Television Criticism From a Post Feminist perspective: Reclaiming Critical Language and Cataloging post Feminist Traits

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Abstract

The term "feminism" encompasses a complex range of interpretations, which are further muddled by the diverse meanings attributed to its multiple modifiers. The geographical location of the writer may occasionally exert influence in this context.The media strategically employs a range of feminist perspectives to expand its reach, while certain opinions within feminism provoke intense debates within academic and activist circles. Discussions pertaining to postfeminism can be found in several sources, including People magazine articles and the popular television show Dawson's Creek, which prominently features stressful adolescent drama. These journals have a broad readership, although they often neglect to assist their audience members who may lack familiarity with theoretical debates in comprehending the significance of terminology such as "post feminism" or discerning their acceptable usage. The issue of nomenclature remains a significant barrier to the advancement of feminism in the early twenty-first century, as highlighted by Sarah Gamble in 1999. Nevertheless, feminism continues to hold significant value as a perspective that acknowledges and addresses modern forms of oppression and injustice.Theoretical ambiguity around the notion of "feminism" mostly arises from the evolving theoretical ideas and the shifting lived realities of women since the apex of second-wave feminism. The inevitability of progress and alteration is evident. Feminist media researchers have observed alterations that extend beyond mere belief systems.

Introduction

The utilisation of the theoretical framework proposed by third-wave feminist theory, sometimes referred to as "postfeminism," could potentially provide valuable insights into the analysis of the dialogue,

character depictions, and broader cultural context depicted in the present television show.Nevertheless, there exists a considerable amount of discourse and even certain instances of resistance towards the concept of postfeminism. Postfeminism is a term employed by authors in many publications, including popular magazines such as People, as well as scholarly literature, to elucidate present-day gender-related concerns. The absence of agreement over commonly used terminology remains a significant obstacle in the discourse surrounding third- and post-feminism. The terms possess little significance until the user provides a clear definition for them. Media academics express significant worry with the absence of consensus on postfeminism, as media criticism offers comprehensive theoretical examinations of this phenomenon. Academic scholars frequently employ this specific terminology, as opposed to more unwieldy phrases such as "new, new women," in order to precisely identify changes in feminist discourse and portrayals of women. However, there remains space for debate over the exact characteristics of these changes and their implications for women's autonomy.

During the transition from the 19th to the 20th century, a considerable amount of perplexity and deliberation arose over the concept of feminism within the realm of American public sentiment. It appears that we have entered a novel linguistic realm wherein phrases possess the ability to convey both a certain meaning and its contradictory counterpart. Furthermore, within the context of feminist theory and prevalent discussions around feminism, labels hold greater significance than the underlying theoretical framework. This theoretical framework encompasses the examination of several concepts such as feminism, anti-feminism, postfeminism, the third-wave of feminism, feminism among women of colour, and power feminism. Socialist or Marxist feminism, liberalism, radicalism, and cultural feminism are all illustrative instances of second-wave feminism, which continue to persist in contemporary society.

This essay examines the significance of reclaiming the term "postfeminism" as a descriptor for modern achievements in feminist theory and representations. Additionally, it delves into the diverse applications of postfeminism within the field of contemporary media studies. The extent of my research on the history of feminism in American television, as well as the diverse scholarly methodologies employed in the United States to analyse feminist discourses and representations within this medium, is substantial prior to delving into the subject of postfeminism. In this analysis, I will examine Ann Brooks's (1997) divergent interpretation of postfeminism, wherein she regards postfeminism as a developed and politically significant kind of feminism. The focus will be on exploring the potential application of Brooks's perspective in the context of media criticism. When appropriately employed, the concept of "postfeminism" can serve as a potent instrument for discerning and assessing emerging patterns in the portrayal of women and feminist ideologies.

The portrayal and representation of feminism in television.

The prevalence of feminist themes in contemporary television has led to a greater emphasis on the evaluation of female portrayals on American television within the realm of feminist critique, as opposed to the explicit examination of feminist language. Approximately three decades ago, the inaugural television series to incorporate feminist discourses emerged. However, even during that time, the treatment of this subject matter was characterised by a sense of prudence, frequently veiling the political aspects of feminism by portraying the "new woman," a term that encompassed both consumerism and feminism.

Julie D'Acci (1994: 67) asserts that the emergence of advertisements targeting "working women" throughout the 1970s played a pivotal role in further enhancing the appeal of white, middle-class women to marketers. Historically, television advertisements have predominantly targeted women due to the perception that females hold primary responsibility for making household purchase decisions. According to

Byars and Meehan (1994), the employment position of women experienced an upward trajectory during the 1970s and 1980s, coinciding with improvements in the economy and advancements in technology. Marketers postulated that the purchasing power of working mothers surpassed that of stay-at-home mothers due to their relatively higher discretionary income. According to Lauren Rabinovitz (1999: 145), feminist programming emerged in the 1970s due to two significant factors: the empowerment of women and the classification of consumer preferences into discrete categories. Additionally, she asserts that television programmes with a focus on feminism experienced notable commercial success during that time period. The cultural phenomenon of women's liberation during the 1970s prompted advertisers to perceive that television programmes targeting the highly sought-after demographic of upper-middle-class working women could incorporate more progressive ideologies and portrayals of women compared to previous on-screen depictions (Rabinovitz 1999: 146). According to Rabinovitz, American television producers sought to create programmes that could be easily associated with their desired target audiences, which they would then present to advertising agencies. Consequently, adopting a broad thematic framework centred around "feminism" emerged as an appealing strategy.

Television programmes such as Rhoda (1974–1988), Maude (1972–1988), and The Mary Tyler Moore Show (1970–1977) endeavoured to address the experiences of women navigating social, economic, and familial challenges by employing comic narratives imbued with a purposeful thematic undertone. This event represented the initial instance in which feminist concepts were openly deliberated.

The portrayal of feminism on television frequently mirrors the feminist movement that arose in American society during a period of reevaluation of women's roles. This movement commenced with the establishment of the "new woman" archetype, as described by Robert Deming as a departure from traditional domestic roles towards more assertive and independent positions (1992: 203). Mary Richards

epitomised the paradigm of a triumphant and self-reliant woman who navigated her path in society without relying on male assistance to establish her identity and purpose. Due to her status as a working woman, she perceived her employment as more than a mere precursor to marriage or a mere substitute for it. Consequently, marriage held a significance beyond being only a precursor to employment in her perspective (Dow, 1996: 24).

Throughout the course of the series, Mary engaged in romantic relationships with other individuals. However, the portrayal of her character consistently presented her as unable to effectively balance a committed partnership with her professional responsibilities at WJM-TV. Conversely, the actress assumes the roles of both a maternal figure and a filial character within the context of the program's fabricated nuclear household. The photograph's significance is readily apparent due to its cultural context. From 1970 through 1977, Mary made frequent appearances on American television, aligning with numerous significant occurrences of the second-wave feminism movement in the United States. The advocacy of liberal feminism played a vital role in advancing women's rights within the professional realm, ultimately facilitating their inclusion in various sectors of governmental administration.

Mary Richards' portrayal of the "new woman" during the 1980s and 1990s depicted a someone who was single, childless, and focused on their professional pursuits. The Richards prototype has seen opposition from a recent surge of assertive female protagonists who concurrently identify as feminists, as a counterargument to conservative allegations that feminism is inherently opposed to the concept of family. This individual is occasionally labelled as a "superwoman" due to her ability to effectively balance the traditional responsibilities associated with motherhood and achieve professional success for women, without making concessions in either domain. Consequently, this particular manifestation of feminism integrates elements from both the household and professional spheres into one's

personal identity. The notion of the superwoman as a feminine archetype was not originated or actively advocated by second-wave feminists. However, this portrayal was employed as a counterargument to the conservative assertion that feminism opposes traditional family values. Television programmes depicting the dual roles of women as both employees and mothers presented a portrayal of women as diligent individuals who effectively balanced their professional commitments alongside their familial obligations, so demonstrating their dedication to both spheres. Several television shows that fall within this category include Scarecrow & Mrs. King (1983–1987), Who's the Boss (1984–1992), The Cosby Show (1984–1992), and Growing Pains (1985–1992).The number 8. As the superwoman image faced critiques in women's magazines and self-help books, the television medium started depicting the concept of work-life balance as a multifaceted and evolving process including negotiation. Illustrative instances of such television programmes encompass those situated within the upper class, such as thirtysomething (1987–1991), the working class, exemplified by Roseanne (1988–1997), and the middle class, as depicted in Baby Boom (1988–1989). The number 9. The portrayal of feminists and the advancement of feminism exhibit an inherent subtext pertaining to race and socioeconomic status. The portrayal of women and feminism on television, exemplified by iconic characters such as Murphy Brown and Mary Richards, was groundbreaking within the context of white, upper-class individuals. However, it is important to recognise that these representations were not novel for working-class women and women of colour, since they had already been depicted in similar ways in earlier periods of history. Recognising the different nature of women is crucial, particularly in light of the historical pushback that has sought to confine women to domestic roles, a phenomenon mostly experienced by affluent white women from the upper and middle classes. Following the proactive pursuit of employment by these affluent women, apprehensions

regarding the potential ramifications of female participation in the labour sector started to emerge.

The fluctuation in the number of women employed in the United States remained very stable from the mid-1960s to the mid-1990s, despite significant changes in the types of occupations women pursued within the economy.

Before the establishment of the contemporary women's liberation movement in 1965, around 40% of women in the working-age demographic were engaged in employment. According to the Statistical Abstracts of 1971, 1997, and 1998, the percentage experienced a modest increase from the low 50s in 1985 to the low 60s in 1997. Due to this rationale, the extensively debated "women's movement" failed to substantially augment the proportion of women inside the working-age population. The catalyst for this transformation can be attributed to the increasing presence of women in the labour sector.

The prevailing cultural narratives criticised affluent white women of the upper-middle class for pursuing employment outside the home and entrusting the care of their children to daycare facilities. Conversely, public discourse and popular media representations depicted working-class women, particularly those belonging to racial and ethnic minority groups, as indolent welfare recipients who exploited the welfare system. In order to secure electoral support, conservative proponents advocated for a reduction in women's working hours and a decrease in government subsidies, as highlighted by Wahneema Lubiano in 1992. Despite considerable progress in the inclusion of women of colour in feminist discourses and media, the prevailing presence of white career women in contemporary portrayals perpetuates the notion that feminism primarily caters to white, middle-class women.

Countdown: 10 - Feminism in Television Studies

Feminist television criticism encompasses a diverse array of academic disciplines, which include, but are not restricted to, the examination of

female viewership, analysis of traditionally gendered genres such as soap operas, exploration of representational strategies employed in the portrayal of women, femininity, and feminism, investigation of the historical involvement of women in the television industry, and examination of the political and economic dynamics surrounding women as television consumers. Within an extensive corpus of scholarly literature exploring American television programmes, researchers utilise three main methodologies to analyse the ways in which television scripts convey feminist ideas. Frequently, there is an emphasis placed on a specific type of character, typically female characters, or on the distinctiveness of a single character. Examples such as the examination of the emergence of the "new woman" during the 1980s (Deming 1992: 204), Kathleen Rowe's depiction of the "unruly woman" in 1995, and the utilisation of a typology of character categories for character comparisons (Anne K. Kaler 1990) serve as noteworthy illustrations. An alternative method for studying feminist material is the examination of narrative strategies and thematic elements employed in television shows or episodes that address feminist concerns. Two scholars, Judith Mayne (1997: 87) and Danae Clark (1990), have conducted academic research on the strategic use of narrative form, representational codes, and visual structures in feminist texts. One alternative perspective involves examining feminism as the central focus and scrutinising it as a thematic element, metaphorical construct, or communicative framework. The examination of feminism as a discourse or thematic framework may yield insights into its portrayal and identify repeating features within popular media, such as television shows. Given its efficacy in integrating postfeminist viewpoints, a comprehensive examination of the third approach is warranted. This analysis will primarily concentrate on fundamental discursive patterns, preceding an exploration of noteworthy scholarly contributions.

Multiple researchers (Blum, 1983; Dow, 1996: 1313, 38; Rabinovitz, 1989) have observed that US television literature predominantly

portrays liberal feminism.The number eleven. Valerie Bryson's theoretical framework for categorising feminism prioritises the significance of public rights over power dynamics inside the family or at the individual level. The source asserts that it possesses unwavering belief in its objective and maintains an invincible stance (1992: 3).The number twelve. According to Linda Blum, the portrayal of liberal feminism is prevalent due to the significance of liberalism as a cultural discourse. On the other hand, Rachel Rabinovitz contends that a political feminist depiction needs to align with the economic foundation of American television.

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