Queering Western Feminist Idealism

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Hang in there! We will free you!

G AH! No!

(Evans, 2011)

(Castro-Mendivil, 2009)

FREEDOM

(Freedom of Speech)

International Women’s Day

We Can Do It!

(Rosie the Riveter)

(Global Feminism)

(Global Feminism)
Introduction

This Zine focuses on drawing attention to the argument surrounding western feminism and its somewhat idealistic approach to the “rest of the world’s” feminism. This Zine examines these ideas by presenting one of the main arguments surrounding this divide; this Zine also features feminists such as Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak and Chandra Mohanty. Although feminism is a great way to have women’s status in the world evaluated, there are still many conflicting and delegitimizing practices conducted within feminist circles on a daily basis.

Feminism

- The social, political, and economical equality of the sexes
- The radical notion that women are people too

Feminist Back Story

Feminism is usually broken down into three waves. The first wave, in the early 1900s, came with the suffrage movement; the second wave, during the 1960s and 70s, focused on race, class, and sexual equality; and the third wave, from the 1990s to today, is an evolving movement with diversity in identity and voice at its core.
My Opinion

- Anyone can be feminist and it is not only for women.
- Feminists are not men-hating, bra-burning, ultra-radical, upper class women.
- Feminists come in all shapes and sizes. They all have varied amounts of intelligence, body hair, money, etc.

Something to Think About

Do you believe all people should have equal opportunities? Do you believe that someone who happens to be superior in a specific situation should not take advantage of someone who is weak in a certain situation? Do you believe an increase in domestic violence is wrong? Then you may want to learn more about feminism and may even want to identify as one yourself.

Basic Argument

Feminism should have its own sections; people are entitled to their own space and their own voices. (Meaning no one in a free society should take away someone else’s voice or identity.)

Different branches of feminism continue to separate and isolate feminists from one another. (Meaning the more feminists seem to branch off, the more divided and eventually at odds they seem to be.)
This chart represents my take on the act of exclusion and the delegitimizing of other spaces. If you use the word "Hello" or "Hi" you are choosing to use one of those words at that very moment. This does not mean that there is something wrong with the word you did not choose or that one must be chosen over the other. However, when you chose either "hello" or "hi" and chose only that word and begin to say that that statement is the correct statement and the other word must never be chosen, then that is problematic.

Another way of looking at this argument is by using this chart. The interlinked circles are the basic titles to some of the important branches of feminism. Each of these branches came from being excluded and/or delegitimized from/by another branch. For example, the Queer movement spawned from exclusion within the Lesbian/Gay political movements. At the center of the chart is oppression. It is oppression that both unites and separates these circles. All of the branches represented in the chart deserve their own space and voice, but at what cost?
Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak

Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak is a self-identified “Marxist-feminist-deconstructionist” (Lahiri, 2011) and the author of the essay, “Can the Subaltern Speak?” (1988). In this essay, Spivak raises many important points about the state of western feminism. Spivak writes about people who are considered natives from third world countries. Spivak also talks a lot about what classifies the Other and the inconsistency western imperialists have with this classification. Her work focuses largely on Sati women and how we, in the western world, seem to be getting our ideas about these women from everyone except the actual women themselves. Spivak states:

…covered over by an alien legal system masquerading as Law as such, an alien ideology established as only Truth, and a set of human sciences busy establishing the 'native' as self-consolidating Other (1985, p. 254).

Here, Spivak is arguing that imperialists tend to use their privilege and power to establish their rules, values, and ideologies mostly reproducing what they have been taught. Using this western lens, they then label the Other as inferior and never to be considered as equal to the people in power.

While significant in informing knowledge on global feminism, Spivak’s (1988) essay is often read as alienating, because she states her arguments using complex language and ideas that are difficult to understand even by people who are intimate with feminist theory and practice. In this way Spivak is sometimes seen as reinforcing masculine hegemony, because she elevates herself to the alienating nature of purely academic writing constructed within scholastic male dominated circles. Still, others have combated this argument, saying that this sophisticated thinking is the way in which Spivak is recognized as an accomplished scholar.

Additionally, since we are operating within patriarchy, we can use patriarchal tools, because that is the template we have. We must collude with patriarchy as a means to combat the hegemony that is inherent in our society. Similar arguments are present in works such as Letherby’s Feminist Research in Theory and Practice (2003). Letherby talks about our male dominated culture and the fight among feminists to fit within these academic circles, which use patriarchy as a template to change male dominated institutions.
Chandra Mohanty

Chandra Mohanty is a transnational feminist. In her book *Feminism Without Borders: Decolonizing Theory, Practicing Solidarity* (2003), Mohanty critiques feminism for its implied ideas about feminism in non-western countries. Mohanty attacks so-called “western” feminism and the labels “first” and “third” world. According to Mohanty, “western” feminism is overly concerned with its own agendas and way of thinking about feminism without stopping to take into account other ways of combating other types of feminism and feminist issues. This in itself is an important contribution to “western” feminism, because many people take these ideas for granted, inherently believing that “western” feminism is the only true feminism and that other countries should adhere to these western ways. This thinking is exemplified by the author’s use of quotation marks around the words “first world”, "third world”, and “western,” emphasizing that these are problematic terms that are not necessarily universally used and understood.

Mohanty goes on to say it is noteworthy that “western” feminism is seen as universal and inherent even though “western” feminism itself is divided and often lacks internal coherence and consistency. Importantly, Mohanty affirms that “western” feminist discourse often classifies non-western feminism as “the other.” This implies that “westerners” are not the other, thereby creating a binary, and by default, a problematic divisiveness. It is these types of dichotomies that the feminist movement has been trying to combat. This is significant because, as Mohanty also points out, “third” world scholars then use these discourses to write about and critique themselves, applying narrowly defined categories and ideas that “western” feminism has laid before them. Such practices thereby reproduce patriarchy itself because they perpetuate the dominant ideas that have been passed off as the correct and only way to think about feminism.
Possible Solutions:

Global Feminism: a term “derived from the practices and concerns of feminist activists and scholars of feminist activism around the world” (Ackerly & Attanasi, 2009). It is a global movement concerned with combining many different feminist perspectives and applying them on a global scale. Global feminism is sometimes referred to as transnational feminism and postcolonial feminism. All have similar ideas and goals. Global Feminism is a great start when attempting to tackle the division and inconsistency within feminism. If many different feminist experiences and knowledge would align themselves with the project, the better the outcome would be. Ackerly & Attanasi (p. 545) state many reasons why global feminism is important. According to the authors, this feminism concerns itself with and unites all injustices around the world; it takes into account all experiences from different oppressed groups around the world and tries to combat these injustices by pulling from many different resources. Global feminism seems to focus on women and can place heavy importance on labels, which is problematic because this can lead to further delegitimizing and segregation if the labels form new hierarchies of importance that in turn displace the feminist mission.

Queering Feminism: a self-proclaimed term used to describe the idea that by taking practices that occur in queer spaces and applying them on a larger scale, minists could start to combat some of the segregation and delegitimizing practices within itself. Queer theory is a relatively new field of study. Steven Seidman (2001), in his article “From Identity to Queer Politics”, states: “Whereas gay identity politics aims to normalize being gay, queer politics struggles against normalizing any identity” (p. 326). This means that instead of enabling change for one group of people, we should concern ourselves with bringing about change for all oppressed groups. This would provide us with an interesting way of bringing everyone together while still acknowledging diversity and difference. That is because queer is a term that is universal but also has variety within itself; all queers choose to unite themselves with this label. This is distinct from saying something along the lines of, “we are all different but are all feminist”, because unlike feminists, most queers acknowledge their differences and accept them as a piece of queer space. Conversely, some feminists question what counts as feminism and tend to develop hierarchies of the “most feminist” versus the “least feminist.”
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Further Reading

