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Technical Report · November 2022

DOI: 10.13140/RG.2.2.32420.96640

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The Differences Between Radical Feminism and Black Feminism

"We have had to fight and still do, for the very visibility which also renders us most vulnerable, our blackness. For to survive in the mouth of this dragon we call America, we have had to learn this first and vital lesson – that we were never meant to survive." – Audre Lorde

This quote by Audre Lorde explains it all in relation to black feminism. "When it comes to other important issues concerning the sexual politics of black womanhood…black feminists have found it almost impossible to say what has happened to black women." (Brown, 2001). There are six distinguishing themes of Black feminism: the dialectical relationship between oppression and activism; diverse responses to the challenges of sexism, racism, and other forms of oppression facing Black women; the heterogeneity of the Black women's standpoints; the importance of dialogue in knowledge creation; the dynamic nature of Black feminism; and feminism as being connected to a broader social justice agenda. (Collins, 2009).

Regarding intersectionality, Jennifer C. Nash is one of the most prominent feminists discussing such and the argument behind the intersectional framework which is necessary for inclusion, equality, and acceptance. "The fetishization of intersectionality suggests the existence of a kind of feminist theoretical utopia, a promised land where the "etc." that marks so much scholarly writing on identity "race, gender, class, age, ethnicity, etc." will be replaced by an attention to all difference… ultimately, this plea for increased intersectionality suggests that 'attending to' or naming difference will undo hegemony and exclusivity within our own ranks. While naming difference certainly allows feminists to bear witness to power's operations, it does little to analyze the mechanisms by which these systems of exclusion are replicated and re-created" (Nash, 2017). Many women who are black will not join the feminist movement because

they are “unable to bond” with racist white women (Hooks, 1989). Black women must be able to “separate feminism as a political agenda from white women or [they] will never be able to focus on the issue[s] of sexism as it affects black communities” (Hooks, 1989).

In contrary, radical feminists aim to achieve a balance of power between men and women. Radical feminism occurred during the second wave around the 1960s. However, many believe that radical feminism is on its death bed. Feminist theory was categorized into strands such as: liberal, radical, socialist, and postmodern/poststructuralist. (Pettman, 1997; Sylvester, 1994; Whitworth, 1998). There is a known amalgamation of radical feminism with cultural feminism, specifically regarding biological determinism of sex-differentiated human characteristics (Tong, Rosemarie, Botts et al., 2017). As such, this results in radical feminism being so woman-centered, it neglects how men are also affected by structures of patriarchy, such as male violence, abuse, and sexual exploitation (Peterson, Spike, Runyan, et al., 1993; Tickner, Pettman, 1996).

Radical feminism is often found to be essentialist, universalizing, and unwilling to acknowledge the differences between women on race, class, sexual orientation, etc. This type of feminism is often found to be “old” or passé, specifically relying on ancient modes of analysis that simply cannot account for the complexities surrounding modern human existence (Steans; Jones, 2010). Feminism has been said to be the “struggle for female freedom in a male supremacist society” (Morgan, 1996). Analytically, the difference between black feminism and radical feminism and other types of feminism is in the extent to which “the social system based on the power struggle between the sexes – i.e., patriarch, the rule of men in which women are subordinate category – is considered to be the root of all further oppression, inequality, and injustice” (Vukoičić, 2013).

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