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### Social Media and the Sociological Imagination

Over the course of many years after the invention of the internet and the first phone, many have mixed opinions on whether social media has helped or worsened society. Although both sides are extreme, they both agree on the concept that social media has affected society in numerous ways. Currently, the main worldwide topic is gender and gender norms. Both men and women have been divided for many decades, and in many cases, cannot see eye-to-eye. Without a doubt, both genders have different world experiences that have been made public, and been brought to light with the use of large social media companies and platforms, and helped inform many. Opinions of cultural and societal gender norms vary from decade to decade, and social media has furthered the show to many positives and negatives of displaying beliefs of gender. Through Instagram, Facebook, Tiktok, Youtube, etc., influencers are able to share their understandings and views on what it is to be a man or woman. This has come with some benefits. It also, however, created stereotypes and negative reactions, further dividing, not only men and women but also causing conflict within each gender.

Throughout history, women were known to get married, have kids, and stay at home to care for their children. Their rights were limited and were property to their male relatives and husbands. When men were drafted to serve in World War I, the only people to take over their jobs were women. Although certain jobs, like bank tellers and clerks, were meant for men, the government needed employers, so they hired women. This led to the realization that women are able to complete work that was “manly” and many women enjoyed working rather than being a

stay at home mothers. “Women’s employment rates increased during WWI, from 23.6% of the working age population in 1914 to between 37.7% and 46.7% in 1918...” (Striking Women) They were, however, given a lower wage although completing the same work. Women would start to protest for better wages and working conditions, ultimately opening chances for women to fight for more rights and equality and introducing the idea of feminism to combat aggressive masculinity. The first wave of feminism has affected women’s lives both in society and in Western culture and would be the foundation of modern feminism.

Although feminism has given women more recognition for their worth in the eyes of society, it didn’t stop many from creating stereotypes and misogynistic remarks and sharing them through the use of television. The creation of magazines, television, and mass media did provide benefits for women. The “portrayal of women shaped perceptions of the feminine ideal even as attitudes about women and their roles in society changed.” (Maurer 2016) With the new invention of the internet, many people were able to voice their beliefs about feminism, and it provided to be a place where women and girls were able to relate to many women’s experiences and become knowledgeable of new ways to apply feminism to their lives and spread the movement to further create equality. Certain gender issues like unequal wages, gender-based violence, and abortion restriction have further brought women together to rise and strike against misogyny through the use of social media platforms to spread advice and create events. Feminists, however, have evolved into hating masculinity, rather than solving the gender gap conflict.

The big dilemma of anti masculinity has mainly arisen due to many influencers and celebrities feeding their audience that the world would be a better place if there was no masculinity and that everyone should be feminists. They use the examples of many male

celebrities who live by the use of toxic masculinity. Men have responded that feminism does more harm than good. Men argue that feminists' goal is to better advocate gender equality, yet turn a blind eye when men are the victims of gender inequality. "Men may not talk about mental health issues due to stigma, shame, and societal expectations. Men are often raised from a young age to be tough and unemotional, which can make it difficult for them to seek help." (Kirthy 2023) This can lead to many disorders like anger issues and depression— ultimately suicide being one of the leading causes of death. "In 2020, men died by suicide 3.88x more than women; White males accounted for 69.68% of suicide deaths in 2020." (American Foundation for Suicide Prevention 2022) Feminists blame men's assertion of power as the real reason for the gender conflict, yet they do not realize that their environment, either society, culture, or a dysfunctional family, forced men to possess toxic masculinity. With these beliefs and easy access to social media, many are able to spread toxic masculinity/femininity and input the wrong ideas of blaming the opposite sex and seeing the other as inferior to the younger generations that are the future. The younger generation will be blindsided and live by the wrong morals and values and spread them to others, further restarting the cycle. Although they have their differences and experience a variety of different sexism and conflicts, both genders need to understand that one gender does not have it worse than the other, in order for change to be implemented.

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