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The Past, Present, and Future Feminism: LGBTQ+ Representation Matters

Isabelle Rojek

To most, the feminist movement has always been seen as paving the way for a bigger and brighter future for women and equality. However, this is not the case. Throughout history, the feminist movement has notoriously left out marginalized groups and kept its focus on white women of status; it's time for a change. A new feminist movement that reclaims the power that the past has taken away. A new space for those of different identities to step forward and make their voices heard. A new wave of feminism that is inclusive towards the LGBTQ+ community and stands with them in their struggles. This new theory for future feminist movements can better represent LGBTQ+ perspectives, issues, and activism by doing exactly that. The movement can create a more inclusive environment by ridding of oppressive terms to describe the LGBTQ+ community and listen to those in it. Advocating for issues that they believe are important, because if we don't listen to those who are oppressed, how do we make a real positive change?

Heteronormativity is defined by culture creating a societal "norm" of heterosexuality placing it above all other sexual identities by making them "weird" or "unnatural." In large part, masculinity is another enforcer of heteronormativity, and "if masculinity is a homosocial enactment, its overriding emotion is fear," (Kimmel 129). Heteronormativity creates this feeling of fear because of the culture of toxic masculinity it enforces on society. Heteronormativity largely "troubles us because it doesn't name or challenge the substantial violence against lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ) people precisely because they do not conform to dominant definitions and performances of gender and sexuality," (Dow 2014). The non-conformity of the LGBTQ community in the heteronormative world reinforces the divide between groups which causes a disconnect. Cisnormativity is similar to heteronormativity, but instead of defining it as placing heterosexuality over other sexualities, it's placing gender identity over others. Social norms saying that to be cisgender is normal, but to be a trans or nonconforming individual is "unnatural" and "perverted;" this is the difference between the two. They may sound similar in the sense of societal constraints on what is "normal" or not, but they differ in the fact that sexuality and gender are two very different things. For instance, the trans community "has often faced unique challenges and opposition from certain subgroups of the feminist movement that inform their relationship to feminism," (Cullen 2019). The trans community has often been excluded from the feminist movement because they choose to not conform to society's gender binary and its restrictions.

Terms that could be used in order to help create a better understanding of the two are privilege, the patriarchy, homophobia, transphobia, the coming out process, gender essentialism, and the gender binary. Privilege is defined by an advantage given to one group of individuals. An example of this would be the concept of religious privilege, which includes being able to find a place of worship close to you or having the ability to have work or school off due to a religious holiday (Hive Learning). The patriarchy is a way of organizing society that favors men over women. An example of this can be seen in issues like the wage gap as well as the housing and hunger crises. Homophobia is having a fear of those who identify as gay, however, the interpretation that a lot of people use today is having a hatred for or a dislike of those who identify as LGB or queer. A relatively common assumption of homosexuality used to be that it was a “gender “inversion,” in which a man who was attracted to men was thought to be acting like a woman, and a woman who desired women was considered to be acting like a man,” (Stryker 77). This way of thinking was detrimental to the public perception of homosexuality because it further alienated them from the rest of society. Transphobia is similar to homophobia, except in this case it’s a fear or hatred of trans individuals. It is incredibly vital “to take into account race, class, culture, sexuality, and sexism... to develop an understanding of the ways that U.S. society has fostered conditions of inequality and injustice for people who aren’t white, male, heterosexual, and middle class,” (Stryker 79). By understanding the barriers that transgender people face due to this outdated thinking, we can learn how to disassemble these “traditional” ideas.

The coming out process is harder to define because it is different for every person, but the general definition is telling people or “coming out of the closet” that you identify as something other than cisgender or heterosexual. Gender essentialism says that men and women have distinct traits and boxes that they fit into; an example of this is saying that boys should like blue, and girls should like pink. Last is the gender binary which is similar to gender essentialism, it is the societal reduction of gender into categories, saying there is only male or female. More often than not, it is assumed that “if people read or hear about sexual orientation or gender identity, they will assume the subject is an LGBTI person. While this is understandable, because that terminology was coined to fight against discrimination on these grounds, it falls short of recognizing that every human being has a sexual orientation and a gender identity,” (Ehrt 2019). This is the reason why the comprehension of the gender binary is so important; it helps to familiarize society with the constraints that it puts on individuals. While these terms help the understanding of heteronormativity and cisnormativity, they perpetuate a negative perception of the LGBTQ+ community. Even though societal transformation will be gradual, we can put

this change into effect through education and the normalization of dialogue regarding the LGBTQ+ narrative.

Authors, activists, theorists, and historians who have played a role in advocating for LGBTQ+ inclusion in the feminist movement include Audre Lorde, Marsha P. Johnson, Jonathan Katz, Susan Stryker, and Laverne Cox. Audre Lorde is an author most known for her work in the inclusivity for black women and fellow women of color in the feminist movement. She also identified as a lesbian who advocated for the inclusion of all people in the feminist movement, as opposed to white cisgender and straight women. Lorde was considered revolutionary for her time, and still to this day, she is quoted and taught to inform others of the hardships and lack of inclusion in second-wave feminism. Another activist who pushed for LGBTQ+ inclusion was Marsha P. Johnson an American transgender activist outspoken in the '70s and '80s on LGBTQ+ rights. Johnson is most famously known for her participation in the Stonewall Uprising of 1969. Johnson also established the Street Transvestite Action Revolutionaries (STAR) in 1970, which was created to support homeless transgender youth on the streets of New York City. Jonathan Katz is an American historian and author who writes about same-sex marriage and inclusion throughout history and is well-known for his writing of *The Invention of Heterosexuality*. He is influential for his research in sexuality and has been awarded many prizes for his work. Katz continues to be one of America's leading experts on homosexuality, as well as gay and lesbian history. Susan Stryker is an American author and theorist who focuses on gender and human sexuality in her writing. She has written books like *Transgender History* and *Kiss My Genders* to educate the public on the history of trans inclusion and exclusion throughout history. She has also appeared in documentaries to comment on trans inclusion, the most recent being *Disclosure* a comment on trans inclusion in Hollywood. Laverne Cox is an American actress who grew famous for her role in *Orange Is the New Black*. She is an LGBTQ+ advocate and also took part in *Disclosure* alongside Susan Stryker. Many others have also played a role in advocating for LGBTQ+ inclusion in the feminist movement. However, these are just some from various parts of history who reflect the ideas of different time periods. It is important to include people from different waves of feminism in order to create an all-encompassing history to look upon. This helps to give a look into the thought processes and ideas from those times.

To summarize what has been discussed in class thus far, LGBTQ+ perspectives challenge feminism because they make people think outside of their normal train of thought. When one thinks of feminism, it typically frames itself as a women's issue, when in fact this is not true. The stereotype is often white middle class, straight, and cisgender women fighting for their rights against white, middle class, straight, and cisgender men. This version of feminism does not include a breadth of people and identities. It leaves out

those who identify as LGBTQ+, gender non-conforming, lower-class individuals, those with disabilities, and even men; they challenge the “mainstream” feminist movement. Throughout history, the definitions of what people dictate as being “feminist” have, of course, changed, but as time goes on, it is imperative to be inclusive, and to avoid reverting to exclusive first-wave feminist ideas. Even though these new ideas did challenge the movement at the time, activists, feminists, and representatives did not bring these new definitions in to upset others. They were brought in to inform others about a new way of thinking, something all-encompassing and inclusive, which is what we now see today.

The relationship between past and present feminist movements and their inclusion, as well as exclusion, of the LGBTQ+ community, has changed drastically since the inception of feminism in 1848. The first wave of feminism completely ignored any sense of gender expression and sexuality. They also left out anyone who was not a white, middle-class, straight, cis, woman. This left no room was no room for individuality in the first wave of feminism, as it was a space for white women to gain the right to vote and assert themselves over minorities. The systems of both “heteropatriarchy and cisnormativity are products of colonialism, and feminists who espouse transphobic discourses invariably reproduce colonial and white supremacist frameworks of patriarchy and gender violence,” (Upadhyay 2021). It is important to connect this is the first wave of feminism because white feminism was the only “socially acceptable” form. The second wave that followed created a space for more women to speak up, the first of many being Betty Friedan with her release of *The Feminine Mystique* which proved to be revolutionary at the time.

While being called a radical and revolutionary feminist, Friedan was also an avid proponent of anti-gay anti-lesbian propaganda and was extremely forward in her writings about her homophobic views. Friedan has received much-deserved criticism over the years, with many saying she “must atone for likening heteros to homos, and she indulges, therefore, in a little hyperbolic homo bashing: “The homosexuality that is spreading like a murky smog over the American scene is no less ominous than the restless, immature sex-seeking of the young women...” (Katz 117). Friedan openly denounces homosexuality by coining the term “lavender menace.” This shows that she did not shy away from her desire to exclude lesbians from the feminist movement. Due to her overt homophobia, those who identified as lesbian created their own group, reclaiming the name Friedan had placed on them. The second wave also passed Title IX, which was big for the feminist movement. Title IX states that “no person in the United States shall, on the basis of sex, be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any education program or activity receiving Federal financial assistance” (EEOC). This act also protects against

discrimination of sexual orientation in school systems. We can continue to modify Title IX on a national level instead of just in school systems and universities. By the time the 20th century came around, “a movement in recognition of gays and lesbians was underway, abetted by the social climate of feminism and new anthropologies of difference,” (APA 2009).

There is a need for laws to be put into place in order to prevent discrimination based on preferred gender identity and sexual orientation in order to adapt to these rapidly changing times. This leads into the concept of intersectionality, coined by Kimberlé Crenshaw. Intersectionality is the concept of intersecting identities causing and increasing oppression for individuals whose identities are marginalized. Examples of marginalized identities that can be used to explain this are people of color, class, sexual identity, gender identity, those with disabilities, etc. By further incorporating intersectionality in the feminist movement moving forward, we can learn to be more inclusive when it comes to these intersectional identities we may not be familiar with. It is vital to listen to those who have been oppressed and not heard and lift them up so they can share their stories.

To create a new theory about how future feminist movements can better represent LGBTQ+ perspectives, issues, and activism, a more inclusive narrative needs to be adopted. Listening to those who are oppressed and have not been represented by past feminist movements is crucial to the success of future waves. If this proves successful, this could lead to a post-feminist society. It is a privilege that “... nowadays, we're accustomed to gay rights being a national issue. Every presidential candidate has to talk about his or her stand on marriage equality and so forth. But back in the '60s and '70s, gays could only dream of getting that kind of national attention,” (PBS 2018). Even though times have changed since the '60s and '70s there is still much to do. Activism in favor of the LGBTQ+ community “is an ideological project that emerges from the interplay of personal, organizational, and systemic factors, it often relies on strategic communication to impart social change... sexual and gender minority advocates have worked together to change public opinion and influence public policy,” (Ciszek 2017). And it will continue to do so. In order for a flourishing feminist future to be achieved, public opinion and public policy need to continue to be guided by the ideals of the LGBTQ+ community.

Throughout time, previous waves of feminism have been proven to be noninclusive; this creates space for change. While others, throughout history, have tried to bring new ideas into the limelight, it continues to feel as though there is no real change being made. A new wave of feminism must be created in order to accomplish the goals that those who have come before have put in place. These goals of creating a space for marginalized individuals and groups to have the ability to share their stories as well as create a society

where those individuals no longer have to feel oppressed. This is what the new theory of feminism is: finally reaching all-inclusivity in a society of post-feminism.

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