

The struggles faced by women in achieving gender equality

[Sociology](#), [Feminism](#)



Burning of the Bra

The establishment of the United States as a country was a result of counter-hegemony, defined as a resistance against existing status quo in order to effect changes in social and political norms. Throughout the course of American history, similar counter-hegemonic movements were organized, among them the women's liberation movement. In Robin Morgan's "No More Miss America," she represents the voice of contemporary feminists to protest the image of Miss America, a symbol of oppression in a patriarchal society under which both men and women are restricted to traditional gender roles. Considered to be part of the second-wave feminism in the United States, these feminists aimed to achieve more than de jure gender equality, as was the main focus of first-wave feminism. Through an enumeration of ten demands of the feminists, "No More Miss America" denounces the practice of objectifying women as well as the act of conforming to one particular beauty standard, hence reflecting the ultimate goal of attaining de facto gender equality.

Nonetheless, due to the long history of gender formation that existed in the United States, structural inequality such as the lack of women in the workforce, the difference in earnings between the two genders, and the scarcity of educated women had become potential obstacles that stood in the way of obtaining gender equality. Considering the small number of women that could have worked in the police or in the media, even though the feminists specifically asked to be "busted by policewomen only" and "only newswomen will be recognized," their demands were most likely met

with scorn from anti-feminists (180). Subsequently, though “no burning of bras took place...this image was constructed by the media...as [a] radical repudiation of the status quo” (179). The negative connotation behind bra-burning as becoming braless and embracing sexuality trivialized the feminist movement, where women were seen as merely seeking for male attention. In addition, the wage gap between men and women was also a structural obstacle. Implied by the quote “...sympathetic men can donate money as well as cars and drivers,” the feminists did not have enough resources to support the movement themselves (180). As a symbol of inequality, the wage gap also suggested the inferiority of women. Lacking the financial means to elevate their social standing, it follows that it would be difficult for women to achieve gender equality. Last but not least, the scarce number of educated women, who were more likely to protest against sexism, further obstructed the process of realizing de facto gender equality. In one of the demands, for instance, it was written that “personality,” “articulateness,” “intelligence,” and “commitment” were “unwise,” and having none of these qualities was expected of women (181). Therefore, most contemporary older women would have shared these qualities and expected the same for women of the younger generation. However, as a result of this traditional view on how women should act, it slowed the growth in number of educated women, hindering the progress of gender equality.

The historical and ideological origins of these structural obstacles can be found in the history of gender formation in the United States. On the one hand, pseudoscience was once used as a method to justify the inferiority of

women. Scientists such as Charles Darwin characterized women as relying more on instincts rather than rational thinking, and women were likened to animals. On the other hand, the ideology that men should be masculine, being more intelligent than women and being able to support the family, brought about these structural obstacles as well. Deviating from these qualities would have resulted in being labelled as non-masculine, and consequently, women were kept from becoming educated and going out to work. Both measures took away women's ability to be self-dependent, which produced the structural obstacles that impeded the advancement of gender equality.

In response to the structural obstacles that stood in the way for women to achieve gender equality, "No More Miss America" proposes to change the status of women by first changing the mindset of women themselves. As inferred from the ten demands of the feminists, the contestants seemed to fully accept the conditions required of them to become Miss America, whether it be becoming "Mindless-Boob-Girlie," "Mascots for Murder," or "a walking commercial" (180). The critical and provoking tone served to rouse not only other feminists who shared similar perspectives to protest against sexism but also the contestants. The contestants would therefore realize the unfairness of the beauty pageant, and reject the idea of embodying such qualities of commodification themselves. Additionally, the feminists attempted to inculcate the notion that there is not a definite beauty standard to which all women must adhere themselves to. In the ten demands of the feminists, for example, some addressed the contradiction that there had

never been a “ true Miss America—an American Indian,” along with other non-white Miss Americas, and others addressed the idea of age discrimination (180). By encompassing all women who were marginalized by the one beauty standard, the feminists fought to disillusion the contestants from thinking along the lines of “ win-or-you’re-worthless” competitive reasoning (180).