

Feminism 2014

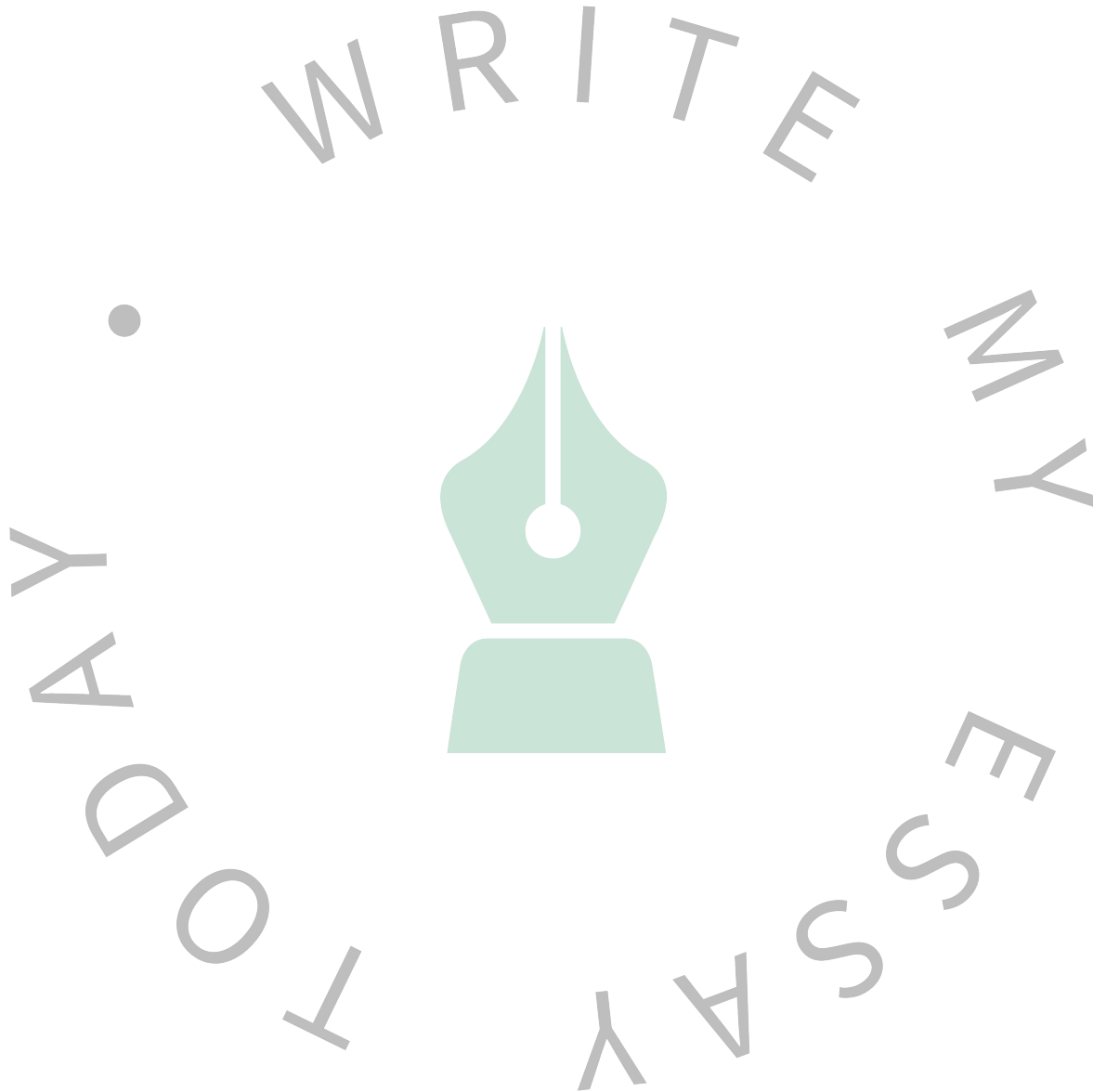
It is likely that, if there is any generally male perspective on feminism today, it is one of confusion. In a relatively brief period of time, feminism vastly challenged gender roles ingrained in Western society for thousands of years, and the late 20th century saw demands for gender equality generating reactions from ridicule to outright fear in men. It is inevitable that any social movement of these proportions has a militant quality to it, and feminism was no exception; as it took hold of American culture, there was in fact a civil rights component to it that inherently defied the male role. Put another way, if women are oppressed, men are the oppressors, and the relevance was supported by a backlash against traditional denials of rights and opportunities for women outside the household. For men, however, the relevance – and integrity – of the movement was questionable. Even today, studies of masculinity sometimes veer toward a reactionary approach to feminism, in that men are surveyed and studied with an expectation of their being oppressed, intimidated, and resentful of the ongoing presence of the movement (Gardiner, 2013, p. 61).

This brings in the enormous issue of postfeminism, a development of feminism that continues to generate controversy, somewhat reverses feminist thinking, and is likely to confuse men. Postfeminism is seen in contrasting ways, just as no true definition exists. It is, however, usually taken as an expanded gender ideology in which gender roles are more viewed as matters of individual choice. This translates to postfeminism being seen alternately as a correct evolution of a more militant feminism, one in which the broader implications of “woman” are addressed, or as a weakening of feminist

principles and a middle-class dilution of the values (Genz, Brabon, 2009, p. 19). No matter the case, the result is a shifting of focus for what women in general may be and desire in social terms. The modern relevance of feminism is at best then more questionable, simply because the movement (ironically) calls into debate more fundamental aspects of gender. Feminism was, and is very much about, defying set models but, as those models are based on cultural conditions, there arose the need to more deeply investigate where rights begin and where basic gender roles end.

Then, postfeminism necessarily brings with it changes in the views of young women who are, of course, at least partially responsible for its rise. It is arguable that, for modern young women, feminist ideals are seen as constricting as the traditional roles feminism attacked. While it is probable that no young woman today would wish to be denied opportunity or viewed as beneath men in status, it is equally likely that they would resist any other effort to cast them in a specific role, and even one of an idealized “free” woman. An extensive amount of research supports this, at least in terms of modern perception, as study after study reveals that young women are generally uninterested in feminism. Various reasons are offered to explain this, one being that generational difference alone counts for the attitude. Feminism was, in plain terms, the cause of their mothers, so they resist joining in. Another is that the aggressiveness of feminism, long supported by media presentations, renders it unattractive to women today, who do not wish to be identified as hostile or militant (Scharff, 2012, p. 7). More likely is that multiple reasons go into the modern aversion to feminism. What may be most interesting in all of this is that no aversion to feminism today would be possible if young women

were not benefiting from the early efforts of feminism. Put another way, today's young women are generally unhappy with feminism because the movement gave them that freedom to dismiss issues of “women's rights” themselves.



References

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Genz, S., & Brabon, B. A. (2009). *Postfeminism: Cultural Texts and Theories*. Edinburgh: University of Edinburgh Press.

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