

The Idea of Postmodern Feminism: An Attempt at Postmodern Feminism to Face a Dilemma

Mincan Li^{1,a,*}

¹*Philosophy, University of Birmingham, Birmingham, The United Kingdom*
a. mxl815@alumni.bham.ac.uk

**corresponding author*

Abstract: As the guiding idea of the third wave of feminist thought, postmodernism has offered a new mode of thinking for the development of feminism. This essay uses the idea of postmodern feminism as an introduction to the dilemma that postmodern feminism faces in not being able to provide practical help in the practical sense of the women's political movement. At the same time, an attempt is made to find a way out of the dilemma. The essay uses references and analysis of previous literature to conduct the research. It is concluded that one way in which postmodern feminism faces a dilemma is through the interpretation of postmodern feminist theory in different contexts. Postmodern feminism plays a varying role in different social contexts. In other words, postmodern feminism has a real role to play in achieving real 'equality' between men and women when most women have already acquired equal political and social status with men.

Keywords: postmodernism, feminism, discourse, dilemma, equality

1. Introduction

Postmodernism has long been seen as an enemy or opponent of mainstream culture due to its emphasis on multiculturalism in the context of the hegemony of European civilization. It was not until the mid-15th century that the situation began to change. People began to realize that the hegemony of western civilization was coming to an end and that it was necessary to reach out to distinct cultures in ways other than through the onslaught of rule and subjugation [1]. As a result, postmodernism slowly began to become a prevailing trend of thought. Meanwhile, there are various conflicts and interpretations of postmodernism by different scholars, and it has its undeniable basic thought, that is, "scepticism".

Doubt is the dominant theme of postmodernist thought. It casts doubt on traditional ideas of truth, reason, similarity, and objectivity, as well as the ideals of universal development and emancipation and the final justification for any one system, overarching story, or explanation. [2]. At the same time, these doubts are not relegated to the realm of nihilism. On the contrary, the scepticism of postmodernism represents its destructive effect on the whole tradition of Western thought and its constructive significance for the future and for reality. These influences, which give life and creativity to postmodernism, have affected many fields. Feminism is one of them.

Postmodern feminism endorses the diversity, plurality, and difference of things in postmodernism. At the same time, because postmodernism is a critique of traditional thought, it destroys the existing 'Male-centrism' way of thinking. Therefore, the purpose of postmodern

feminism influenced by this is to dismantle the existing concept of gender and deconstruct all previous theories of gender relations. Moreover, the theoretical emphasis of postmodernism on plurality and differences has led feminism to value the differences between different individuals, groups, and subject positions. This provides the theoretical support for feminism to ‘overturn’ the traditional gender binary in practice.

In this case, the theme of this essay is to discuss the main ideas of postmodern feminism and the dilemmas it faces. To make the discussion more plausible, the author will use an overview of theories, along with a critical analysis. In this way, the author attempts to find an effective solution to the dilemma faced by postmodern feminism. That is, through a mutual revision between feminism and postmodernism, this study hopes to make the theory of postmodern feminism become a more effective support for the struggle for women’s rights.

The main ideas of postmodern feminism will be set out in the first section. This part will also focus on the challenge of postmodern feminism to other schools of feminism, for example, liberal feminism, socialist feminism, radical feminism, and others. This will be used to demonstrate the fundamental impact of the main ideas of postmodern feminism on the ideas of other feminism schools. The second section will address the dilemmas that postmodern feminism theory is facing. Then in the third and final part of the main section, the author will try to find a way out of the dilemma by analyzing the theories of postmodernism and postmodern feminism.

2. The Ideas of Postmodern Feminism

To understand the ideas of postmodern feminism, the first step is to comprehend the thoughts of postmodernism. The core thought of postmodernism has already been mentioned above, while it is not sufficient for understanding its whole idea. Thus, this section will be divided into three parts. First is the idea of postmodernism. Secondly is postmodernism in the theory of feminism. Thirdly, postmodern feminism is challenging other theories of feminism.

2.1. The Idea of Postmodernism

According to Frost and Elichao [3], postmodernist thought proposes that there is not one fundamental truth, but a multiplicity of subjective and personally constructed truths. These realities are shaped not only by subjective experience, but also by what is socially, culturally, orally and in writing. Postmodernist thinking thus moves away from the empiricist pursuit of objective truth [3]. At the same time, postmodernism rejects grand narratives, shifts attention away from the typically arbitrary and artificial binary categories such as “man” and “woman” and back to the relative experience of each individual. It challenges the accuracy of categorizations and presumptions based on cultural, social, and class disparities, and it disassembles these socially constructed groups to examine the variability in individual experience within them [3].

In addition, as one of the leading figures of postmodernism thought, Michel Foucault’s ideas on rights and discourse analysis provided some support and help for feminism. Regarding the analysis of power, Foucault’s focus is not on rights per se, but on power relations and the operation of power relations [4]. At the same time, he points out that power is not an entity, but only some relations. He argues that power relations are not static and closed internal cycles, but open texts. The enforcement of power relations comes from countless places and from all the emitters rather than being limited to specific objects and particular domains [5]. Foucault points out that power is not about acquiring something or the thought of combating and oppressing some force. It operates from a myriad of perspectives, a myriad of individuals, organizations, and groups, in a variety of relationships [5].

In conducting his analysis of power relations, Foucault makes frequent references to theories of discursive power. He places terrific value on the mechanisms that produce and sustain discursive

power. In the course of his discussion of discursive power theory, he refers to the concept of 'performative' [6]. To clarify this concept, he argues that a 'discourse' is not just a symbolic language but a dynamic totality that is integrated into a discourse [4]. Discourse is not self-regulating but is placed within a complex social system. At the same time, discourse is subject to social and historical conditions. Behind these factors, the concept of 'power' begins to take shape [4]. As a result, Foucault demonstrates how speech is made up of power and vice versa, and how the power exerted is latent in the practice of discourse. Hence, in practice, speech already has power, and displaying discourse is exercising power [6]. Foucault's analysis of power is a powerful weapon for deconstructing grand narratives by abandoning traditional theories of power and questioning the conventions of history. It also provides a theoretical basis for postmodern feminism.

2.2. Postmodernism in the Theory of Feminism

Foucault's analysis of discursive power above brings about a shift in thinking for feminism. Foucault argues that power is controlled and shaped by a network of discursive relations, and that if women are to take power and change the position of the 'other' that they have been in for so long, they ought to substantially alter the status of women's speech, or at least its marginalization. Moreover, feminist philosophy has changed concurrently with the rise of postmodernist ideas. The first topic is concerned with the problem of female differences. The second involves a reevaluation of sexual (and physical) distinctions, which refers to the understanding and implications of the difference between men and women, notably in terms of methods based on the presumption that women are equal to men or that women are different from men. The third examines subjectivity, or what it means to be a "woman," in terms of women's own perspectives on creating their identities and the potential influence of the unconscious (such as desire) on these processes [7].

Postmodernism also offers new modes of thinking for feminist thought, i.e., integrative modes of thinking, including those that assign value to women; those that reject binaries and promote pluralism, those that are political in difference (which include differences in race, ethnicity, class, gender, and sexual orientation), and those that value the other [8]. At the same time, postmodernism offers the possibility of exploring women's experiences and behaviors in the context in which they occur rather than within a presumed hegemonic normative framework that treats women as dysfunctional group members [3]. Postmodern feminism is committed to critiquing all those modern theories that are so lofty, grandiose, and all-encompassing, attempting to build a theory of community, i.e., establishing political and moral principles based on the experiences of local, specific groups while rejecting causation and macro-social conceptions [9]. This makes postmodern feminism and, like postmodernism, challenges other genres of feminism that have preceded it.

2.3. The Challenge Posed by Postmodern Feminism

Both conservative and liberal feminist views on sexuality have been criticized by postmodern feminism, which contends that neither has been able to transcend the oppressive paradigm of power, which is seen as something that is taken by specific processes and groups [10]. The traditional model of repression is based on the underlying premise that male sexuality is always associated with violence, lust, objectification of objects, and orgasm as the primary goal, while female sexuality is associated with nurturing, reciprocal intimacy, and an emphasis on non-genital pleasure. Male sexuality is forced, violent, and repressive of female sexuality. It serves as a model of instinct and restraint.

With regard to the depiction of power, postmodern feminism challenged both liberal feminism and Marxist feminism. Power, according to liberal feminism, is the ability to govern and take advantage of everyone [11]. According to Marxist feminism, power is the authority that the ruled

class has over the ruling class [12]. But nonetheless, postmodern feminism views power as distributed and decentralized rather than centralized in an organization or a particular group. In the past, women were more concerned with issues than with discourse. For instance, they were less worried with their own marginalization in historical documents and more concerned with issues like low salaries, rape, and female infanticide. [1]. The women's movement should "paradigm shift" from an emphasis on things to one that is more discursive, according to postmodern feminism. Because, in postmodernism, speech equals power [5].

3. A Dilemma of Postmodern Feminism

The sharpest critique of postmodern feminism and postmodernism points to its apolitical or post-political tendencies [13]. This argument, which originates from the feminist movement, is predicated on the notion that postmodernism deprives women of their rights in connection to all humanity at a time when they have only recently begun to be subjects of their own rights. Why is the subject's very definition being called into question at a time when women are rising up to become subjects rather than history's objects and when many people are starting to name women by their own names (women have traditionally stayed silent)? The question is a profound one - women have been treated as passive objects of history, and just when they are aware of this and want to be subjects of history but have not yet done so, the subject is denied. At the same time, the difference between traditional feminism and postmodern feminism is also a difference in the way in which identity and the subject are perceived. Postmodern feminism calls for 'deconstruction' and sees the subject as fluid and changing. Even the use of the concept of 'femininity' invariably reinforces the essentialist mindset that the distinction between the sexes is innate and fixed. The concept of 'femininity' has meant different things at different points in history [14]. The goal of feminism is to strive to be the subject of discourse and ideology. And the postmodern feminist construction of the 'subject' structures feminist political activity. If postmodern feminism's infinitely decentralized luxury and pluralism of perception and theory are followed, then politics and the political activity that feminism has always insisted on will come to an end and dissipate [2].

Thus, the assertion that one cannot be both a feminist and a postmodernist. This is because postmodernism is relativist and anti-political. This point of view contends that while postmodernism can be incorporated into some feminist theories, it cannot be fully accepted or used to alter feminism. Whilst postmodern feminism thinks of itself as being quite political, postmodernism is post-political. As postmodernism holds that there is no such thing as truth, problems can only be settled by the use of force (domination) [14]. Postmodernism deconstructs and dissolves the subject, denying or destroying the possibility of building any positive agency in the world. Moreover, without a subject with an experimental history and gender, there can be no feminist consciousness and no feminist politics [15].

What is extremely seductive to feminism is Foucault's interaction between power and sexuality. However, some feminists warn their colleagues against this temptation, for the price of feminist surrender to Foucault's powerful discourse would be the depoliticization of feminism. Postmodernism is by no means a theory of political action, and to be tempted by it would be to stop thinking of women as forming an oppressed group under patriarchy, much less their emancipation. This critique puts postmodern feminist theory in a dilemma. As theory itself, it questions the existence of theory and deconstructs the concept of 'gender'. It makes the feminist position collapse in the struggle for political rights and status.

4. The Way in Which Postmodern Feminism Approach to Answering the Dilemma above

It is undeniable that the critique of postmodern feminism above is indeed plausible, but that does not mean that postmodern feminism cannot find an appropriate way to respond. Indeed, the aim of feminism was to gain more political rights and political status for women in a bid to achieve equality between men and women. In order to achieve this aim, feminism of all schools of thought provided theoretical support for feminist political movements. Moreover, women have made significant gains evident in their non-stop struggle in recent decades. Women began to have the right to vote, to vote and to express their opinions in the political arena. Women were able to enter the workplace, work in the same jobs as men, and be paid for their efforts. However, why is it still impossible to say that the feminist movement has succeeded today? Why is it that society and women still cannot confidently claim to have achieved so-called “gender equality”? Perhaps the reason is that even though women have gained some political rights and can fight for the same jobs as men, hidden inequalities still exist in all aspects of life. For example, when some companies recruit, they still prefer to give offers to men rather than women. When women enter a company, they are paid less than men, even if they work in the same market and in the same position as men. Moreover, it is clear that society’s hidden requirements for women are much harsher than those for men. Society promotes a template of what women are ‘supposed’ to be like, without equally presenting a template of what men are ‘supposed’ to be like. In this context, a movement that focuses on the political economy of women’s political and social advancement is not relevant. The deconstruction of the concept of ‘gender’ in terms of fundamental discursive power, as advocated by postmodern feminism, has become effective in this context.

Postmodern feminism hopes to change the cultural shackles that have been attached to women through the analysis and deconstruction of discourse. Furthermore, in this way, it brings women’s discourse to the center stage of history so that the world can hear the voices of women. Postmodern feminism’s deconstruction of gender focuses the public’s attention on a particular person rather than on a particular man or woman. In doing so, it simultaneously dissolves the stereotypes of men and women, thus achieving true ‘equality’.

At the same time, the postmodern feminist deconstruction of the ‘subject’, while in one way dissolving the position of the feminist political movement, may also have different expectations of the feminist movement in different contexts. In a context where most women have now gained political power and status, the feminist movement needs more to do away with inherent prejudices and stereotypes about the female subject. The existence of the subject, however, still leaves women in a position of ‘gazing’.

Thus, the postmodern feminist response to the dilemma is still tinged with the postmodernist idea that the theories of postmodern feminism may be less applicable in a context where women are still in dire need of political rights and social status. However, where women have acquired political rights and social status, postmodern feminist theory can help to achieve a real sense of ‘equality’ between men and women.

5. Conclusion

This essay describes the influence of postmodernism on feminist thought and the main ideas of postmodern feminism. Included in this is a critique of postmodern feminism against other feminist schools, and a critique of postmodern feminism by other feminist schools. Of these, the reference in the text to the dismantling of postmodern feminism’s position on feminist political movements is undeniable. It is also something that the feminist political movement needs to be always aware of. However, this article explains what postmodern feminism can give when faced with this dilemma. That is, the role of postmodern feminism varies in different social contexts. When postmodern

feminism first appeared, the feminist movement concentrated more on the struggle for women's political power and social status. At this time, postmodern feminism was more of an ideological wave and hardly helped or even combated the feminist political movement in any real sense. However, with women having mostly gained political power and social status, the feminist movement should turn to the dismantling of inherent social prejudices. Moreover, this is where postmodern feminism can provide an effective theoretical underpinning.

In this essay, the author tries to give a method for postmodern feminism to cope with the dilemma. However, frankly speaking, this approach is the result of a varying construction of the role of postmodern feminism thought based on a variety of contexts. It does not change substantially from the theory of postmodern feminism itself. The author argues that an improvement of the theory of postmodern feminism itself should be the next direction of research.

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