



THE ILLUSION OF CHOICE IN FEMINISM

BY NORA ZIMMERMANN

deemed unsupportive, “bad” feminist. But the political and social calls for change halt.

TikTok users recently took part in discourse surrounding the validity of a “stay at home girlfriend,” when user @KendelKay detailed a day-in-the-life of a woman with no job, financially dependent on her boyfriend. A screenshot of her diary she posted mentions a “lack of fun/social life/excitement,” as well as being “unsatisfied with my looks,” which brought on satirical parodies about how destitute the stay-at-home life must be.

The range of choices in daily life from wealthy to poor, from white people to people of color vary extremely. In choice feminism, a wealthy white woman who chooses not to buy luxury beauty products or clothing may be praised for her rejection of societal norms, whereas a woman of color purchases said items out of survival, because of current and past culture’s relentless torment. “Nothing can be more elementary and universal than the fact that choices of all kinds in every area are always made within particular limits,” says Indian philosopher Amartya Sen. Not every choice reflects agency.

Sexual liberation and the reclamation of derogatory terms are key components of third wave feminism. The concept of choice being equivalent to power is dangerous frequently, particularly regarding sex work. A choice-feminist may argue that sex work remains dignified so long as the worker has willingly volunteered herself for it. However, there are boundaries to choices.

In Nivedita Menon’s *Seeing Like a Feminist*, reports show that 71% of women have willingly chosen sex work as a means of financial stability. But upon further investigation, it was found that incentives to do so were low pay from other jobs, the seasonal nature of work, and the inability to support dependents

from low-income jobs. Notably, a majority of sex workers come from impoverished and economically disadvantaged families. If prostitution is a last resort as opposed to other less economically appealing options, is it even a choice?

Choice feminism allows all parties involved to become complicit with oppression. Pretending that the choices society influences women to make are all genuinely their own will not suddenly rescue them from oppression. The social context of one’s life is much more relevant respecting life choices than the individual themselves.

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Bright eyed and bushy tailed, new age feminists with eye-liner “sharp enough to kill a man” are taking part in a fashionable contemporary feminism known as “choice feminism,” wherein life choices are justified and politically correct. Modern celebrities and everyday women make bold choices to sexualize themselves at heightened levels. But how much of this sexualization is their own free will, and how much comes from desire to conform to the patriarchy comfortably?

At surface level, the warm embrace of tolerance and acceptance is inspiring, but with time, recedes into a lack of critical debate that leads to political hampering. Choice feminism cultivates neoliberal virtues, such as individualism and consumerism, while simultaneously minimizing the urgency of collective action against systemic gender inequality.

Choice feminism arises in three ubiquitous critiques of feminism; feminism is too radical, feminism is too exclusionary and feminism is too judgemental. In the absence of these elements, the difficulty of demanding change of friends and family eases in the face of being

