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Miss Representación: An Analysis of Latino Feminism and Men

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Statement of the Problem

Feminism has in recent years gained an unneeded stigma towards those who are not directly apart of it. Young men although affected by feminism often have negative views, though often not through any fault of their own. The media is a clear instigator of this kind of thinking, and because of that it's almost impossible to escape negativity towards feminism and miss representation in such a technologically oriented society in the United States. However, there is another aspect of this anti-feminism culture I would like to explore. Latino representation of feminism is even further from gaining any traction due to the hyper sexualization and degradation of Latinas in the media.

To put Latina feminism into perspective, there are really very few characters a Latina can play in a modern role aside from a few outliers. The top two of these characters being of course the border-crossing Latina maid who's really only good for cleaning and finding the murder victim, and the red hot spicy Latina with a breathy voice with more attitude than brains. Through the lens of Latin culture, I will be exploring why a negative stigma exists towards feminism and why young men dislike it so much. The best possible outcome of solutions would be to create a way for the media to benefit from projecting feminism in a positive light so that the rest of society may follow.

Background of the Problem

Anti-feminist men's rights activism is on the rise in the media along with misogynist related mass murders occurring more and more frequently in recent years and this may be do to the increase of anti-feminism. According to Dragiewicz and Mann (2016) "In the absence of explicitly antifeminist polices or laws, antifeminists in the state draw upon are pertoire of tactics reflected...and calls for 'balance' that position feminism and antifeminism as similarly valid" (p.1). Anti-feminist groups are using tactics to fight the progression of gender politics of an equal society. However, this is more than just an issue effecting women. The same authors claim, "Moreover, in many countries, antifeminist activism is tied in with nationalist movements that promote racist and xenophobic as well as patriarchal agendas" (p. 2). What was once a problem for women is now bleeding over into a problem for everyone who isn't in the nationalist group. Reikai and Mika (2013) discuss the plight of a man named Elam who made a case against feminism after a gentleman had committed suicide because of his abusive relationship with his wife. After this feminism gained backlash, which then quickly declined into something much worse. Reikai and Mika state, "Elam says that being able to talk about being angry at women, hating women and even beating women on sites like A Voice for Men" (p. 1). The aforementioned examples are more of a group based personal attack on feminism, however there are theories of the basis of antifeminism as well as why men feel personally wronged by the concept.

Wronged white men can at times seem like a contradiction in it of itself, but some groups feel that rather than equality feminism stands for taking away men's rights while giving nothing in return. Eriksson (2013) writes, "Has the feminist influence [turned] into an oppressive Big Sister who comes after any white, heterosexual man who dares to say anything not approved by the guardians of the politically correct?" (p. 249). Eriksson makes this statement as a summary to a commentary of feminism in this era. However Erikson goes on to detail how the feminist message is not one of malicious intent to men, but empowerment and hope to those who need it. The message however is taken in new directions and interpretations that turn the mission statement into a threat. Many of the antifeminist ideals are based in the media and the success of feminism is determined by cultural beliefs, states Himmelstein (1984). This also means that antifeminist ideals are shared in the same way and is more prominent through the introduction of sensationalism in the media that highlights negative attributes about feminism.

The media coverage about anti-feminism is just the tip of the iceberg because the issue goes far deeper because the representation of women is completely misguided and misogynistic, especially for minorities. Gonzales et al. (2013) is concerned with the "Labyrinth" metaphor used to describe how Latinas undergo a stigma and are mistreated and deserve a freedom from navigating said labyrinth. The bottom line is while feminism fights for the equal rights for Women; minorities have an added disadvantage of not only being put down for their gender but also cultural identity. The source elaborates that Latinas in academia undergo scrutiny thus effecting their education. Such conditions occur because culture has a huge impact on society, author Jones (1996) explores this phenomena within the radical feminist movement from a political standpoint. "Social, cultural, political, and technological changes are converging to eat away the structures of male dominance" (p. 34). Perhaps the fight for cultural acceptance will bring on the fight for acceptance of feminism as well.

The remaining questions are what will become of feminism in society; will men feel oppressed because of it, and most importantly; what is to be done now? The future of feminism as discussion by Mansfield (2007) who discusses the concept of "new feminism" stating that the success of the movement depends on "Abandoning the obsession with sex that is such a dubious feature of present-day feminism; while permitting exceptions and encouraging negotiation for different circumstances" (p.8). Mansfield is encouraging less political roles in order to change societies stance on feminism making it a more pervasive yet less threatening concept for the public. The problem with this solution is that today society is so deeply rooted in the media that something more drastic needs to happen in order for feminism to be pushed forward in a positive light. Teitel (2014) claims "Today, Western feminism isn't concerned primarily, as it should be, with civic action, but with overreaction to unsavory elements in popular culture (sexist song lyrics, sexist TV writing) and a never-ending obsession with the identity politics of "privilege." (p.32). Teitel is not shy in her words stating that "internet bickering" and "safe spaces" are not going to solve the problems women face today. Feminism must adapt into something greater, something of strength and grit because that is how change is made; not by doing what is easy but by doing what is necessary. If this method is followed the media cant frame feminists as playing the victim or being uneducated "whiners", not if feminists continue until there's nothing left to fight for and only then will women have won, not to be better but to be equal.

Authors Solutions

Dragiewicz and Mann (2016) suggest Feminist policies need to be involved in politics and need to be backed by laws at the national level. Rekaï and Mika (2013) believe that instead, feminist movements need to focus on common ground to gain traction, like patriarchal agendas do. Erikson (2013) makes a point that feminism needs no clear enemy and should not strategize against certain groups. Himmelstein (1984) gives some contract to the aforementioned solution by stating that positive publicity is key and negative publicity towards groups should be avoided at all times. Gonzales et. Al. (2013) wants education in the Latina community to be a backbone of pro-Hispanic feminism. Jones (1996) coincides with this solution adding that technology and cultural changes should be used to capitalize on feminism in cultural acceptance. Finally, Mansfield (2007) encourages people to make feminism work for them and not to focus on politics in order to make feminism pervasive. Teitel (2014) follows this thinking and encourages people to make feminism strong and forceful, not weak and play into gender stereotypes, and above all, fight for true equality.

Authors' Conclusions

Dragiewicz and Mann (2016) along with Rekaï and Mika (2013) draw conclusions that the anti-feminism movement is grounded in men wanting to take back the power they feel that they had lost through pro-feminism eras. Eriksson (2013) and Himmelstein (1984) introduce the notion that antifeminism is brought on by the media and scrutinized through framing. Gonzales et al. (2013) and Jones (1996) talk about cultural feminism from the Latino perspective, and how politics plays a huge role in the antifeminism approach to minorities. Mansfield (2007) and Teitel (2014) discuss the future of feminism and what needs to be done to adapt the movement to be pushed forward.

Gaps in research and future recommendations:

Dragiewicz and Mann (2016) make interesting comparisons of how the antifeminism closely resembles that of xenophobic views but doesn't delve as much as I think it could have given the subject matter of the article. Authors Rekaï and Mika (2013) focused too much on details of the story and added too much commentary from other authors. Over all Rekaï and Mika had just compiled information from other sources with bias agendas. Authors Gonzales et al. (2013) took an emotional appeal approach while writing the article and used a lot of metaphors for an academic source which did not give enough of a serious tone to the issue at had of Latina feminism and education. Himmelstein (1984) is a source that gives good points and alternative views on the issue but is dated and uses some dated sources as well which does not make the information less valid, but a little less relevant. The critique for Teitel (2014) is mainly that it seemed to be going off topic or rant on points a bit, but over all it is the most impactful article that shifted my view on the subject matter even if I don't agree with all of the authors viewpoints, I learned.

The Solution

As many things as money can buy, people's thinking and opinions are not one of them. While it is believed through the feminist community that getting rid of patriarchal ideals will fix everything, it won't, not alone anyway. The true solution is education, give women the means and the confidence to continue education, rise above the norms and show the world that to be a woman is to be a person, to be a woman is to be strong and smart like any other human being can be. If there is anything that scares a powerful man, it is an equally powerful woman. Additionally if I had all the resources I could ask I would not only provide a good education for women, I would also use money to spread the message that feminism is positive, it's not supposed to be against anyone, to be a feminist is to believe in equality. Education for women of all nationalities, and backgrounds, give my Latina counter parts the chance everyone deserves. I would pay movie producers to go against misogynistic movie clichés. I would shape the media to stop exploiting women and the men that support them, to not pressure young men to be "macho" and put girls down. I would change how the world sees feminism, if I had unlimited resources.

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