

A STUDY ON WAVES OF FEMINISM

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Abstract: Feminism is used to describe a political, cultural or economic movement aimed at establishing equal rights and legal protection for women. Feminism involves political and sociological theories and philosophies concerned with issues of gender difference, as well as a movement that advocates gender equality for women and campaigns for women's rights and interests. The roots of feminism are obscured in ancient Greece, but most of the people recognize the movement by the four waves of feminism. This research paper will explore the waves of feminism.

Keywords: *Feminism, gender equality, women's rights*

INTRODUCTION

Feminism refers to any principles that seek equality in rights for women, usually through improving their status. Feminism is rooted in ending men's historical supremacy over women. Feminism is thus a term that emerged long after women started questioning their inferior status and demanding an amelioration in their social position. Even after the word feminism was coined, it was still not adopted as a term of identification by many of those who campaigned for women's rights. Even many of the women's rights organizations in the late 1960s and early 1970s did not call themselves feminist: the term feminism had a restricted use in relation to specific concerns and specific groups (Delmar 1986). It is only more recently that the label feminist has been applied to all women's rights groups indiscriminately, and this non-coincidence between these groups' self-identification and subsequent labeling as feminist clearly relates to the problem of what criteria are to be used in deciding whether a person, group or action is 'feminist'.

Feminist writing and criticism highlight the position of women in literature, society and world culture, emphasizing that the roles and experiences of women tend to be marginalized by patriarchal societies. Feminist writers and critics attempt to redress the balance by writing literature and criticism from the point of view of women. A key feminist work from the modern period is *A Room of One's Own* (1929) by Virginia Woolf. The term 'womanist' is sometimes used to refer to black feminism, to distinguish their approach from that of mainstream white middle-class feminism. Although the terms "feminism" and "feminist" did not gain widespread use until the 1970s, they were already being used in the public jargon much earlier; for instance, Katherine Hepburn speaks of the "feminist movement" in the 1942 film *Woman of the Year*. According to Maggie Humm and Rebecca Walker, the history of feminism can be divided into four waves. The feminist theory emerged from these feminist movements.

THE FOUR WAVES OF FEMINISM

The first wave (1830's – the early 1900's): Women's fight for equal contract and property rights

First-wave feminism involved a period of feminist activity during the 19th and early 20th centuries, especially in Europe and in the Anglosphere; it focused primarily on gaining the right of women's suffrage, the right to be educated, better working conditions and double sexual standards. The term, "first-wave", was coined retrospectively after the term second-wave feminism began to be used to describe a newer feminist movement that focused as much on fighting social and cultural inequalities as further political inequalities.

In the late 19th to early 20th centuries, women realized that firstly, they must gain political power (including the right to vote) to bring about change was how to fuel the fire. Their political agenda expanded to issues concerning sexual, reproductive and economic matters. The seed was planted that women have the potential to contribute just as much if not more than men. First-wave feminism refers to an extended period of feminist activity during the nineteenth century and early twentieth century in the United Kingdom and the United States. Originally it focused on the promotion of equal contract and property rights for women and the opposition to chattel marriage and ownership of married women (and their children) by their husbands. However, by the end of the nineteenth century, activism focused primarily on gaining political power, particularly the right of women's suffrage. Yet, feminists such as Voltairine de Cleyre and Margaret Sanger were still active in campaigning for women's sexual, reproductive, and economic rights at this time. In 1854, Florence Nightingale established female nurses as adjuncts to the military.

The second wave (1960's-1980's): Broadening the debate

Coming off the heels of World War II, the second wave of feminism focused on the workplace, sexuality, family and reproductive rights. During a time when the United States was already trying to restructure itself, it was perceived that women had met their

equality goals with the exception of the failure of the ratification of the Equal Rights Amendment (which has still yet to be passed). This time is often dismissed as offensive, outdated and obsessed with middle-class white women's problems. Conversely, many women during the second wave were initially part of the Black Civil Rights Movement, Anti Vietnam Movement, Chicano Rights Movement, Asian-American Civil Rights Movement, Gay, and Lesbian Movement and many other groups fighting for equality. Many of the women supporters of the aforementioned groups felt their voices were not being heard and felt that in order to gain respect in co-ed organizations they first needed to address gender equality concerns. Women cared so much about these civil issues that they wanted to strengthen their voices by first fighting for gender equality to ensure they would be heard.

Second-wave feminism refers to the period of activity in the early 1960s and lasting through the late 1980s. The scholar Imelda Whelehan suggests that the second wave was a continuation of the earlier phase of feminism involving the suffragettes in the UK and USA. Second-wave feminism has continued to exist since that time and coexists with what is termed third-wave feminism. The scholar Estelle Freedman compares first and second-wave feminism saying that the first wave focused on rights such as suffrage, whereas the second wave was largely concerned with other issues of equality, such as ending discrimination. The feminist activist and author Carol Hanisch coined the slogan "The Personal is Political" which became synonymous with the second wave. Second-wave feminists saw women's cultural and political inequalities as inextricably linked and encouraged women to understand aspects of their personal lives as deeply politicized and as reflecting sexist power structures.

The third wave (1990's – early 2000's): The “micro-politics” of gender equality

The Third-wave of feminism began in the early 1990s. The movement arose as responses to what young women thought of as perceived failures of the second wave. It was also a response to the backlash against initiatives and movements created by the second wave. Third-wave feminism seeks to challenge or avoid what it deems the second wave's "essentialist" definitions of femininity, which (according to them) over-emphasized the experiences of upper-middle-class white women. A post-structuralist interpretation of gender and sexuality is central to much of the third wave's ideology. Third wave feminists often focus on "micropolitics", and challenged the second wave's paradigm as to what is, or is not, good for females. Unlike the former movements, the term 'feminist' becomes less critically received by the female population due to the varying feminist outlooks. There are the ego-cultural feminists, the radicals, the liberal/reforms, the electoral, academic, ecofeminists... the list goes on. The main issues were prefaced by the work done by the previous waves of women. The fight continued to vanquish the disparities in male and female pay and the reproductive rights of women. Work continues to end violence against women in our nation as well as abroad. This wave was about acceptance and a true understanding of the term 'feminism'.

Since the first wave, the remarkable progress has been made, but there is still much to be done. Due to the range of feminist issues today, it is much harder to put a label on what a feminist looks like- leading to a brand new generation rallying for equality and women's rights. Third-wave feminism began in the early 1990s, arising as a response to perceived failures of the second wave and also as a response to the backlash against initiatives and movements created by the second wave. Third-wave feminism seeks to challenge or avoid what it deems the second wave's essentialist definitions of femininity, which (according to them) over-emphasize the experiences of upper-middle-class white women.

Fourth-wave feminism: a developing and lively wave, revitalization of interest in feminism with the use of social media

Fourth-wave feminism is the resurgence of interest in feminism that began around 2012 and is associated with the use of social media. According to feminist scholar Prudence Chamberlain, the focus of the fourth wave is justice for women and also opposition to sexual harassment and violence against women. Its essence, she writes, is "incredulity that certain attitudes can still exist". To those who question about the existence of Fourth-wave feminism, Baumgardner (2011) responds, "*I believe that the fourth wave exists because it says that it exists*" (P. 250). Through examining the era of "terror" produced by the 9/11 attacks, Kaplan (2003) was among the first to imagine the possibilities of fourth wave feminist action and research. To Kaplan, fourth wave feminist projects need to be able to articulate the violence and extremism experienced by women, both at home and abroad, brought on by imperialism in the form of global capitalism. Hence, Kaplan suggests,

The fourth wave will be distinguished by bringing second and third wave feminists together to confront a new and devastating reality that involves us all, if not equally, then at least at once. This new reality ideally cuts across racial, ethnic, and national divides. (P. 55)

Fourth-wave feminism is "defined by technology", according to Kira Cochrane, and is characterized particularly by the use of Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, YouTube, Tumblr, and blogs such as Feministing to challenge misogyny and further gender equality. Issues that fourth-wave feminists focus on include street and workplace harassment, campus sexual assault and rape culture. Scandals involving the harassment, abuse, and murder of women and girls have galvanized the movement. Examples of fourth-wave feminist campaigns include the Everyday Sexism Project, Ni Una menos, No More Page 3, Stop Bild Sexism, Mattress Performance, 10 Hours of Walking in NYC as a Woman, Yes All Women, Free the Nipple, One Billion Rising, the 2017 Women's March, the 2018 Women's March, and the Me Too movement. In December 2017, Time magazine chose several prominent female activists involved in the Me Too movement, dubbed "the silence breakers", as Person of the Year.

Those associated with fourth-wave feminism include Laura Bates, Jennifer Baumgardner, Kira Cochrane, Lucy-Anne Holmes (No More Page 3), Anita Sarkeesian (Tropes vs. Women in Video Games) and Emma Watson.

Conclusion

The movement of feminism and its four waves will become a success and the efforts of feminists will not go in vain when women are valued for themselves as men are. When women can walk down a street without being harassed when their interview for jobs are considered with the exact same criteria as men interviewing are. It's when good husbands and fathers have the same norm, couples split up housework fairly and stay at home, dads can support by staying at home as moms do. It's when transmen and transwomen get the health care they need that is appropriate for their bodies, and what it says on their driver's license isn't considered relevant. The conclusion of feminism is when girl children are not sold into marriage or any children into the sex trade ever. The wrapping up of feminism is not world peace or love and harmony, but the removal of the systemic, universal undervaluing of women and women's work by society. That will mean more competition, but also much more allocation and collaboration.

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