marginalized groups, these groups often need white women to advocate for them. The authors of an analysis of intersectional feminism in the Trump era emphasize that, "It is imperative that white cis-hetero people be disruptors/contrarians to stand up against the wrongs perpetrated on marginalized

bodies by white systems. White silence is violence" (Battaglia et. al 2019, 133). The authors of an analysis of intersectionality and the Women's March interviewed women of color who acknowledged that if white women supported their interests, they would be taken more seriously by those in power (Brewer and Dundes 2018, 51). The intersectional framework recognizes the problematic nature of a white-feminist lens. In a statement that may be construed as bold, Woman 1 remarked, "White feminism isn't needed anymore" (Interviewee 1). When asked to elaborate on her statement, she explained that feminism is not productive if it only elevates the voices of white women because some women live with multiple marginalized identities. Since white women have traditionally been the most-privileged group of women because of their race, their gender-related issues cannot take precedence over the issues of women of color who experience racial and gendered oppression. White women who embrace the feminist label must ensure that their agendas are intersectional. The Emergence of Neoliberal Feminism from Liberal Beginnings Many young feminists do not believe gender discrimination is a collective problem faced by all women (Farmer 2008, 6). This statement marks

he widespread abandonment of liberal Balanda 11 feminism and the adoption of a more individualistic, neoliberal approach to

feminism. Neoliberal feminism, or the advancement of individual women who tend to be elite or privileged, would not have been possible without the liberal, rights-based feminism of previous generations. In Nanette Funk's critical examination of Nancy Fraser's "Feminism, Capitalism and the Cunning of History," Funk argues that classical liberal feminism was a prerequisite for neoliberalism. She writes, "In the early twenty-first century, feminist demands for women's autonomy and fulfillment, and the related need for women to have paid employment, created women's 'romance' with neoliberalism. It legitimated to women their entry into paid neoliberal employment worldwide" (Funk 2013, 186). Essentially, women would not be ableto be neoliberal feminists without the gains that liberal feminists have made for equality in the public sphere. There are many theories that try to explain why neoliberal feminism has begun to overtake liberal feminist activism. Some scholars argue that women have abandoned large scale social movements not because they do not want to enact change, but rather because the demands of womanhood today do not allow for this kind of organizing. Women, left tobalance both waged work and domestic work, do not have the time and resources to rally for social change (Asoka and Leonard 2016, 27). This apparent paradox,in which women are expected to "break the

glass ceiling" as well as care for and manage a household, creates women who forgo liberal feminist activism in order to manage their individual careers and families. The development of neoliberal feminism correlates with the transition from the Women in Development (WID) framework to the Gender and Development (GAD) approach (Wilson 2015, 805). The WID approach focused solely on incorporating women into the productive Balanda 12 sphere in an attempt to prove that they could be as productive as men; however, this approach subsequently assumes that women are a homogeneous group with identical interests. The GAD approach, in contrast, focuses more

roadly on how gender relations in the household prohibit women from attaining their fullest potential. Thus, many women, discouraged by expectations of them inthe private sphere, focus their efforts on the public sphere. "Woman-as-Stock" Model The advancement of women in the workforce, a prominent tenant of neoliberal feminism, has erupted in the last decade. Catherine Rottenberg, an avid proponent of neoliberal feminism, wrote a comprehensive review of Ivanka Trump's best-selling book, Women Who Work: Rewriting the Rules for Success, in which she draws on Trump's book to argue that neoliberal feminism hasincreasingly become part of mainstream culture. In her book,

Trump targets"aspirational women" who deliberately choose to create their desired lifestyle through hard work and perseverance (2018, 2). Furthermore, Trump supports the "woman-as-stock" framework, in which women should think of themselves as investable entities within companies, and their goals should be to increase their market value. Rottenberg summarizes, "competition and success are eclipsing demands for equal rights, as well as how nations of the self-as-stock are replacing discussion of autonomy and emancipation, leaving few if any traces of liberal feminist subject in their wake" (Rottenberg 2018, 7). Many women, once rallied together for the cause of equality, are now more focused on individual selfadvancement. Balanda 13 Theory of Feminism Today: Postfeminist Dualism The varying interpretations of feminism have caused many women to be discouraged by the movement. On one hand, there are women who are attempting to reclaim the liberatory nature of the feminist movement in a so-called "fourth wave." The others, who may not even be considered true feminists, work solely for their own advancement. Farris and Rottenberg claim, "Some feminists have been so dismayed by the way in which the word feminism has been compromised that they have even questioned whether we need to give up the term altogether" (Farris and Rottenberg 2017, 8). Ultimately, the traditional

concepts associated with feminism such as equal rights, liberation, and social justice have largely been

eplaced with ideas such as advancement, responsibility, and individualism. I argue the state of contemporary feminism should be classified as postfeminist dualism. Essentially, society is operating on the assumption that the major goals of the original women's movement have been achieved. For some, this assumption has resulted in an increase in neoliberal tendencies. For others, this assumption has led to the adoption of new interests, or an intersectional framework. Thus, the disparities in the ways that these groups have responded to post-feminism result in its dualistic nature. In her analysis of postfeminism, Penelope Robinson acknowledges the contradictory definitions of postfeminism. She draws on the work of Shelley Budgeon, writing: Budgeon argues that authors who define postfeminism as anti-feminism understand the term to mean that"equality has been achieved" and that "goals are constructed as individual problems and not political ones" (Budgeon 2001, 13). The second approach to postfeminism that Budgeon outlines… implies "a process Balanda 14 of ongoing transformation" (2001: 14). This definition of postfeminism, she argues, constitutes "a reflective engagement with the limitations of hegemonic forms of feminism in order to understand how

feminism is shifting and evolving" (Robinson 2008, 33.) Budgeon's analysis of the contradictory definitions of postfeminism shape my theory of postfeminist duality. In essence, there are two types of women. The first group are those who believe that the feminist movement is something of the past and that women should work hard to achieve their career goals without government or societal intervention. These women are often white and middle-to-upper class. Woman 3 was a perfect embodiment of this postfeminist platform. She argued that smaller strides individually are better than "just telling the government what you want" (Interviewee 3). She suggested that she would be comfortable asking for a raise and advocating for herself in the workplace. This neoliberal, advocate-for-yourself approach has exploded since the release of Facebook COO's best-selling book, Lean In. In this pseudo "how to

anual," Sandberg encourages women to "sit at the table," stop worrying about being likable, communicate when being treated unfairly, and make their voices heard in the workplace. For Sandberg, women who want to be viewed as equal to men and taken seriously by society as a whole must join the workforce and strive for professional advancement. What Sandberg espouses is the embodiment of this type of postfeminism. The question becomes whether this strand of postfeminist dualism

can be even considered feminism. From my perspective, these neoliberal behaviors can only be classified as "feminist" if the individual working for her own accomplishments also does something to assist Balanda 15 women who are less privileged. Since Sandberg wrote a book to encourage women to achieve leadership roles, I would argue that she has paid forward her privilege in the nameof feminism. Other women in high power positions can advocate for a variety of company-based initiatives such as codified maternity leave policies. If women solely focus on their own success without regard to other women below them,their actions can not be defined as feminism. The second group of postfeminists are those who recognize the success of the traditional women's movement but believe there is still work to do. These women tend to embrace an intersectional agenda and often include women of color, LGBTQ+ women, and their white, heterosexual allies. Woman 1 fits into this classification. By making strides to cater to the needs of women of color and other marginalized women in her production of The Vagina Monologues, she is showing a consciousness for the issues that feminists must still work to address. She also believes the government should be involved in instituting federally-mandated programs to help women, noting that the issues that women face in this country "are based oninstitutionalized inequalities that are

hard or almost impossible to fight against independently" (Interviewee 1). The women who subscribe to the postfeminist dualism approach and who acknowledge the transformative nature of feminism are more comfortable vocalizing their grievances to the federal government and

al elected officials and can be classified more simply as liberal feminists with an expanded, intersectional agenda. Ultimately, it is no easy task to define feminism and situate it decisively in 2019. While there is no question that there is still a large majority of women who are advocating for women's rights, there is a strong anti-feminist undercurrent that believes that society has achieved gender equality and women should work to achieve success in the workplace. Thus, the theory of Balanda 16 postfeminist dualism attempts to account for both of these outlooks; it acknowledges that the primary goals of women's liberation have beenachieved and that women now have used the success of earlier generations to support their neoliberal or intersectional tendencies. Balanda 17

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