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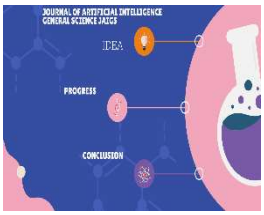

Critique Of Modern Feminism

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ABSTRACT

This paper explores the counter argument for Chapter 3 of *Marriages, Families, and Relationships* by Mary Ann Lamanna, Agnes Riedmann, and Susan Stewart, which deals with the topic of Gender Identities and Families, especially regarding feminism. This paper will provide a general summary, main points, and concepts of the chapter that focuses on feminism. Afterwards, this paper will continue to provide a general social, legal, and cultural climate of the time the book was written versus now (2024), and then reflect on some new information and research that disproves the glorification of modern feminism as done in the book. The critique will demonstrate how modern feminism, under the guise of advocating for gender equality, can sometimes promote racist and sexist agendas. Specifically, this paper will detail the mechanisms through which modern feminism disguises itself, manipulating social perceptions to orient one group as superior over others. This will include an analysis of how certain feminist narratives utilize the concepts of victimhood and social proof to establish a hierarchy of suffering and legitimacy, thereby positioning some groups as more deserving of support and resources than others, based on race, class, or historical experiences.

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Critique Of Modern Feminism

The chapter on "The Women's Movement" provides a comprehensive overview of the evolution of feminist movements, tracing their development from the 19th century to the present day. It begins with the "first wave" of feminism in the United States, which was sparked by the 1848 Seneca Falls convention. This wave primarily focused on achieving women's suffrage, a goal that was realized in 1920.Following this period, there was a significant lull in feminist activism until the mid-1960s, despite some gains for women in education and employment during World War II. The post-war era saw a reinforcement of traditional gender roles, with the media glorifying the housewife and breadwinner models. However, dissatisfaction grew among educated women in the 1960s, leading to the "second wave" of feminism. Influenced by the civil rights movement, this wave challenged traditional gender roles and sought greater equality in employment and education, as underscored by legislation like Title IX.The National Organization for Women (NOW), founded in 1966, played a pivotal role during this period, advocating for educational and occupational opportunities, as well as reproductive rights and same-sex unions. [1]The movement saw significant advancements in how women's roles were perceived in society, particularly among mothers and caregivers. Entering the "third wave" in the late 20th century, feminism became less dogmatic and more pluralistic, addressing a broader range of issues including sexuality, personal expression, and fashion choices. This wave emphasized the concept of intersectionality, acknowledging the varied experiences of women across different races, classes, and cultures. The chapter on "The Women's Movement" offers a predominantly positive depiction of feminism, emphasizing its historical successes and progressive developments from the suffrage victories in the early 20th century through to the advocacy of intersectionality in the third wave. This portrayal highlights key legislative and social achievements, such as the passage of Title IX and the establishment of the National Organization for Women. However, the chapter lacks a critical exploration of the feminist

[1]Lamanna, M. A., Riedmann, A., & Stewart, S. (Latest Edition). *Marriages, families, and relationships: Making choices in a diverse society.* Cengage Learning.

movement's shortcomings and controversies. It does not address significant issues like the exclusion of women of color and working-class women during the early waves, nor does it delve into the ideological rifts over issues like sex work and trans rights in later waves. Furthermore, the narrative glosses over the criticisms related to feminism's impact on men and traditional family structures. By omitting these elements, the chapter presents a somewhat sanitized and uncritical narrative of feminism, failing to capture the complex, multifaceted debates and internal divisions that have also characterized the movement's history.

When "Marriages, Families, and Relationships: Making Choices in a Diverse Society" by Mary Ann Lamanna, Agnes Riedmann, and Susan Stewart was first published in the late 1980s, it entered a society grappling with deeply entrenched legal and cultural discrimination against women. During this time, women faced overt, legalized inequality in various aspects of life. Economic discrimination was widespread, with women often receiving lower wages than men for equivalent work. Employment practices openly favored men, with many job advertisements specifically targeting male candidates, reflecting a market that was overtly gender segregated. Educationally, although Title IX had been enacted in 1972 to prevent sex discrimination in any education program receiving federal assistance, its implementation was still overcoming significant resistance. Financial discrimination was also a recent memory; it was only in 1974 that the Equal Credit Opportunity Act made it illegal to discriminate on the basis of gender in credit transactions. However, the repercussions of prior discriminatory practices were still evident.Reproductive rights were another area where inequality was stark. Women’s access to comprehensive reproductive health services, including contraception and abortion, was heavily regulated and varied by state, despite the Roe v. Wade decision in 1973. Moreover, in the realms of marriage and

divorce, laws generally favored men, complicating efforts for women to secure equitable asset distribution and alimony during divorces.[2]

These were times of clear, legalized inequality. Today, however, the legal landscape has transformed significantly. Laws that directly prevent equality are next to non-existent, and reforms have largely dismantled systemic barriers. Yet, the discourse in media often highlights a false victimhood narrative among white women, with modern feminism sometimes weaponized for perpetuating racist and sexist agendas across different races, classes, and cultures. In other words, mere positive aspects of feminism as portrayed by LaManna, Riemann, and Stewart's is incorrect today. Severalrecent studies indicate that modern feminism no longer pushes for ideologies presented in the book, but rather perpetuates racist and sexist agenda.

For example, the recent Barbie movie, released globally with significant fanfare, aimed to subvert entrenched beauty standards and gender stereotypes associated with the Barbie brand. Despite this, the film inadvertently reinforced problematic stereotypes related to race, gender, and victimhood.[3]Specifically, it portrayed superiority and victimhood in ways that depended heavily on race and hair color, subtly perpetuating traditional notions of blonde superiority. Furthermore, while attempting to empower its female characters, the movie often portrayed male characters less favorably, suggesting a divisive notion that empowerment for one gender comes at the expense of the other. Additionally, the film depicted victimhood based on appearance rather than personal experiences, oversimplifying identity and oppression and potentially encouraging viewers to adopt victim status for attention rather than genuine grievance. This approach undermines the complexity of individual narratives and could hinder true inclusivity and representation.

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[2]Lamanna, M. A., Riedmann, A., & Stewart, S. (Latest Edition). *Marriages, families, and relationships: Making choices in a diverse society.* Cengage Learning.

[3]Jonsson, T. (2016). The narrative reproduction of white feminist racism. *Feminist Review, 113*(1), 50–67. https://doi.org/10.1057/fr.2016.2

Additionally, Kimberlé Crenshaw's seminal work on intersectionality, particularly her 1991 article "Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence against Women of Color" in the *Stanford Law Review*, provides a critical foundation for understanding the layered impacts of race and gender within feminist theory. [4]Crenshaw argues for a nuanced approach that recognizes how different forms of discrimination overlap, rather than portraying all men as universal oppressors, a view that can inadvertently lead to the criminalization of men from minority backgrounds. Her research highlights the dangers of simplifying complex social dynamics into broad stereotypes that not only misrepresent the reality but also exacerbate societal and legal biases against minority men.

The evidence of harmful effects of modern feminism does not end there. Hillary Potter, *in Intersectionality and Criminology: Disrupting and Revolutionizing Studies of Crime* (2015), discusses how intersections between feminist discourse and criminology can sometimes perpetuate racial stereotypes. Potter points out that feminist criminology, when not critically examining its intersectional impacts, might reinforce harmful stereotypes that depict minority men as more likely to engage in criminal behavior. [5]These stereotypes overlook the systemic factors-such as economic disparity, social exclusion, and institutional racism-that contribute to such perceptions and experiences among minority communities.Moreover, the discourse often projects a uniform experience of victimization and oppression that is purportedly shared across an entire group, such as white women, thereby sidelining the individual and varied experiences of others within the group. [6]This not only practices a form of superiority by default but also obscures the real and diverse experiences of oppression faced by individuals from various backgrounds. The assumption that all women face the same forms of oppression erases the specific, compounded challenges faced by women of color and women from lower socioeconomic backgrounds.In

[4] Crenshaw, K. (1991). Mapping the margins: Intersectionality, identity politics, and violence against women of color. *Stanford Law Review,* 43(6), 1241-1299.
[5] Potter, H. (2015). *Intersectionality and criminology: Disrupting and revolutionizing studies of crime*. Routledge.
[6]Mohanty, C. (2003). Feminism without borders: Decolonizing theory, practicing solidarity. Duke University Press.

today's globalized society, where there is a push to maintain cross-cultural and social interactions to ostensibly avoid superiority, these narratives can paradoxically reinforce a subtle dominance. By emphasizing a uniform narrative of victimhood, the discourse can inadvertently uphold the very structures of power it seeks to dismantle, marginalizing the voices of those who do not fit the predominant narrative.

Additionally, a study published in the Journal of Communication Inquiry highlighted how media coverage of workplace equality predominantly featured white women, neglecting the unique challenges faced by women of color in the workforce and perpetuating harmful stereotypes.Empirical evidence from advocacy organizations such as the American Association of University Women (AAUW) sheds light on the impact of exclusionary practices within modern feminist movements. Single-issue advocacy campaigns can inadvertently perpetuate exclusionary practices. A study commissioned by AAUW found that campaigns solely focused on reproductive rights often overlooked the intersecting oppressions faced by women of color, contributing to the perpetuation of systemic inequalities, and hindering progress towards a more inclusive feminist agenda. The research underscores the urgent need for inclusive feminism, as advocated by scholars and activists alike.[7]Ange-Marie Hancock highlights in her studies how mainstream feminist policies, predominantly shaped by middle-class, white perspectives, often fail to address the complexities faced by women of color, leading to a narrow, sometimes exclusionary advocacy. This is compounded by media representation biases, where white celebrities are frequently depicted as the face of feminism, overshadowing activists of color and skewing public perception as noted in a 2017 *Journal of Gender Studies* article. [8]Furthermore, feminist theorists like Bell Hooks and Chandra Talpade Mohanty criticize the movement's focus on predominantly white, Western issues, neglecting critical areas such as immigration and labor rights that significantly impact women of color. This issue is mirrored in the workplace, where, according to Pew Research Center findings, white women have ascended corporate

[7]Taylor, K. Y. (2017). *How we get free: Black feminism and the Combahee River Collective*. Haymarket Books.

[8] Hancock, A.-M. (2007). "When Multiplication Doesn't Equal Quick Addition: Examining Intersectionality as a Research Paradigm." *Perspectives on Politics, 5* (1), 63–79.

ladders while women of color often remain in lower-paid, less secure positions, highlighting a racial glass ceiling that mainstream feminist advocacy has yet to shatter.[9]

The performative nature of modern feminism, characterized by public displays of advocacy that often do not translate into substantial change, has significant implications for understanding and addressing systemic issues like sexism and racism in future societal structures. [10]This phenomenon, where activism is more about public image than actual change, can perpetuate both sexism and racism under the guise of combating them.Firstly, performative feminism often simplifies complex issues into hashtag campaigns or surface-level discussions that do not challenge the deeper systemic roots of discrimination. For instance, participating in women's marches or social media challenges might make individuals feel they are contributing to gender equality, but without addressing underlying attitudes or policies at home or in the workplace, little actual progress is made.[11]Additionally, the performative aspect can lead to a competitive environment where activism is more about personal branding. This can create divisions within communities that should be working together to combat sexism and racism. It can also lead to the marginalization of less visible or "marketable" issues, which are equally important but do not receive as much attention because they do not provide the same social media impact. [12]The future challenge will be to move beyond performative feminism to a more substantive, inclusive, and intersectional approach.[13]

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[9] Mohanty, C. T. (2003). *Feminism without borders: Decolonizing theory, practicing solidarity*. Duke University Press.

[10]Blencowe, C. (2011). Biology, Contingency and the Problem of racism in feminist Discourse. *Theory, Culture & Society, 28* (3), 3–27. https://doi.org/10.1177/0263276410396918

[11]Terborg-Penn, R. (1998). *African American women in the struggle for the vote, 1850-1920*. Indiana University Press.

[12]Blencowe, C. (2011). Biology, Contingency and the Problem of racism in feminist Discourse. *Theory, Culture & Society, 28* (3), 3–27. https://doi.org/10.1177/0263276410396918

[13]Capecod.edu. (n.d.). Retrieved May 3, 2024, from https://www.capecod.edu/media/capecodedu/content-assets/documents/write-stuff/The-Write-Stuff,-Volume-30-2.pdf#page=13

This means integrating an understanding of intersectionality into daily life, ensuring that feminist activism genuinely includes and represents all women and marginalized groups.[14]

To support the critique of modern feminism's potential to perpetuate racism and sexism under the guise of advocating for gender equality, it is essential to integrate empirical evidence from social and evolutionary psychology, particularly focusing on the concepts of social proof and mate choice copying. Social proof is a psychological phenomenon where individuals conform to the actions of others under the assumption that those actions are reflective of the correct behavior. In the context of feminism, this often manifests when narratives of victimhood or empowerment are echoed and amplified across media and social platforms. For instance, research by Robert Cialdini highlights how exposure to popular opinions increases the likelihood of adoption of those views, regardless of their factual accuracy or relevance to the individual's personal experience. This is particularly potent in digital environments where feminist hashtags and viral stories can quickly set a perceived standard for feminist identity, pushing individuals to align with these views not through personal conviction but because they perceive them as socially validated and dominant.

Mate choice copying, a behavior noted in several species including humans, involves individuals preferring potential partners they see being chosen by others. Translated into social movements like feminism, this means that individuals might adopt certain feminist attitudes and behaviors seen as successful or desirable in their social circles. G. Geher's research (2006) on human mate choice behaviors shows that individuals are prone to mimic strategies that are perceived as advantageous for attracting partners. This can be extended to social behaviors within feminist circles where certain stances or expressions—such as vocal advocacy for specific feminist issues—are copied because they are viewed as successful in garnering social approval, attention, or support.

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[14]Murphy, L. B., & Livingstone, J. (1985). Racism and the limits of radical feminism. *Race & Class, 26* (4), 61–70. https://doi.org/10.1177/030639688502600404

The impact of media on these phenomena cannot be understated. Studies on media representation demonstrate how certain feminist narratives are propagated, establishing a "correct" way to be a feminist, which then becomes the model for others to emulate. This often leads to a homogenization of feminist experience, overshadowing the complex, varied realities of women from diverse backgrounds, particularly minorities. This is evident in the way media often highlights stories of white women's experiences as the quintessential feminist journey, inadvertently sidelining the intersectional experiences that might not fit this narrative. Additionally, case studies provide concrete examples of how social proof and mate choice copying manifest in real-world feminist contexts. For instance, the rise in professional and academic careers among women following increased representation in these fields in media and popular culture illustrates mate choice copying, where career choices are influenced by the perceived success of others in those roles.

By integrating these scientific perspectives, the paper underscores how modern feminism, despite its advocacy for equity and inclusion, can fall into the traps of social conformity and uncritical adoption of popular stances. This not only perpetuates existing inequalities but also risks creating new forms of discrimination under the guise of progressivism. The analysis thus reveals the complex dynamics of perception manipulation within feminist movements and challenges the modern feminist narrative to evolve into a more inclusive and critically self-aware discourse.

The challenge for modern feminism, then, is to articulate a critique of patriarchy and gender inequality that avoids reinforcing or creating new forms of inequality. This requires a thoughtful and inclusive approach that acknowledges the individual and intersecting forms of oppression that different people face. By moving beyond a monolithic portrayal of gender issues, feminism can contribute more effectively to advancing genuine equality and justice, ensuring it does not unintentionally perpetuate the very inequalities it seeks to dismantle.

In conclusion, while the textbook provides a foundational understanding of feminist movements, it fails to critically engage with the ways in which these movements can perpetuate acial and sexual inequalities. To move forward, modern feminism must embrace an intersectional framework that rigorously questions its assumptions and broadens its inclusivity, ensuring that all voices are heard and valued equally. This approach will not only rectify the shortcomings identified but also enhance the capacity of feminism to create a truly equitable society.For families, this might involve deeper conversations about the historical contexts of sexism and racism, rather than simply participating in performative activism. It also means modeling behaviors that show a genuine commitment to equality, such as conscious consumption of media that goes beyond mere visibility. By addressing the performative nature of modern feminism, future generations can better understand the complexities of sexism and racism, and more effectively work towards genuine social justice and equality.

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