



HOW WILL THE FIGHT FOR WOMEN'S RIGHTS BY GEN Z DIFFER FROM THE FIGHT BY PREVIOUS GENERATIONS?

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INTRODUCTION

The fight for equality is one that has certainly spanned multiple generations over the course of centuries. One of the more prominent battles for equality has been for the fight for equal rights and treatment under law. In terms of organizing and galvanizing support groups and coalitions – women’s rights movements date back all the way to the 19th century. The history of the battle for women’s equality spans so far over time that it is officially classified into three to four separate “waves” as it is coined (Feminism: The First Wave, 2021). The waves vary in their scope and goals, but they all come down to women fighting for an advanced role in our society in some aspect. Women have historically been treated as second class citizens in many areas of society for decades and that problem has yet to be effectively resolved. Women today still face major societal hurdles such as – reproductive rights, the gender pay gap, and paid maternity leave at work. Given the fact that women still face mounting issues today in society and that these issues have and will continue to evolve and provide juxtaposition with issues of the past, there is the very legitimate question of how will the fight for women’s rights by gen z differ from the fight by previous generations?

The question of the difference between gen Z’s fight for women’s rights and past generations’ fight is one of great complexity. The immense complexity of this issue is one that very much requires an interdisciplinary approach to be capable of effectively answering the question outlined. It is highly unlikely that an answer can be established through the usage of a single discipline. Women’s role in society is one that spans across multiple different facets of life. From politics to the world economy, to their very social status, women maintain a completely indelible mark on our world and way of life. What is likely the best approach to this topic is to address it through the perspective of multiple different disciplines. Gen Z’s fight for

equality versus previous iterations can be assessed and analyzed through the effectiveness of interdisciplinarity's union of characteristics and thoughts.

Upon deep assessment of the many disciplines out there, I have established three different disciplines that are most effective in applicability to the issue at hand in this discussion.

Economic, political, and social perspectives all have deeply rooted importance in the composition of women's fight for equality both past and present. These disciplines are most appropriate for this research because all three constitutes a woman's standing in society. From a woman's fingerprints on the economy, to their political authority in influencing legislation, to their social class standing – all three factors are the determining factors for exactly how much equality women truly have amongst their male counterparts. Given the sheer number of women in the world, the discussion of these three disciplines will help facilitate a solution to the research question at hand.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Beginning with the first wave of feminism, women and supporters of equality in the past mostly dealt with issues related to the legal rights of women. Many of the legal rights fought for were items such as – right to own property, vote, and other rights pertaining to freedom (Feminism: The First Wave, 2021). In a time where there was no television, no internet, or even the radio, women were only able to convene and organize a movement in person. The 19th century is when we saw the first true organized movement of women, though many felt disenfranchised far before that time. Much akin to the original thinking of earlier feminists, the fact is that equality can lead to direct improvement of mankind's moral sentiments (Edited by Shabliy, Kurochkin, & Ayee, 2020). While equality can provide a positive societal effect, inequality can also “undermine the foundations of social balance,” as sociologists describe it

(Edited by Shabliy, Kurochkin, & Ayee, 2020). This is an important assessment of women's role in society provided through a social perspective.

The first wave feminism spanned the course of nearly eight decades, culminating in the achievement of arguably their biggest aim of gaining the right to vote in 1920 for the first time ever. The battle for women's equality was far from over, however. Following the landmark achievement of gaining voting rights and upon the commencement of the second wave of feminism, many saw how much more work was needed to achieve equality. This wave of feminism now entails battles pertaining to the political and social status of women (Feminism: The Second Wave, 2020). Supporters in this era of feminism fought to elevate their status on a social and political basis and had to battle against long established social and political norms.

As Cornwell and Riva allude to in their writing, second wave feminism provided women and supporters with the opportunity to alter gender along with, "the beliefs, behaviours and practices associated with gender difference" (Cornwell & Riva, 2015). The social construct of gender was and is one that has been etched into stone for centuries. Phipps speaks on the roots of social ideology tied to gender and gender roles. From the moment of birth on through much of early childhood, people are placed into roles deemed appropriate for their sex that constructs and determines their interests and preferences from education to careers (Phipps, 2007). The engrained social constructs of society also led to major obstacles faced by second wave feminists in the political realm as well.

Across the pond with American ally the United Kingdom, social gender roles intersect deeply with politics much like here. Second wave feminists sought to disrupt the social norms involved with politics. As Kenny and Evans make mention of in their piece, the biggest obstacle faced in the political realm of inequality faced by women during the second wave is the

“important gatekeeping role of political parties” (Kenny & Evans, 2020). Not only do socially constructed roles place women in positions such as “housewives,” but it also places women on the sidelines and out of leadership positions in our politics. With the systematic omission of women from the workforce as well as positions of political leadership, women have been placed in an incredibly disadvantageous position with little ability to provide the true economic impact of which they are capable. Upon comparison between the 20th and 21st century, the economy saw incredibly low rates of female economic participation as well as leadership with more women having participating beginning in the early 2000’s as opposed to what was seen with the 1900’s (Kemp, 2016). Economists have observed the growing scores of women entering leadership positions as well as increasing their economic participation over the last century as women have slowly gained more standing in the world (Kemp, 2016).

Third wave feminism has been the most recent stage in the movement of fighting for women’s equality. Much of the third wave of feminism has dealt with women’s protection against sexual assault and domestic violence, as well as racism particularly negatively impacting women of color (Feminism: The Third Wave, 2020). Many women for decades have been abused physically, verbally, as well as sexually. Phipps makes mention of how women are underrepresented in some fields such as science, engineering, and technology – not only does situations such as that negatively impact the economy, but it negatively affects society and culture as well. Many women have felt unwelcome in the SET field due to it being viewed as a man’s job which is a direct derivative of society’s long held beliefs of gender roles (Cornwell & Riva, 2015). Women have also shown hesitations in joining similar fields due to toxic cultures that facilitate the systematic sexual abuse and oppression of female employees. Women and

other advocates have sought to combat Third wave feminists' issues through means such as, protesting, striking, and whistleblowing.

Gen Z is likely to be classified into the Fourth wave of feminism (Feminism: The Fourth Wave, 2021). Modern day feminists have already faced challenges unforeseen to the previous generation. The emergence of the transgender community, repealing of the landmark Roe v. Wade ruling, and an expanding pay gap are issues that the previous iteration of feminism did face to such a degree if at all. The transgender community has had an incredibly challenging time with breaking the long-held notions of what constitutes a man and a woman. Given society's penchant to side with historical teachings on gender roles, the transgender community has faced immense hurdles and breaking that societal seal (Cornwall & Riva, 2015). The expanding pay gap is also an extreme issue that is negatively impacting the female community, with especially damaging strains on the economy. Women will not possess the desire to join certain fields knowing that men will be paid more for the same work, in line with the thinking of many sociologists on the issue (Phipps, 2007). The most recent issue plaguing women as well as the upcoming generation is the assault on women's reproductive rights. The previous generation of feminists did not face this behemoth that is the complete overhauling of women's reproductive rights in the repeal of Roe v. Wade. Much of what chipped away at the very foundation of women's reproductive rights has been the male-dominant nature of politics with women incredibly underrepresented and especially in higher up positions of political leadership (Evans & Kenny, 2019).

INSIGHTS POTENTIAL CONFLICT

Upon conducting the appropriate research on this topic there has been little conflict between interdisciplinary insights and perspectives. The only potential conflict observed would

certainly be between the insights of the sociological and political perspectives. Some critics of the feminism movement have pointed out that there are not as many instances of women being discriminated against when it comes to positions of political leadership as it may seem – some of these critics include GOP leadership. Sociologists acknowledge that society has long viewed women as being less equipped for positions of leadership as opposed to men (Phipps, 2007). The fact that we now have more female supreme court justices, governors, and senators than ever – as well as the fact that we have had a female secretary of state and speaker of the house directly counter arguments made by those such as Evans, Kenny, and other political minds in their writing (Evans & Kenny, 2019).

In such an instance we can see a possible point of confliction between the sociological and political perspectives and insights. This confliction only muddles any discussion over the true status of women's leadership roles and ability to be hired based on credentials over mere gender social stereotypes. When we have a society that has long-held views on women being inferior to men in positions of leadership and political power, having barrier-breaking roles in politics and the legal system counter directly to such claims. This confliction of disciplinary perspective insights is at the root of much of the debate surrounding whether earlier iterations of the feminism movement have already achieved the equality sought. The confliction experienced only casts more questions on what role women are to play in the political leadership realm going forward for Generation Z.

COMMON GROUND

The amount of common ground between the different disciplinary perspective insights are plentiful. All three disciplines provide ample evidence to suggest that women have made much progress in the fight for equality but still have a long way to go. Economics show that

women have made great progress in pursuit of equal footing and opportunity with men, but compared to previous generations Generation Z still has obstacles to overcome in pursuit of equality (Kemp, 2016). Women have taken on more roles in politics and positions of political leadership on executive levels, yet and still we have had a complete regression of and assault on various women rights ranging from reproductive rights to transgender rights, to the right to vote. While women have also made progress on a social front in acquiring more power and ability to be heard in society, there is still a battle for complete equality and recognition in our society of the fact that women possess the same life skills and capabilities as men counterparts. The common ground discovered between the disciplinary perspective insights helps to facilitate the complete integration of these insights into a discussion that provide an answer to the research question at hand.

INTEGRATION

With assistance from views by sociological, political, and economic disciplinary perspectives – the picture of what the future fight for equality holds for Gen Z becomes all the clearer. The path that must be taken to achieve equality will likely run through many of the critics who point to enough progress already made in some respects. The progress made so far must not distract from the challenges still posed or even newly arisen. There are numerous differences to point out in the feminism movement from one generation to the next.

The socially engrained view on women and gender roles is one that continues to challenge any notion for the need for further equality for women (Cornwall & Riva, 2015). The advent of social media and its immense power over the youth community provides women and fellow feminists a large new platform to combat the widely held beliefs that have held women back for decades. The use of social media is certainly a difference between the previous

iterations of feminists compared to those of today and the future, past feminists have not had such a powerful tool at their disposal. The grand presence of activists on social media allows Gen Z to even make an enormous impact economically with the ability to affect corporations bottom line numbers – an ability to single-handedly alter the economic landscape even further than their current economic impacts (Kemp, 2016).

Generation Z also must face renewed attacks on the ability to vote. The passage of the Voting Rights Act of 1965 marked what seemed to be a glorious moment for the ability to vote for the groups of people that have long been disenfranchised from the sacred democratic process. The renewed attacks on voting rights in light of 2020 election denialism and disinformation provides a new challenge unforeseen for feminists in the modern age and near future. Though women have had expanded power and roles within government, up to this point it has not been nearly enough to prevent outcomes in state legislative chambers that we have observed (Evans & Kenny, 2019).

The lack of female involvement in politics has also led to the process of dismantling the landmark Roe v. Wade ruling that was years in the making. Not only have women in the past been relatively inactive and unimpactful in the realm of economics, but in politics as well with voter turnout (Kemp, 2016). The new obstacle for women that is reproductive rights has renewed calls for big voter turnout and highlighted the importance of having female involvement in the democratic voting and political process (Evans & Kenny, 2019). Not only is voting and direct involvement in the political process paramount to mounting any sort of campaign against the assault on voting and reproductive rights but so is the economic involvement of activist by funding the appropriate organizations that will fight protect and safeguard the best interests of women and they disenfranchised (Kemp, 2016).

The lack of equality in our political and economic sectors have been a direct result of the sizeable social imbalance created by the social construct of life instilled in the minds of many from an incredibly early age (Edited by Shabliy, Kurochkin, & Ayee, 2020). The fight for paid maternity leave is also another fight pursued by current and future feminists that did not receive as much attention by previous generations of feminists. Given the foundation of gender social constructs, many women have dealt with minimal to no paid maternity leave based on the historical stereotypes of the typical “housewife” role in staying at home and caring for the children while men go out and work (Cornwall & Riva, 2015). With the increasingly modernized views of gender roles and social constructs there has been a recent and foreseeable push to provide women with more occupational rights and accommodations. This new push is a battle primed to be taken up by Generation Z feminists and stands in contrast to previous feminists.

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

Conducting research on this subject matter has certainly revealed many insights into precisely how the fight for equality by Gen Z will differ from their predecessors and how a fight is still very much needed. The introduction of social media and evolving public sentiment on historic social constructs has provided upcoming feminists with tools unforeseen to predecessors. With such tools, feminists can reach audiences of millions across the world all while never having to physically go anywhere. Movements, protests, and marches can now all be initiated and organized with simple social media postings and the usage of hashtags.

Much of the research outlines new challenges faced by future feminists that draw stark contrasts to previous iterations of the movement. The combination of new tools at their disposal and contemporary issues brought to the forefront of the public’s attention works to create an immense juxtaposition with the tools and issues by previous generations. The modern and future

problematic challenges of the gender pay gap, assault on reproductive and voting rights, as well as the toxic social cultures that perpetuate sexual abuse and harassment – all culminate in crafting a foundation of differences amongst the fight by previous feminist movement generations versus Generation Z's feminist movement and what will be known as the true Fourth wave of feminism.

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