Wokeism: A Critical Analysis of its Impact on Society and the Emergence of Woke Capitalism

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ABSTRACT

Wokeism, a social and political movement centred on intersectionality and social justice, has garnered both praise and criticism for its impact on contemporary society. While proponents of wokeism argue that it fosters empathy, raises awareness of social justice issues and promotes solidarity among marginalised individuals, critics contend that it stifles open discourse, prioritises identity politics over merit and contributes to an "us versus them" mentality. This article explores the complexities of wokeism, its strengths and challenges, the impact on society, and the emergence of Woke capitalism. Recommendations for policy makers, institutions, and employers to address the challenges of wokeism are also discussed. Engaging in critical analysis and open dialogue is essential for understanding wokeism's multifaceted nature and its implications for society, ultimately leading to a more equitable and just future.

Keywords: Woke-ism; Intersectionality; Social justice; Cancel culture; Identity politics; Open discourse; Diversity; Empathy; Woke capitalism; Corporate social responsibility

INTRODUCTION

Wokeism, also referred to as "woke culture," has emerged as a prominent social and political movement in recent years. This movement is centred on issues of social justice and inequality and is characterized by its focus on intersectionality, the interconnected nature of social categorizations such as race, gender and class as they apply to a given individual or group. While wokeism has been lauded for its efforts to address systemic injustices and promote greater empathy and understanding, it has also faced criticism for its potential to restrict free speech, stifle dissenting opinions, and prioritise identity politics over individual merit [1].

LITERATURE REVIEW

Hindrance to Open Discourse

One of the primary challenges of woke-ism is its potential to hinder open discourse and meaningful debate. In an environment where individuals are hesitant to express their opinions for fear of being labelled as insensitive or intolerant, it becomes difficult to engage in productive discussions about complex social issues. Consequently, this reluctance may impede progress towards addressing and resolving these issues [2].

Focus on Individual Experiences

Another challenge of wokeism is its tendency to focus on individual experiences and identities rather than collective goals. Although it is essential to acknowledge and address issues related to discrimination and marginalization, it is equally important to concentrate on broader social and political concerns. A singular focus on individual experiences may limit the potential for systemic change (Figure 1) [3].

Figure 1: The complex interactions between one's individualistic experiences and those of collective society.

The following three case examples typify these challenges

The BBC and the Naga Munchetty controversy: In 2019, BBC Breakfast presenter Naga Munchetty faced criticism for expressing her opinion on President Donald Trump's controversial tweets that suggested four congresswomen of colour should "go back" to their countries. The BBC initially ruled that Munchetty breached impartiality guidelines; however, following public backlash, the ruling was reversed. This incident highlights the challenges of wokeism when it comes to maintaining impartiality in media while addressing sensitive issues [4].

The New York times and James Benner resignation: On the other side of the pond, 'the New York times and the James Bennet resignation' illustrated the challenges of wokeism, as reported by Rutenberg. In June 2020, James Bennet, the editorial page editor of the New York times, resigned after facing backlash for publishing an op-ed by Senator Tom cotton titled "send in the troops." Critics argued that the op-ed promoted militarised force against protesters during the nationwide demonstrations following George Floyd's murder. Many employees expressed their concerns, arguing that the publication of the piece put Black staff members in danger. This case demonstrates the challenge of wokeism, where open discourse and diversity of thought may be stifled by concerns of causing harm or offence [5].

National Health Service (NHS and the bame pay gap: The NHS has faced scrutiny for the pay gap between white and Black Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) employees. In 2020, a report revealed that BAME staff in the NHS were paid significantly less on average than their white counterparts. This issue has sparked conversations around race and equality within the organisation, highlighting the challenges of wokeism in addressing disparities in pay and representation. Nationally UK has had several industrial actions due to pay issues and working conditions with the latest nursing pay increase offer for 5% by the government currently being considered by unions and members.

Impact of Wokeism on Contemporary Society

Increased awareness: Wokeism has had a multifaceted impact on contemporary society. On the one hand, it has contributed to increased awareness of important issues related to social justice and equality, such as police brutality, sexual harassment, and income inequality. By drawing attention to these issues, wokeism has facilitated greater empathy and understanding for marginalised and discriminated individuals [6].

The #Metoo movement: The #MeToo movement, which gained momentum in 2017 after several high profile cases of sexual harassment and assault in the entertainment industry, is an example of the impact of wokeism on contemporary society. The movement shed light on the widespread nature of sexual misconduct and the power dynamics that enable it. Wokeism contributed to the movement's success by amplifying the voices of survivors, raising awareness of systemic issues and prompting changes in policies and workplace culture (Figure 2).

Figure 2: depicts women protesting for the #MeToo movement which bought into light the injustices experienced by many due to the abuse of power by high profile individuals and furthered by deep-rooted systemic issues.

The gender pay gap reporting: In the UK, the 'gender pay gap reporting', comes to mind. The UK government mandated gender pay gap reporting for companies with more than 250 employees in 2017. This requirement has increased transparency and awareness of pay disparities between men

and women, prompting discussions and actions to address the issue. Wokeism's influence in raising awareness about gender inequality has played a role in pushing for policies like these [7].

Diminished diversity of thought: On the other hand, wokeism has also led to negative consequences, such as a diminished diversity of thought and a reluctance to engage in meaningful debate (Figure 3). Additionally, it has contributed to an "us versus them" mentality, wherein individuals are often pitted against one another based on their identities and experiences.

Figure 3: Highlights one of the core issues societies that society is facing diminished diversity of thought. Thoughts and views are being restricted, with individuals avoiding debates and discussion due to the fear of being cancelled.

Raising awareness: Wokeism possesses several strengths, one of which is its capacity to raise awareness of critical social justice issues. By highlighting issues related to discrimination and marginalisation, wokeism has fostered increased empathy and understanding for historically oppressed individuals. Furthermore, it has drawn attention to systemic issues pertaining to inequality and injustice.

Consider the Grenfell tower tragedy. The Grenfell tower fire in 2017, which claimed 72 lives, led to widespread discussions about social inequality, housing safety, and the government's responsibility to protect its citizens. Wokeism has helped amplify these discussions, leading to increased public pressure for government action and policy changes to address social inequalities and ensure safe living conditions for all [8].

Another typical case example would be the black lives matter protests. The Black Lives Matter (BLM movement, which advocates for racial justice and the end of police brutality against black people, exemplifies the strengths of wokeism. The movement gained global attention following the deaths of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor and Ahmaud Arbery in 2020. Woke-ism's focus on intersectionality and social justice allowed the BLM movement to highlight systemic racism and

police violence, ultimately sparking conversations and changes in policy worldwide.

A lot is going on in academia in relation to wokeism, for instance, the subject of "Decolonising the curriculum in UK high education institutions" is gathering momentum. Several UK higher education institutions have initiated efforts to decolonise their curricula. These efforts aim to challenge the Eurocentric focus of traditional academic programs and ensure that diverse perspectives and histories are included in the curriculum. The university of Cambridge, for example, launched a project in 2017 to examine the curriculum's representation of non-European authors and ensure the inclusion of diverse voices. Woke-ism has played a role in raising awareness about the importance of including diverse perspectives in education [9].

DISCUSSION

Community and Solidarity

Another strength of wokeism is its ability to create a sense of community and solidarity among those who share similar experiences. By uniting individuals who have been historically marginalised or discriminated against, wokeism has cultivated a sense of belonging and connection (Figure 4).

Figure 4: Depicts solidarity and a sense of belonging, which is a huge element of wokeism. It fuels a sense community, especially for marginalised and minoritized groups.

Fostering Open Discourse

To address the challenges and limitations of wokeism, several measures can be implemented by policy makers, institutions and employers. First, fostering an environment conducive to open discourse and meaningful debate is paramount. This can be achieved by encouraging individuals to express their opinions respectfully and constructively. A fitting case example here would be the Starbuck's diversity and inclusion initiatives [10].

In response to a 2018 incident where two black men were wrongfully arrested at a Philadelphia Starbucks, the company closed its stores for a day to conduct anti-bias training.

Starbucks has since implemented new diversity and inclusion initiatives, including setting goals for increasing minority representation in leadership positions, providing resources for employee-led diversity groups and committing to transparency in their progress. This example illustrates how organisations can address wokeism's challenges by fostering open discourse and promoting diversity and inclusion. In the UK, the Lloyd's of London and initiatives; the Lloyds of London, the insurance market has launched several initiatives to promote diversity and inclusion in the workplace, including the Dive in Festival, an annual event focusing on diversity and inclusion in insurance. Lloyd's has also introduced a gender balance target of 35% women in leadership positions by 2023 demonstrating how organisations can take steps to address the challenges of wokeism.

Emphasising collective goals: Secondly, it is critical to prioritise community collective goals over individual experiences. While recognizing and resolving discrimination and marginalization issues is critical, it is also vital to concentrate on broader social and political concerns in order to affect systemic change.

Prioritising diversity of thought: Lastly, it is crucial to prioritise diversity of thought and perspective. This can be accomplished by establishing a workplace culture that supports and encourages different points of view and experiences [11].

Woke Capitalism

Wokeism's problems have also given rise to a phenomena known as Woke Capitalism. This word refers to the practice of companies or firms utilising their brands, such as Nike and Ben and Jerry's, to take a stand on social issues such as racial inequality and global warming. While some see these initiatives as a significant step forward in corporate social responsibility, others see them as a cynical marketing technique, claiming that these businesses prioritise profit over genuine social progress.

Unilever's sustainable living plan: Unilever, a British-Dutch multinational consumer goods company, launched the Unilever sustainable living plan in 2010. The plan aimed to reduce the company's environmental impact and improve social conditions, including sourcing 100% of agricultural raw materials sustainably and enhancing the livelihoods of millions of people. While Unilever has been praised for these efforts, critics argue that the company still has a long way to go in fully addressing social and environmental issues, illustrating the complexities of Woke capitalism [12].

Nike's dream crazy campaign: Another suitable and widely publicised case example which typifies woke capitalism was 'Nike's "dream crazy" campaign. In 2018, Nike launched its "dream crazy" advertising campaign, featuring Colin Kaepernick, the former NFL player who protested racial injustice by kneeling during the national anthem. While the campaign drew praise for addressing social issues, it also faced criticism for potentially exploiting a genuine issue for commercial gain. This case exemplifies the complexities of

Woke capitalism, where companies take a stance on social issues while facing scrutiny over their motives and sincerity [13].

CONCLUSION

The concept of wokeism has had a profound impact on various aspects of contemporary society, including popular culture, politics and business. As we continue to navigate these complex issues, it is essential to critically evaluate the strengths and limitations of this ideology. While wokeism may offer some solutions to pressing social issues, it is crucial to remain cognizant of its potential shortcomings and approach it with a critical eye. In summary, wokeism presents a complex and multifaceted set of challenges that necessitate a nuanced and critical analysis. Its impact on society is far-reaching and requires thoughtful consideration of its strengths and limitations. As we progress, it is essential to continue engaging in open and honest dialogue about the issues raised by wokeism and to seek diverse perspectives and sources of information in order to fully understand its impact. By doing so, we can better address the challenges facing our society and work towards a more equitable and just future.

- Wokeism is a complex and multifaceted concept that addresses social issues related to race, gender, and other forms of inequality.
- Wokeism has been criticised for its perceived tendency to stifle free speech, engage in cancel culture, and promote identity politics over individual merit.
- Wokeism has also been praised for its focus on intersectionality and its potential to provide a more nuanced and holistic understanding of social issues.
- Wokeism has had a significant impact on various aspects of society, including popular culture, politics and business.
- Woke capitalism, in which companies use their brand to take a stance on social issues, has emerged as a result of the growing influence of wokeism.
- Wokeism presents both strengths and limitations, and it is important to engage in critical analysis and open dialogue when evaluating its impact on society.

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