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Waves of Feminism

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Feminism is an umbrella term for a number of cultural phenomena related to the ever deteriorating situation of women under the patriarchal status quo. The term was coined in 1837 by the utopian philosopher and radical socialist Charles Fournier (1772–1837) as a reaction to the organized forms of activism for supporting women's suffrage. Feminism represents many schools of philosophical thinking, theories, and moral beliefs. Despite its multiple forms, it has unanimously mobilized toward alleviating women's subjugated positions, private and social alike, by exerting impact on the economic, political, and cultural fabrics of modern societies. Feminism represents institutional and grassroot activities for abolishing gender-based inequalities with respect to women and their social standing. As a Western movement, it has ensued in four waves that encompass a number of satellite formations of a vicarious or complimentary nature.

From its very outset, feminism has interacted with the media practically and critically. Understanding the power of communication technologies and the role of media forms for shaping social standards and visibility, women's lib crusaders have looked for ways into the media scene in hope for larger audiences but also for a fairer representation of women through and in the men-dominated media professions. Beginning with the 1840s, they first engaged with the media via journalism (mostly informatory press, pamphlets, and leaflets) and editorial work, to later spread on further-reaching and more influential outlets (such as radio, television, the internet), and their related practices. Toward the 21st century, women also started to occupy executive and governance positions in the media industry. American journalist Lucie Salhany was the first woman to head the broadcast network television as chairwoman of Fox Broadcasting Company in 1993. Despite that, only 27% of management jobs are occupied by women today. As informed by the *Global Report on the Status of Women in the News Media* in 2011, "women represent only a third (33.3%) of the full-time journalism workforce" (Byerly, 2001, p. 6) and take a limited fraction of decision-making and ownership jobs in the media environment.

Due to the power-struggle nature of their interactions, feminism and the media share a rather strained and mutually exploitative relationship. This owes mostly to feminist reproval of the media input in the production of women's unfavorable circumstances. The long list of blames highlights the promotion of beauty myths, the support of women's professional passivity (as in media jobs and in other professions), and the reinvention of a female as the entertaining body—something to be looked at. In response, the media have discredited the importance of the feminist fight by offering antagonistic portrayals of feminists. Moreover, they have profited from sensationalizing women's activism and commercializing the movement's agenda.

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A pivotal challenge in the feminist battle toward the gender-balanced media representation seems the media content and targeting—with their aesthetics, organization, and structuring. Indeed, many media genres as well as the general style of mass information have long been implicitly male or fixed on male audiences. That monopoly relented in the 1960s when feminist ideas came into fuller effect with women taking over as media executives. In 1965, Helen Gurley Brown, infamous author of *Sex and the Single Girl* (1962), resurrected *Cosmopolitan* to become a salient advocate of feminist concerns in the popular international magazine market. In 1973 the first women's porn magazines *Playgirl* launched in the United States to mark a revolution of women's press under the unprecedented editorship of Ira Ritter. *The Oprah Winfrey Show* (considered the highest-rated show in the history of American television) aired in 1986 for 25 seasons, transforming the media and public consciousness with regard to the role of mainstream channels and information egalitarianism. As of the 21st century, with online technologies at hand, women are given an undoubtedly more inclusive and more profound media presence that is also less geographically constrained. During the women's general strike and Black protest of 2016, website activism gathered millions of supporters worldwide. The following year, the #MeToo movement, encouraged by Alyssa Milano's tweet in which she encouraged her followers to come out with their stories of sexual assault or harassment, was established by Tarana Burke to protest sexist behaviors, becoming the first feminist hashtag action of a global range.

Cultural critics divide the history of modern feminism into four parts which they term "waves." Each wave marks a specific cultural period and women's involvement with the media. Despite the embeddedness of the wave metaphor in theorizing feminism, the metaphor has been considered problematic and contested within feminist literature. Its structuring is often considered historically misleading and politically useless.

The first wave represents the pioneering stage of feminist activism that spread in Europe and North America, Egypt, Iran, and India between the early 1800s and the first decades of the 20th century. Despite its international range, the first wave was most active in the United States and Western Europe as inspired by proto-feminist political writing of authors such as Mary Wollstonecraft (*The Vindication of the Rights of Women*, 1792) or John Stuart Mill (*The Subjection of Women*, 1869). The first wave mobilized around the idea of the "New Woman"—an ideal of femininity that challenged limits established by male-centered society. The first wave relates to social campaigns that expressed dissatisfaction with women's limited rights for work, education, property, reproduction, marital status, and social agency. It is associated with women's suffrage—a movement advocating women's entitlement to vote, the flagship organization of which became the International Woman Suffrage Alliance (1904).

The first-wave feminists' trust in the organized and visible form of protest showed through public gatherings, speeches, and writing. Their activism revolved around the press, which was the major information and communication medium at the turn of the century. The Seneca Falls Declaration of 1848, which emerged from the abolitionist movement, triggered an urge for a more active presence of women in North America and led to setting up *The Lily* (the first US newspaper owned and edited by women) that coincided with French *Le Voix des Femmes* in Europe. Such journals allowed for a more balanced vision of femininity, providing a more thorough picture of the lives of women, especially with regard to their professional potential, and included women of color in the idea of womanhood thus defying the image promulgated in the bourgeoning women's popular magazines (e.g., *The Lady's Magazine*, *Ladies' Magazine*, and later *Ladies' Home Journal*). also in terms of their professional gender and racial discrimination. In 1853, Canadian journalist Mary Ann Shadd Cary established *Provincial Freeman*, becoming the first Black female publisher in the Western world. It is important to note that the first-wave movement tended to marginalize women of color. In her famous "Ain't I a woman" speech delivered at the 1851 Ohio Women's Rights Convention in Akron, abolitionist Sojourner Truth described this marginalization in terms of ideological inconsistency, pointing to the exclusion of women of color from the movement's agenda.

Early media coverage of first-wave feminists were unfavorable and biased. Media coverage was overtaken by the stereotypical trope of a bad looking, unfeminine advocate of women's liberation who hated all men. This trope first appeared in *How They Got the Vote*, a 1913 silent movie directed by Ashley Miller. Fairer, albeit deeply sensational, representations emerged from news outlets. The tragic death of Emily Davison who threw herself onto the racetrack at the Epsom Derby event on June 4, 1913, was reported in the *Manchester Guardian* as "sensational" and "hideous in its tragic futility" ("Yesterday's Sensational Derby," 1913). The word "militant" became from then on emblematic for media depictions of suffragists' actions.

A moment of breaking through the glass ceiling for first-wave feminism was the inclusion of women in telegraphy. In the mid-19th century, many females in America and Europe "entered a challenging … technological field in which they competed with men" to start a "subculture of technically educated workers" (Jepsen, 2000, p. 2). Telegraphy enacted the "deeds not words" suffrage slogan and carried women toward the century of a communication hype to which they proved to be skillful contributors. It was also an investment opportunity for many bourgeois women, especially in Britain, who, using the right granted to them by Married Women's Property Acts, bought telegraphy stocks, gaining agency in the sphere of finance.

As the first wave concluded with the acknowledgment of women's right to vote, the second wave commenced after the postwar chaos and the atmosphere of the liquefaction of social roles to focus on women's work and family environment. Active from the early 1960s to the late 1980s, the second wave asked questions about the constituents of gender roles and women's sexuality. Simone de Beauvoir's phrase "one is not born a woman but becomes one" (Beauvoir, 1949/1956, p. 273) served as a byword for the wave's effort toward relaxing the social idiom of femininity. The second wave was influenced by poststructuralism, deconstruction, and psychoanalysis. As such, it showed interest in the relationship between the structuring of womanhood (in social practice and media representation) and woman's lived experience. Key concepts at that time were Betty Freidan's *feminine mystique* (1963) and Laura Mulvey's *male gaze* (1975), and later Alice Walker's *womanism* (1983/2007) that introduced the ideas of the third wave. Also, notable forms of women's resistance were identified through the notions of *écriture feminine* (Cixous, 1976), *gynocriticism* (Showalter, 1979), and *female fantasy*

(Coward, 1984; Radway, 1984/1991) to express the need for women's critical agency as well as self-aware, bottom-up representation of femininity.

As television became the defining medium for the second quarter of the 20th century, the second wave revolved around women's struggle for televisual presence. It was important for overcoming employment patterns and representation templates to provide a more balanced, equal, and reliable practice for both. From the very beginning, the male-dominated environment of television recreated the social functions of gender, mostly by eliminating women from authority positions, and reducing them to technical, organizational, administrative, or entertaining roles. Also, the number of women in television wavered unfavorably, which was best reflected by the gradual decline of women in television jobs from the 1960s to 1980s on both sides of the Atlantic. Data from British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) surveys in the last years of the 1980s showed a disproportionate balance of 5 women to 150 men in television-related jobs (Casey, Casey, Calvert, French, & Lewis, 2008). The disproportion relented in the 1990s, as supported by a number of legal regulations to reduce the financial and position-related misrepresentation of women in televisual structures. Also, various feminist groups (like the National Organization for Women) supported women's equal inclusion in the media scene. The Media Workshop, an organization founded by Florynce Kennedy in New York in 1966 encouraged a gender and race balanced contribution to mass publication and broadcasting. In 1968 in New York, Nanette Rainone started "Womankind" and "Electra Rewired" the first radio programs with a feminist lean, slanted exclusively toward women issues. A strong feminist media voice was *Ms.* magazine published in the United States as an insert in the *New York* magazine, and later as an independent journal of the Feminist Majority Foundation (an organization set up in 1984). The equal contribution to the media environment in America was monitored by the *Media Report to Women* journal. As of 1984, the Council of Europe adopted a decree on the equality between women and men in the media. It was an effect of a strong feminist front outside America.

The era of the internet, which burst out with the beginning of the 1990s, brought new possibilities for representation and communication along the changing access to technologies and their related media planes. A great part of the third wave that came around that time subscribed to the benefits of technological development, pointing to the opportunities emerging from women's contribution to tech-evolution and the emergence of cyberspace. There was an increased focus on using internet technologies (traditionally a male-dominated arena) for improved networking to advance the feminist agenda and restructure the sources of social impact. An important part of this movement was the awareness of DIY (do it yourself/independent cultural production) related to self-broadcasting and self-made representation that spread at that time, followed by new activist awareness and new activist styles. The third wave was a moment of "growing expertise in navigating the internet, producing webpages, electronic zines and blogs" (Whelehan, 2007, p. xvi). For feminism, it meant a new consciousness of women's role in technological evolution. Around 1991, cyberfeminism was born to remind us "that there are differences in power between women and men specifically in the digital discourse" (Hawthorne & Klein, 1999, p. 2). It was also to bring to the fore both past and contemporary histories of women in tech environments to show the emancipatory potential behind new information and communication technologies. Iconic cyberfeminist Sadie Plant (especially in *Zeros + Ones*, 1998) pointed to the strong link between cyberspace and the political empowerment of women. Cyberspace became a new clitoral matrix. In 1991, Australian feminist collective VNS Matrix released a billboard project entitled "A Cyberfeminist Manifesto for the 21st Century," in which they proclaimed the viral capacities of the connected female body under the network(ed) abjection. A figure of a cyborg, brought to the critical attention by Donna Haraway's *Cyborg Manifesto* (1991), revisited the hegemonies of science and the preconditioning of the female biological and intellectual predisposition.

In various strands of the media environment, the third wave witnessed the emergence of a wide spectrum of fringe and mainstream icons like Riot Grrrl and the Guerrilla Girls on the one side and Madonna on the other. It has also mediated the ideas of *womanism* for inclusion of race issues and queer minorities in the feminist debate. Increasing in strength alongside the rapid implementation of women's professional and social independence, the third wave has also faced an antifeminist turn. Susan Faludi (2006) terms it an undeclared war against women and points to antifeminist myths propagated by popular media. Much of the antifeminist turn was ignited by postfeminism thinking in the late 1980s, whose pet peeve was the seeming irrelevance of the second- and third-wave utopias for women's actual realities. By declaring "feminism is dead," postfeminists communicated the need for a more balanced approach toward women's choices and needs, one that combines traditional female roles and liberal desires (e.g., marriage and kids plus professional success). For popular culture, especially cinema, television, and press, it meant the rise of new hybrid tropes (like bitchiness meets Cinderella) that epitomize what Angela McRobbie (2004) calls "double entanglement ... the co-existence of neo-conservative values in relation to gender, sexuality and family life, with processes of liberalization in regard to choice and diversity in domestic, sexual and kinship relations" (p. 256). The most notable texts of that trend include *Sex and the City*, *Bridget Jones's Diary*, and *Ally McBeal* whose characters often ridicule core feminist ideals and place femininity back in consumerism, but this time experienced from the position of power.

Toward the 2010s, feminism revived under actions that spread internationally across the Web and in the streets to protest violence against women and children. According to Kira Cochrane (2013), online mobilization on media platforms like Facebook, Twitter, Tumblr, YouTube, Vimeo, Instagram, and so forth, as well as the hashtag and blog campaigns that followed (e.g., Everyday Sexism Project, Feministing, Counting Dead Women Project, #Fem2, #YesAllWomen, #HeForShe, #ToTheGirls, #EverydaySexism, and more recently, #MeToo, #NoMore, and #TimesUp) mark a new period, new agenda, and a new manner in the feminist struggle that she terms the fourth wave. The private and organized use of the social media became a real catalyst for the fight against women's harassment, professional discrimination, media sexism, and gender shaming. It also became a step toward a globally inclusive, participatory, and insightful feminism, open to women's voices from outside the Western context. The fourth wave shows interest in essential feminist values and as such welcomes a transgeneration dialogue in which women of different feminist periods (late second, third, and fourth wavers) share experiences for a common goal (like it was at North East Feminist Gathering in Newcastle, England, in 2014). This is particularly visible in Xenofeminism (see Hester, 2018)—a side trend of the fourth wave that rediscovers the aspects of second-wave biopolitics for technocracy, particularly in relation to Shulamith Firestone's technologies of gender described in her 1970 *Dialectic of Sex*. Fourth wavers stress the importance of women's share in media democracy. As they believe, it assists in overcoming class distinctions and making good use of accessibility facilitated by internet technologies. The Geena Davis Institute on Gender in Media formed in 2004 and became an institution to research the representation of gender in the media industry with an aim to promote gender equality in media production and use. The lack of balance in this representation was clearly exposed in Jennifer Siebel Newsom's *Miss Representation*, a 2011 film that initiated The Representation Project, a nonprofit organization for overcoming underrepresentation of women in media, politics, and structures of influence. An important voice in that struggle was an online media start-up *A Women's Thing* started in 2014 that invited submissions from female artists and writers seeking aid in launching their work. The aim was to reach out to those underprivileged by disability or other constraints.

Currently, feminism is creating a broad landscape of activities that marry various social, cultural, political, and aesthetic aspects of the contemporary condition. It engages femininity in all social strata and manages those aspects of egalitarian politics which decentralize systems of power toward a more peripheral and therefore more encompassing social politics.

SEE ALSO: A History of Feminist Film Theory; Feminism in the News; Feminist/Activist Responses to Online Abuse; Feminist Data Studies; Feminist Moving Image Practices; Gender and Advertising; Gender and Media; Gender and Media Policy; Gender and Technology; History of Women in Journalism; Women in the Advertising Industry; Zine Culture

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