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Describe the key features of one significant sociological perspective and how they relate to the study of contemporary society.

Feminism is a prominent and ever-present topic in today's society, permeating various aspects of our lives such as daily conversations, social media and news outlets. It has become ingrained in our education system, where we are taught that men and women have become equal in contemporary society. However, this notion of equality has not always been the norm.

For generations, feminists have been vocal about different aspects of feminism, including education, representation and perceptions of society and media. Back in 1792, Mary Wollstonecraft argued for equal education for women, challenging the notion that women should be relegated to the role of housewife. She advocated for women to be seen as equals and companions to men (Wollstonecraft 1792). This can be considered as the first wave of feminism.

The second wave of feminism in the 1960's focused on reproductive rights, workplace equality, and fighting gender based violence. It challenged traditional gender roles and worked towards legislative changes and societal shifts. The third wave, emerging in the 1990's, aimed to be more inclusive, recognizing diversity based on factors like race, class, sexuality and ability. It used new mediums like the Internet and blogs, engaged in intersectional feminism, emphasized consent, body positivity and the rejection of rigid gender norms. Both waves played vital roles in advancing women's rights and continued to shape the fight for gender equality.

Another important aspect of feminism involves exploring the concept of gender as a social construct rather than being solely determined by biological factors. This perspective challenges the traditional understanding of gender as something innate or fixed and instead recognises it as a product of societal norms and expectations.

By deconstructing the notion of gender as a fixed biological characteristic, feminism aims to create a more inclusive and equitable society for all individuals, regardless of their gender identity. In this exploration of feminism, I will delve into these key aspects and evaluate their

relevance in modern society. I will also examine how these aspects have influenced contemporary thinking towards feminism. Specifically, I will focus on the impact of discrimination in society, the persistent gender inequalities and the significance of identity politics.

My aim is to provide an analysis of feminisms key aspects and their connection to the modern world, shedding light on the ongoing struggle for gender equality and a change in society.

Throughout history, women have faced oppression and have had to fight for their rights, such as access to education and, the right to vote and equal employment opportunities in a male dominated fields like engineering and construction. While there has been progress since World War 2, with more women being employed, the gender gap in employment still persists (Blau, 1984).

Discrimination can manifest in various settings, including education, voting and also the criminal justice system. It can also take different forms, such as overt, covert and subtle (Rosette, Akinola and Subtle, 2018). In the workplace, women often face challenges of being treated fairly. Some are passed over from getting a promotion due to being pregnant or their desire to start a family, regardless of their skills or qualifications. This further perpetuates the discrimination by resulting in lower earnings for women who take time away from work (Blau, 1984).

Discrimination in the workplace still remains a problem today, extending beyond the issue of women being employed. A study by the PEW Research Center found that approximately four in ten women have experienced gender discrimination at work. This includes unequal pay for the same job, being overlooked for assignments and promotions and facing repeated small instances of bias (PEW, 2017).

Sexual harassment, being a form of discrimination, poses significant challenges in terms of defining its boundaries. It encompasses a range of behaviours, such as inappropriate comments, lewd looks, sexual jokes and gender based comments directed at females (Hersch, 2015).

In the past sexual harassment was largely overlooked, reflecting a lack of awareness and understanding of its detrimental impact on individuals and on the workplace. However over time society has become more educated about the issue, leading to the recognition of sexual harassment as a violation of human rights in the workplace.

As awareness grows, the principles of feminism, which advocate for gender equality, are becoming increasingly embedded in contemporary society. Feminism serves as a guiding ideology that sets boundaries and strives for a more equitable and inclusive environment. Although progress has been made, it is important to acknowledge that achieving true gender equality is an ongoing journey.

By analysing the evolving understanding of sexual harassment and the increasing influence of feminism, it becomes evident that society is gradually moving towards a more positive future. However, it is crucial to continue educating individuals and raising awareness to address the complexities surrounding sexual harassment and discrimination. Discrimination against women continues to be a significant issue in our society today, affecting their opportunities, financial well being and mental health.

Examining the key aspect of gender inequality, education stands out as a critical issue, particularly in certain parts of the world. It remains an important aspect of feminism, as access to education is not equal to all genders globally. While first world countries like the United Kingdom and the United States provide educational opportunities for all genders, with mandatory education up to the age of 16 and 18 respectively, many countries still restrict female education.

In some areas such as South Sudan, three quarters of girls are unable to attend Primary school, depriving them of an essential foundation of their future. Afghanistan faces a similar challenge, where boys are more likely to attend school than girls due to cultural and societal norms. In Burkina Faso, only one per cent of girls complete secondary school, limiting their prospects for higher education and better opportunities. Ethiopia provides another example, with two in five girls being married off before the age of eighteen, denying them the chance of an education and perpetuating their dependence on husbands for financial support (Butler, 2006).

These instances reveal the stark reality of gender inequality, where feminism struggles to exist in these regions. Women are often treated as objects or possessions, subjected to a patriarchal society that views them inferior to men. This inequality intersects with various other modalities, including class, ethnicity, sexuality, race and regional factors (Judith Butler, 2006).

Addressing these disparities is crucial for achieving gender equality on a global scale. It involves not only providing equal access to education but also challenging social norms, promoting cultural change and empowering women to pursue educational opportunities. By recognising and addressing the intersectionality of gender inequality, we can work towards a

world where all individuals, regardless of gender or background, have the same opportunities to thrive and succeed.

Examining the countries where men and women have equal opportunities to pursue further education raises the question of whether our society truly advocates for gender equality, regardless of skill and talent. It also brings attention to the distinction between equality of opportunity and equality of outcome, which is an important factor to consider in this context.

Equality of outcome refers to a scenario where individuals with similar skills and talents are treated equally, without considering factors such as gender. However, proponents of equality of outcome argue that it is necessary to prioritise gender and minority representation over skills and talent, in order to achieve equality of race, gender and ethnicity in various fields. This perspective suggests that the best person for a job may not necessarily be chosen for their qualifications, but rather to ensure diversity and representation. This has been discussed by Jordan Peterson, a key figure in Psychology, he argues that focusing on equality of outcome can lead to potential drawbacks, as it may disregard individual abilities and competencies, potentially undermining meritocracy. He contends that it is important to value and consider skills and talent, alongside efforts, to promote diversity and representation (Peterson, 2018).

The discussion of surrounding equality and of opportunity and equality of outcome is complex and multifaceted. It underscores the ongoing debate about the best approach to achieving gender equality and insuring a fair and inclusive society. Striking a balance between recognizing and addressing historical inequalities while also valuing individual skills and talents remains a challenge that requires thoughtful consideration and open dialogue. One of the possible explanations as to why feminism, among other movements and theories, can sometimes acquire a negative reputation is when radical feminism takes on an aggressive and illogical stance. When certain individuals within the feminist movement adopt extreme measures or engage in irrational arguments, it can overshadow the broader goals and principles of feminism. This can lead to misconceptions and misrepresentation of feminism as a whole. It is important to recognise that radical feminism represents a specific subset of the feminist movement and does not reflect the diverse range of perspectives and approaches within feminism. By understanding and acknowledging this distinction, we can better appreciate the multifaceted nature of feminism and avoid generalisations that undermine its overarching goals of gender equality. Ultimately the goal is to create a society that provides equal opportunities

and access to education, employment and other areas, while recognizing and valuing the diverse experiences and contributions of all individuals, regardless of gender.

Another crucial aspect I would like to look into is the notion of gender as a social construct in relation to identity politics. This perspective raises important questions about the way gender is understood and experienced, as it challenges the traditional belief that gender is solely determined by biological factors. However, it is worth noting that this perspective has been subject to debate, with some arguing that it can be problematic, as it shifts the focus from biological markers to personal choice in defining one's gender identity.

One of the most famous statements on this topic comes from Simone de Beauvoir, who famously asserted, "One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman" (Simone de Beauvoir, 1949). This quote

encapsulates the idea that gender is not an innate quality, but rather a social construction shaped by societal expectations, norms, and conventions.

In our society, everything seems to be assigned a gender, from the colours we wear to the music we listen to. These seemingly innocuous choices are often used as markers to categorise individuals within the gender binary. Society has created a framework where certain clothes, hairstyles, and even interests are associated with specific genders. Consequently, deviating from these predetermined norms can lead to scrutiny and criticism from society, as these external signifiers have been established as social cues for understanding gender.

However, it is important to recognise that this construction of gender is not universal or fixed. Different cultures and historical periods have varying understandings of gender, and individuals may have diverse gender identities that do not align with societal expectations. By understanding gender as a social construct, we can critically examine the ways in which gender norms and expectations can limit and restrict individuals, and work towards creating a more inclusive and accepting society that recognises and respects the diverse range of gender identities and expressions.

By viewing gender as a societal construct, feminists aim to shed light on the ways in which ideas about gender are shaped, reinforced, and perpetuated by cultural beliefs, social institutions, and power structures. They argue that gender roles, behaviours, and identities are not inherent or biologically determined, but rather learned and enforced through various socialisation processes.

This understanding of gender as a social construct allows for a more nuanced analysis of the complexities surrounding gender. It recognises that gender is not a one-size-fits-all concept, but rather varies across different cultures, historical periods, and social contexts. It also emphasises the importance of considering how other social factors, such as race, class, and sexuality, intersect with gender to shape individuals' experiences and opportunities.

However, it is important to note that the idea of gender as a social construct is not without its critics and debates. Some argue that biological factors, such as hormones and genetics, do play a role in shaping gender identity, while others contend that the influence of social factors is more significant. These discussions and disagreements contribute to the ongoing dialogue within feminist theory and activism.

Feminism remains a relevant and vital movement in today's society. It has evolved over time, addressing various aspects such as education, representation, discrimination, and the notion of gender as a social construct. Feminism has made significant progress in advocating for gender equality, challenging traditional gender roles, and fighting against discrimination and inequality.

However, there are still challenges to overcome. Discrimination against women persists in various areas, including the workplace, where women face unequal treatment and opportunities. Sexual harassment remains a prevalent issue that society is gradually becoming more aware of and addressing. Gender inequality in education is another important aspect, particularly in regions where access to education is limited for girls.

The debate surrounding equality of opportunity versus equality of outcome raises important questions about how best to achieve true gender equality while considering individual skills and talents. It is a complex issue that requires ongoing dialogue and thoughtful consideration.

The understanding of gender as a social construct has provided a framework for examining the ways in which societal norms and expectations shape our understanding of gender. By recognising and challenging these norms, we can work towards a more inclusive and accepting society that embraces the diversity of gender identities and expressions.

Feminism continues to be a driving force for progress and change. By continuing to advocate for gender equality, challenging discriminatory practices, and promoting inclusivity, we can strive for a society that values and respects the rights and experiences of all individuals, regardless of their gender.

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