

SHAME AND VIOLENCE : SUPPRESSING / IMPOSING IDENTITY

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Abstract

A tribute to Feminism as a movement lies in its strength as a social movement as it has the power to expand women's aspirations and improve their lives without enlisting them as card-carrying feminists. Feminism is not dependent on ideological purity (indeed, it has always been a mixture of conflicting ideologies) or any formal organizational structure. In the nineteenth century feminism drew upon countless unaffiliated voluntary associations of women devoted to social reform or self-improvement. In the nineteenth century many, or maybe most, women who took part in the feminist movement saw themselves as paragons of femininity. The great historic irony of feminism is that the supposed feminine virtues that justified keeping women at home—sexual purity, compassion, and an ability for nurturing—eventually justified their release from the home as well. Late-twentieth-century feminism has similarly drawn upon consciousness-raising groups, professional associations, community-action groups, and increased work-force participation. Feminism, however, is popularly deemed to represent an opposing belief that men and women are equally capable of raising children and equally capable of waging war. Thus, feminism represents, in the popular view, a rejection of femininity of middle-class women, wrought partly by economic forces and a revolution in birth control. Throughout its 150-year history feminism has insinuated itself into the culture as women have sought to improve their status and increase their participation in the world outside the home. The paper looks at Feminism as a movement in the present context and analyses what needs to be done in the global journey of women claiming their rights.

Keywords : *Feminism, Women's Rights, Gender Equality, Economic Independence*

Introduction

"A tired woman cannot make a good wife"

When we introduce Feminism, it should always begin with the three waves, how the women of the world have faced suppression and oppression in every phase of life and whenever they want to come out of it, they have been suppressed by their own people or society.

In the first wave (1830's – early 1900's): Women's fight for equal contract and property rights. Often taken for granted, women in the late 19th to early 20th centuries realized that they must first gain political power (including the right to vote) to bring about change. How to fuel the fire. Their political agenda expanded to issues concerning sexual, reproductive and economic matters. The seed was planted that women have the potential to contribute just as much if not more than men.

"A willing body at night, a willing pair of hands and feet in the day and an obedient mouth". (231)

The second wave (1960's-1980):

Coming off the heels of World War II, the second wave of feminism focused on the workplace, sexuality, family and reproductive rights. During a time when the United States was already trying to restructure itself, it was perceived that women had met their equality goals with the exception of the failure of the ratification of the Equal Rights Amendment (which has still yet to be passed).

Misconception

"A tired woman cannot make good wives"

This time is often dismissed as offensive, outdated and obsessed with middle class white women's problems. Conversely, many women during the second wave were initially part of the Black Civil Rights Movement, Anti Vietnam Movement, Chicano Rights Movement, and Asian-American Civil Rights Movement, Gay and Lesbian Movement and many other groups fighting for equality. Many of the women supporters of the aforementioned groups felt their voices were not being heard and felt that in order to gain respect in co-ed organizations they first needed to address gender equality concerns.

Women cared so much about these civil issues that they wanted to strengthen their voices by first fighting for gender equality to ensure they would be heard.

The third wave (1990's – present): The "micro politics" of gender equality

Today and unlike the former movements, the term 'feminist' is received less critically by the female population due to the varying feminist outlooks. There are the ego-cultural feminists, the radicals, the liberal/reforms, the electoral, academic, ecofeminists... the list goes on.

Women all over the world are on the verge of completing the massive delayed revolution that needs to be won for women. It is a delayed revolution because all the rights that would make women free and equal citizens of this country, persons able to develop to their full potential in society, were won on paper long ago. But we are not really free and equal if the feminine mystique keeps us from freely using our rights; if the only world we really are free to move in is the so-called woman's world of home; if we are asked to make an unreal choice no man is ever asked to make; if we think, as girls, that we have to choose somehow between love, marriage and motherhood and the chance to devote ourselves seriously to some challenge, some interest that would enable us to grow to our full human potential. Are we really free and equal if we are forced to make such a choice, or half-choice? Traditional roles of women are merged with the possibility of women as individuals, as decision-makers, as creators of the future. We do not know

how strong we could be if we affirmed ourselves as women and joined together, instead of each woman feeling freakish and isolated, as if no one else but herself had the brains and the courage to look beyond that young peak of marriage and childbirth that the feminine mystique enshrines. Men as well as women are victims of the feminine mystique. We must simply break through this curtain in the minds of women in order to get on with the massive delayed revolution of women who are doing the housework of politics, who, trapped in the feminine mystique, acquiesce merely to lick envelopes, take nominal posts in ladies' aid auxiliaries, collect furniture for auctions, and second nominating speeches. Freed from their self-denigration, however, they could hold policy-making positions, run for the county committee, serve on the town committee, run for the state Senate or Congress, go to law school and become a judge, or even run for Vice President. We know more than we think we know politically, and we are not using this knowledge. Of all the passions open to man and woman, politics is the one that a woman can most easily embrace and move ahead in, creating a new pattern of politics, marriage and motherhood. Only self-denigration stops women in politics. In addition, there are the great number of women who could be artists, who are artists but do not take themselves seriously as such. All that keeps a woman of talent from being an artist is her false image of herself, the fear of making the commitment to discipline herself—and of being tested. A woman who has had the strength to innovate in the community—who has led in solving new problems in education, politics, mental health, and in all the other problems that women have worked on in their suburbs and cities in recent years.

But in the long run, identifying feminism with femininity offered women limited liberation. The feminine weaknesses that were presumed to accompany feminine virtues justified the two-tier labor force that kept women out of executive positions and political office and out of arduous, high-paying manual-labour jobs (although women were never considered too weak to scrub floors). By using femininity as their passport to the public sphere, women came to be typecast in traditional feminine roles that they are still playing and arguing about today. Are women naturally better suited to parenting than men? Are men naturally better suited to waging war? Are women naturally more cooperative and compassionate, more emotive and less analytic, than men?

A great many women (and men) still seem to answer these questions in the affirmative, as evidenced by public resistance to drafting women and the private reluctance of women to assign, and men to assume, equal responsibility for child care. Feminism, however, is popularly deemed to represent an opposing belief that men and women are equally capable of raising children and equally capable of waging war. Thus, feminism represents, in the popular view, a rejection of femininity.

"Always adjusting to everybody's needs" (227)

While the roots of feminism are buried in ancient Greece, most recognize the movement by the three waves of feminism. The third being the movement in which we are currently residing. All of the above aptly describes woman's identity crisis. It is not simply a modern anomaly, but an age-old dilemma familiar to each individual. Eventually each of us recognizes the need to know who we are. We were never intended to have a self-centered identity. We were expected to have a God-centered identity.

In the simple and concise words, we have the summation of our equality, the duality and mutuality of our humanity. We see in those few uncomplicated words that we project the image of God as male and female,

since God is male-female in his totality. It is necessary therefore to encompass both the male and the female in order to have a balanced projection of who God is.

The father is to represent leadership, authority, and objective truth. The mother's role is nurturing life in the framework of subjective truth: love, compassion, submission. These attributes are necessary to the role of nurturing life. We need to be concerned, then, with being whole women, as well as with what being whole women contributes toward making whole men. It is the two in complement which reflects the image of God. This is the definition of our humanity. Husbands, live considerately with their wives, bestowing honour on the woman as the weaker sex, since you are joint heirs of the grace of life.

The unity of mankind is symbolized in God's intention for the marriage relationship. God planned the unity of our humanity from the beginning, when he created us male and female.

Woman is the glory of man is to me one of the most beautiful things that can be said about woman! Notice he does not say that she is the image and glory of man. She is the image of God, and that is why and how she may be the glory of man. It is in bearing his image that we find our identity and our security. The issue here is one of authority in human relationships---authority, not equality. We also see the authority structure. He first created the man because it is in maleness that God's authority is portrayed. Paul reminds us that this is loving authority. In the male is invested the responsibility of leadership. .

Closely related to the identity issue is the problem of authority. Both must be settled ultimately and finally in our relationship to Jesus Christ. Once we have settled the question of whether God is going to be God in our lives, once we have submitted ourselves to his sovereign control, then we have settled the authority issue. The human relationships will fall in line naturally from that perspective. Our equality, our identity, and our relationship to authority are all resolved in our understanding of God's creative intent for humanity.

Changes in the Role of Women (Corporate Identity)

In the past, the major shift in identity that women faced was the transition from mother to freedom. Now the career-minded woman's life path more closely resembles a man's, shifting aspirations with the turn of each decade of their lives. Yet the reasons for the shifts differ for women. Women now enter the workplace with high expectations of career advancement. Many in their 20's say, "I want to be CEO" then face the reality of having to live in the trenches for a while before they can rise up.

As they enter their 30's and their career focus narrows, they seek meaningful and challenging work, saying, "I want to prove my value and make a significant difference." This is where their development splits off from men. As they cope with the ongoing inequality in the workplace, their disappointments of dreams unmet, and continually feeling misunderstood and mismanaged, they begin to drop off the corporate ladder. Their personal values and corporate values may become irreconcilable.

By the time they enter their 40's, many lose their taste for proving themselves. I have met many top performers who feel they can accomplish more working on their own or with a group of enlightened consultants/coaches. Others take lateral moves to keep their minds challenged and their lives in balance. Some drop off the grid to discover themselves.

A woman from my research went from being a celebrated marine biologist to an international sales executive to a management consultant and is currently raising her daughter and contemplating her next career move. She told me she was taught to always raise her hand. Now in her 40's, she is questioning what she is raising her hand for. These women have not faced a crisis, but they are facing a *mid-life quest for identity*.

This quest might even endure into their 50's and 60's as circumstances change and desires surface. It is possible that women without careers go through significant explorations each decade as well. For smart, goal-driven women, a mid-life crisis isn't about recovering lost youth. It's about discovering the application of their greatness. If they only see through the false image, they can so easily make the little choices—not the fake big ones such as marriage versus career, but the little ones—that, if made all along, will easily create a new image of woman. And even if their choices involve effort, work, a few conflicts and problems that have to be solved, these are easier problems than that desperate emptiness a woman faces at thirty-five or forty after she realizes that all her life cannot be lived in lifelong full-time motherhood is that no one has defined what "greatness" looks like so the quest has no specific destination.

Conclusion

The main issues we face today were prefaced by the work done by the previous waves of women. We are still working to vanquish the disparities in male and female pay and the reproductive rights of women. We are working to end violence against women in our nation as well as others. We are still fighting for acceptance and a true understanding of the term 'feminism,' it should be noted that we have made tremendous progress since the first wave. It is a term that has been unfairly associated first, with ladies in hoop skirts and ringlet curls, and then followed by butch, man-hating women. Due to the range of feminist issues today, it is much harder to put a label on what a feminist looks like. Quite frankly, it all comes down to the dictionary's very simple yet profound definition: "the theory of the political, economic and social equality of the sexes." If that's what a feminist is – who wouldn't want to be called that?

"We talk of revolution- political and economic and yet the greatest revolution in a country is one that effects improvement in the status and living conditions of its women."
– Jawaharlal Nehru

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