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**Talking the “Post” Off of Feminism:
History, Sexuality, and the Women’s Movement’s
*Third Wave***

...

by

Candis Steenbergen

**A thesis submitted to the Faculty of
Graduate Studies and Research in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts
in Canadian Studies**

**The School of Canadian Studies
Carleton University
OTTAWA, Ontario**

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History, Sexuality, and the Women’s
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submitted by Candis Steenbergen, Hons. B.A.

**in partial fulfillment of the requirements for
the degree of Master of Arts**

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January 2000

Abstract

This thesis is an exploration of “generations” in the contemporary women’s movement in Canada. Just as definite demarcations separate the first and second stages of feminism, a third generation – a *third wave* – has emerged at the millennium, one that contrasts the threat of postfeminism and refutes popular media proclamations of feminism’s demise. This study locates each of feminism’s generations in its historical context and examines conceptual divisions through the lens of a single issue: women’s sexuality. There are significant generational divisions within the women’s movement at the present time, tensions directly related to concepts of power, participation, and control. The thesis argues that increased dialogue – mutually-respectful, reciprocal exchanges between and among feminism’s waves – will help bridge the generation gap and improve the solidarity of the movement. This thesis provides a strong historical foundation for further analyses of feminism’s generations, activism, and theories of resistance, and recommends that women’s sexuality be examined in greater detail in future studies.

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Acceptance Form will eventually go here...

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Woman, women, feminine, femininity, "femalinity," femaleness, to be a woman...so many words, so many concepts that in the collective thinking of women evoke different realities. So many words, so many concepts that in the discourse of the women's movement call for different models to interpret the multiple facets of the individual and collective experience of women and to formulate a theory of gender relations. The plurality and multidimensionality of the contemporary discourse of women are now recognized. However, the movement of this discourse, the diversity of its perspectives, and its orientations are not always clearly grasped.¹

Efforts to define "feminism" and attempts to determine the boundaries of what constitutes the "women's movement" in Canada have been and continue to be problematic endeavours for all scholarly investigations. Feminism has been broadly defined as a doctrine that acknowledges women's systemic disadvantage in society, one that defends women's rights and advocates for women's social, political, and economic equality with men. Feminism has also been described as a theoretical framework that became part of wider, often activist, women's movement.² That "women's movement" has been described as the collective promotion of "the emancipation, liberation, rights and interests of women, as these are defined by women, which has existed as a political force in modern times since the early nineteenth century."³ While standard definitions provide useful (albeit vague) summaries for reference materials, general descriptions erroneously depict feminism

¹ Francine Descarries-Bélanger, and Shirley Roy, translated by Jennifer Beeman, "The Women's Movement and Its Currents of Thought: A Typological Essay," (Ottawa: Canadian Research Institute for the Advancement of Women, May 1991) 1.

² Roger Scruton, A Dictionary of Political Thought, (London: Pan Books, 1982) 171; Nicholas Abercrombie, Stephen Hill, and Bryan S. Turner, Dictionary of Sociology, (Markham: Penguin Books, 1988) 96.

³ Scruton, 495.

as an immutable ideology and the women's movement as a unified body following one exclusive strategy for social change.

In reality, the historical and current foundations of feminism and the women's movement in Canada are much more intricate and its proponents are far more diverse. "Feminism," as Geraldine Finn has noted, "does not speak with one voice."⁴ Feminists have always expressed their desire for social, political, economic and cultural change in a variety of milieus. Feminist activity has taken a wide range of forms: from militant political activism, to volunteerism within small communities, to academic research and writing, to the creation of public works of art. Nancy Adamson, Linda Briskin, and Margaret McPhail acknowledged that the women's movement in Canada has always had a "diverse, complex, and shifting reality," and added that feminists have *never* followed a unified political ideology.⁵ While all feminisms share certain characteristics, significant differences in political strategy, in vision, in attitudes towards men, in understanding the roots of women's oppression, and in setting priorities also typify the Canadian women's movement.⁶

"Women's issues" have also changed considerably over time.⁷ Feminists in the late 1960s and early 1970s identified, named, and analyzed women's oppression, particularly as it existed in the private lives of 'ordinary' women. The decade that followed was "a phase of expansion and consolidation," a period in

⁴ Geraldine Finn, *Conclusion*, in Angela Miles and Geraldine Finn, eds, Feminism in Canada: From Pressure to Politics, (Montréal: Black Rose Books, 1982) 299.

⁵ Nancy Adamson, Linda Briskin, and Margaret McPhail, Feminist Organizing For Change: The Contemporary Women's Movement in Canada, (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1988) 9.

⁶ Adamson, Briskin, and McPhail, 9. See also Roberta Hamilton, Gendering the Vertical Mosaic: Feminist Perspectives on Canadian Society, (Toronto, Copp Clark Ltd., 1996) 54.

⁷ Adamson, Briskin, and McPhail, 9.

which the women's movement grew in size and visibility, as well as in organizational and strategic terms.⁸ Manon Tremblay noted that the 1970s marked the institutionalization of the women's movement with the establishment of state organizations like the Canadian Advisory Council on the Status of Women.⁹ In the 1980s, many of the battles fought by the mainstream women's movement concentrated on institutional policy and political change.¹⁰ The strategies adopted by the women's movement through all three decades were employed in reaction to the political conditions of their struggles. However, they were also the result of constant internal checks and balances performed by and among women of strikingly different political persuasions.¹¹ Feminism itself has altered and evolved over time as the intricacies of women's positions in society have changed.¹²

Feminism in the last decade has been no different. By the early 1990s, the battlegrounds for feminist struggles had altered again. In 1993, Tremblay noted that:

...over the course of the last few years, the feminist movement has devoted itself primarily to fighting to maintain what women have gained in a climate of political conservatism, of financial austerity, and of the affirmation of a neo-conservative right wing. In addition, the antifeminist undercurrent which is currently developing in the

⁸ Manon Tremblay, "Gender and Society: Rights and Realities," in David Thomas, ed., Canada and the United States: Differences that Count, (Peterborough: Broadview Press, 1993) 275.

⁹ Tremblay, 275.

¹⁰ The 1980s witnessed significant political victories for women in Canada, including: the inclusion of a gender equality clause in the Canadian Constitution (adopted in 1981, in effect by 1985), changes to the Criminal Code regarding the interrogation of sexual assault victims (1983), the Employment Equity Act (1986), expanded rights for native women (section 12(1)(b) of the Indian Act repealed in 1985, women on reserves granted the vote in 1986), and the Morgentaler decision (1988).

¹¹ Hamilton, 54. Writing on contemporary feminism's recent past, Hamilton noted that "feminists disagreed not only on the explanations for women's inequality, oppression, and subordination, but also on the means to transform their situation."

¹² Jeri Dawn Wine and Janice L. Ristock, Introduction, Women and Social Change: Feminist Activism in Canada, (Toronto: James Lorimer & Company, 1991) 4; Adamson, Briskin and McPhail, 9.

West has led to the belief that the feminist movement has lost its *raison d'être* with women now having achieved equality with men.¹³

At the end of the decade, Tremblay's "undercurrent" has become a commonly heard reproach of feminism and its proponents. The "diversified, multifaceted and enriched" nature of feminist activities has been re-interpreted by oppositional forces (and perpetuated by popular media) as demonstrative of an antiquated, ineffectual, "splintered and fragmented" women's movement.¹⁴ The evidence supporting the charges has been more disconcerting. The arrival of a number of publications in Canada's very recent past – written predominantly by young, female iconoclasts – has incited reports of a "new generation" of feminists, dissidents who tout the coming of feminism's last breath.

In 1992, American Amy Friedman published Nothing Sacred: A Conversation With Feminism. Utilizing Kingston's Queen's University campus as a model, Friedman asserted that the feminism of the 1960s and 1970s had mutated, and that she was no longer comfortable identifying with what the movement, particularly in academia, had become in the early 1990s. Friedman's agitation with academic feminism was multi-faceted: she "deplored [the] sloppy, inaccurate, lazy language" used by proponents, was angered by the promotion of "female knowledge as distinct from male knowledge," and was dismayed by the apparent feminist belief in "ultimate solutions" for the atrocities of the world against women.¹⁵ She argued:

¹³ Tremblay, 276.

¹⁴ Hamilton, 80.

¹⁵ Amy Friedman, Nothing Sacred: A Conversation With Feminism, (Canada: Oberon Press, 1992) 42, 44, 58.

...The new feminist rhetoric – was beginning to sound like other versions of revolutionary fanaticism, and revolutionary fanaticism, we all know, has sparked some of the most heinous regimes in humankind's history. No matter who the enemy.¹⁶

According to Friedman, feminism – particularly in academia – lost sight of its original goals, and has fixated on romanticized images of women as powerless victims, encouraged self-pity, and sought to gain strength in martyrdom.¹⁷ During the course of the last three decades, she argued, feminism has grown terrified of recognizing differences among women, and has not retained the sacredness of the personal.¹⁸ Individual stories, she asserted, now served only as “fodder for a statistical mill”.¹⁹

Young Canadian feminist objectors have emerged as well. In 1995, journalist and author Kate Fillion published Lip Service: The Truth about Women's Darker Side in Love, Sex, and Friendship. Fillion examined the complex situation of women today, discussed the myth of female moral superiority, and attempted to deconstruct a number of existing stereotypes, including “woman as victim,” and “woman as saint.” Fillion stated that women today adhere to conflicting paradigms: that (largely as a result of the feminist movement) they have increased power and opportunity in relationships and in the workforce, but that many still feel powerless. She asserted:

Self-determination is what women want, but the myth of female moral superiority tells us that women cannot be actors in their own right. Apparently, women are too pure to harbor

¹⁶ Friedman, 60.

¹⁷ Ibid., 58.

¹⁸ Ibid., 59.

¹⁹ Ibid., 42.

negative feelings and too virtuous to make mistakes. Agency – having some control over one's own life – is confused with happy endings. When things turn out well, women are given full credit, but when something goes wrong, we are absolved of responsibility.²⁰

According to Fillion, second wave feminists struggled to achieve sexual liberation, yet they did so through the perpetuation of dangerous dichotomies: object/subject, passive/aggressive, and female/male. Fillion described this phenomenon as the preservation of an age-old sexual script, and that consequently "the common language used to discuss sexuality in the public arena...[has been] predicated on women's passivity and oppression."²¹ Based on her own observations coupled with a handful of personal interviews, Fillion argued that women have "made it," and that a new script must be written and put into practice to ensure true sexual equality.

In a similar vein and the very same year, journalist and self-proclaimed "dissident feminist" Donna LaFramboise published her debut text, The Princess at the Window: A New Gender Morality.²² LaFramboise's work directly attacked what she called "establishment feminism," that group of "people who are recognized by society at large as legitimate feminist spokespersons."²³ Citing the publications of Ann Landers, *Ms* magazine, Marilyn French, and Catherine MacKinnon, LaFramboise asserted that "the lunatic fringe has taken over mainstream feminism."²⁴ Arguing

²⁰ Kate Fillion, Lip Service: The Truth About Women's Darker Side in Love, Sex and Friendships, (Toronto: Harper Collins Publishers, 1995) 318.

²¹ Fillion, 223.

²² Donna LaFramboise's personal web page (found at www.razberry.com) outlines her own "dissident feminist vision" and provides counter-arguments to the barrage of negative reviews that her book – and selected articles written for *The National Post* – have received.

²³ Donna LaFramboise, The Princess at the Window, (Toronto: Penguin Books, 1996) 8.

²⁴ LaFramboise, 33.

that highly questionable ideas have been elevated to feminist dogma, she claimed that the movement itself has become extremist, self-obsessed, arrogant, and intolerant. LaFramboise was alarmed by the speed at which such “sloppy thinking” has permeated the rhetoric of popular culture and has influenced public policy, and she expressed the fear that *all* feminism might become suspect in the near future.²⁵

LaFramboise stated that the traditional methods of examining and analyzing women’s issues have become obsolete, and called for a reevaluation of underlying assumptions regarding sex and sex roles:

...feminism isn’t an infant any longer and it can no longer be excused for acting like one, for making incessant demands while remaining oblivious to the needs, rights and hurts of others who share the same planet...²⁶

Like Fillion, LaFramboise believed that mainstream feminism has perpetuated a myth of femininity, one that asserts female martyrdom. The feminist “establishment,” she argued, has deliberately maintained such fictions to ensure their own survival. While not advocating the death of feminism as a useful theoretical framework for future analyses, LaFramboise differentiated between “a feminism that *informs* one’s opinions and a feminism that *dictates* how one should think.”²⁷ Her solution was a call for a more tolerant, flexible, compassionate, and rational form of feminism, one that advocates “gender” issues as opposed to “women’s” issues.

Although Lip Service and Princess at the Window provide captivating perspectives on the current state of Canadian feminism, both have serious

²⁵ LaFramboise, 48.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 12.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 323.

limitations. Fillion's text made broad generalizations about "Canadian women" as a unit based upon personal observations, individual interviews, and a variety of sociological studies of white, heterosexual, able-bodied, educated, middle-to-upper class women. Many of LaFramboise's arguments relied upon qualitative research analyses of *Ms* magazine articles and letters to Ann Landers, which were then applied to an unspecified notion of "North American feminism."²⁸ As well, no attempt was made to differentiate between the American and Canadian movements. One reviewer attacked Fillion and LaFramboise's "highly selective, blinkered vision," and stated that their texts were little more than "in-your-face rant[s]" supported by "extraordinarily inflated ideas" regarding the prevalence and influence of feminism in Canada.²⁹ Myrna Kostash, commenting on the arguments of the "dissidents," attacked Fillion for erroneously presenting second wave feminism as "a monolithic movement reducible to a single tendency."³⁰ Kostash also suggested that this newest generation of feminist "dissidents" believe that establishment feminism is anti-male, and that "mainstream feminists hate the very idea of sex with men."³¹

Friedman, Fillion and LaFramboise presented limited analyses of feminism's past shortcomings and future directions. Instead, they provided insight (albeit unintentionally) into the state of the Canadian women's movement at the end of the twentieth century by way of ideological one-upmanship and petty name-calling. All

²⁸ Ibid., 7.

²⁹ Clarissa Hurley, "Feminists Bashing Feminism: The Princess at the Window," *The New Brunswick Reader*, 17 August 1996.

³⁰ Myrna Kostash, "Dissing Feminist Sexuality," *Canadian Forum*, (September 1996) 13.

³¹ Ibid., 13.

of the authors had been exposed to women's studies departments from various Canadian universities, and all three directly targeted the work of feminists in the academy. Interestingly, all of the texts failed to illustrate an in-depth knowledge of the history of the contemporary Canadian women's movement. As evidence, all of the authors utilized items from the popular press, provided snippets of contentious quotations from select feminist theorists (most of whom were American), and relied heavily upon personal interviews and personal experiences. All three expressed concern for the current state and potential future of Canadian feminism, and all provided instances in which mainstream second wave praxis has "failed," but none provided viable alternatives. Friedman, Fillion, and LaFramboise all viewed communication, tolerance, and flexibility as key factors for future strategies of the women's movement, yet none attempted it. Individual interviews of select women aside, none of the previously mentioned authors succeeded in achieving a sound blend of historical analysis, theory and practice.

Are Amy Friedman, Kate Fillion, and Donna LaFramboise representative of feminism's next generation? Are their perspectives indicative of the women's movement's newest wave? Unfortunately, mainstream media has latched on to the existence of these (and other) "new feminists" with vehemence. Accepting the insurgence of writings as an indicator of women's successful liberation and the impending death of feminism, popular discourse has perpetuated assumptions that Canada, as it approaches the millennium, has entered a "postfeminist" era.

In the summer of 1998, the cover of *TIME* magazine reinforced such notions,

featuring black and white photos of the antiquated faces (and perspectives) of Susan B. Anthony, Betty Friedan and Gloria Steinem next to the fresh, full-colour visage of a fictional prime-time television character, Ally McBeal. Under McBeal lay the question "Is Feminism Dead?" The cover story announced that a new generation of "enlightened" women has emerged, dismissing the efforts and accomplishments of the women's movement's very recent past, and actively promoting a new version of "female empowerment":

...feminism at the very end of the century seems to be an intellectual undertaking in which the complicated, often mundane issues of modern life get little attention and the narcissistic ramblings of a few new media-anointed spokeswomen get far too much...What a comedown for the movement...But if feminism of the 60s and 70s was steeped in research and obsessed with social change, feminism today is wed to the culture of celebrity and self-obsession.³²

Ginia Bellafante posited that the next generation of feminists is concerned with little more than individual gain, the consumption of material goods, and the exertion of their own 'enlightened' power, and argued that the insurgence of young, self-absorbed women has contributed to the "flightiness" of feminism at the millennium.

Critics argued that *TIME* failed to look at the larger picture, and that Bellafante consciously selected very particular written materials as "proof" of the current apolitical, postfeminist climate. According to Marcia Ann Gillespie, editor of *Ms. Magazine*, the failure to mention the activism and written work of young feminists was intentional, and that the lack of interviews with "any of the many women of that generation who are doing righteous work," was another indication of

³² Ginia Bellafante, "Feminism: It's All About Me!" *TIME*, Vol. 151, No. 25, 29 June 1998.

the media's misunderstanding and misrepresentation of the women's movement itself.³³ Young feminist voices *have* emerged in recent years, but their voices have been overshadowed by the seemingly more media-savvy postfeminist presence and have eluded mainstream commentators of Canadian society to date. Often critical of the strategies and tactics of their feminist predecessors, these women have been considerably more indicative of feminism's third "wave."

Irshad Manji, a young Toronto-based political commentator, journalist, broadcaster, and columnist has published a number of articles concerning the current state of Canadian feminism. Her debut full-length text, Risking Utopia: On the Edge of a New Democracy, published in 1997, was originally intended as a written response to postfeminist thought as it has emerged in Canada through the works of writers like Kate Fillion and Donna LaFramboise, as well as a critique of what she called "a troubled feminism."³⁴ While she harshly criticized the "reductionist arguments" of Fillion and LaFramboise, Manji agreed that "the usual dichotomies [of feminist praxis] are weighing us down. We have to switch direction."³⁵ Manji described her work as a journey of sorts, a voyage to "an ethos of belonging that encourages everyone to be a participant before labeling anyone a deviant. Whether in the feminist movement or in society at large, the challenge is

³³ Marcia Ann Gillespie, "Equal Time," *Ms.* (September/October 1998) 1. See also Hamilton, 43, who noted that mass media proclamations of feminism's demise are not unique to the current period. In 1977, *Weekend Magazine* announced the death of feminism in a feature entitled "Beyond Sisterhood."

³⁴ Irshad Manji, Risking Utopia: On the Edge of a New Democracy, (Vancouver/Toronto: Douglas & McIntyre, 1997) 3.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 52.

to belong."³⁶ Profiling Canadian women from coast to coast, the author examined both feminist theory and activism as well as the "personal epiphanies" of individuals to supplement her argument.

Borrowing from Trent University Professor John Fekete's 1994 text, Moral Panic: Biopolitics Rising, Manji argued that the mainstream women's movement has been guilty of practicing identity politics³⁷:

...many feminist communities create their own iron-clad norms and expect aspiring entrants to meet them as a condition of acceptance. Although these non-traditionalists despise the patriarchy, they pay homage to it by constituting a women's auxiliary – the Pink Patriarchy. That is, I know straight women who label themselves 'lesbians' because they need an in, a base of credibility, with certain feminist coteries. Their disclosures of heterosexuality serve only to mask their humanity. Being sexually suspect, the "breeders" (as straight women often get tagged) are sometimes interrogated about their politics.³⁸

Manji argued that the practice of identity politics has become a double-edged sword for the women's movement, in that while recognizing differences among women, unique characteristics particular to each individual can be overlooked by generalizations. She dismisses identity politics as the "Moulinex Reflex," one that has only served to simplify, label and bottle the complexities of "individual souls."³⁹

³⁶ Manji, 3.

³⁷ See John Fekete, Moral Panic: Biopolitics Rising, (Montreal/Toronto: Robert Davies Publishing, 1995) 22 & 27. Fekete argues that "biopolitics...is a regression from politics to a new primitivism which promotes self-identification through groups defined by categories like race or sex." This leads to the active advancement of the group's cause, and subsequently, to panic. *Biofeminism*, according to Fekete, is one example of this. "It is built on hostility and anxiety, and its attention is divided between its discourse of aggression towards its adversary..."men," and the discourse of fear..."

³⁸ Manji, 42.

³⁹ Ibid., 37.

In Risking Utopia and elsewhere, Manji expresses concern over the pervasive postfeminist view that “women have won the keys to the 18th floor office – and that now, behind the doors and desk, they are sabotaging their success.”⁴⁰ Incorporating autobiographical information (including an account of her own “short-lived breakthrough” as the first woman of colour on the editorial board of a major Canadian newspaper), Manji denounced the postfeminist assumption that women currently enjoy equality with men in the workforce.⁴¹ Such deductions, she argued, are not only inaccurate, but may lead to distorted views of policy-making (such as employment equity), and the perpetuation of existing stereotypes of “who deserves a good job and who doesn’t” because “breakthrough divas amount to tired tokens if they can’t challenge anything more than the complexion of institutions.”⁴²

Manji’s text calls for a new paradigm, one that embraces the tenets of individualism, democracy, communication, and – to a certain extent – chaos, through which all people, regardless of their sex, race, or sexual orientation can grow, change, and belong. Called the “Utopia of Complexity,” Manji’s vision emphasized the significance of values – particularly empathy, agency and accountability.⁴³ Philosophically sound and convincingly written, Risking Utopia adds an infrequently heard voice to the current debates as well as a unique perspective to the complexities of the women’s movement in Canada.

⁴⁰ Irshad Manji, “The Breakthrough Syndrome: If You Think Feminism’s Day is Done, Just ask the Women Who’ve ‘Made It’,” *This Magazine*, (March/April 1996) 27.

⁴¹ Manji (1997) 18-19.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 29.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 171.

Other young feminists have expressed their fear for the future of feminism, looked outside the barrage of media reports of feminism's newest, apathetic generation, and found fault inside the women's movement:

If I had a quarter for every time I heard some cool, together girl say, "I'm not a feminist, but..." and then proceed to list off all her unquestionably feminist beliefs, jeez, I would be in Honolulu right now, and not here getting all stressed out. Now, let's not be funny and pretend that the big bad media has distorted feminism and that's why it does not appear relevant to today's young women – the media's a factor, but it's not the only problem. Let's face up to what is going on here, please, and spare me having to vomit.⁴⁴

Jaime Kirzner-Roberts, writing for a special edition of *Fireweed* devoted entirely to the emergence of a new generation of feminists, is a member of the "third wave" of the women's movement. Third wavers admit that there are problems both outside of and within contemporary feminism itself, and insist that tensions – both ideological and strategic – must be resolved if the movement is going to continue to be a potent force for change.

As reports by the media suggest, a new generation of young women *has* emerged, aggressively challenging the assumptions and strategies of mainstream feminism. However, the popular press pinpointed the wrong group of women. The third wave exists within the women's movement itself, a generation of young women actively attempting to address the complexities involved in women's everyday experiences and the personal and structural relations affecting them. Their criticisms are intended to further the feminist cause, not to slander the

⁴⁴ Jaime Kirzner-Roberts, "I'm not a feminist, but..." *Fireweed*, "Revolution Girl Style," Issue 59/60 (Fall/Winter 1997) 77.

movement or its proponents. Nonetheless, solidarity with their feminist predecessors has been difficult to attain. As Rebecca Walker noted:

Young women are struggling with the feminist label not only, as some prominent Second Wavers have asserted, because we lack knowledge of women's history and have been alienated by the media's generally horrific characterization of feminists, and not only because it is tedious to always criticize world politics, popular culture and the nuances of social interaction. Young women coming of age wrestle with the term ["feminist"] because they have a very different vantage point on the world than that of our foremothers. We shy away from or modify the label in an attempt to begin to articulate our differences while simultaneously avoiding confrontation.⁴⁵

While recognizing that the accomplishments of the women's movement to date have been remarkable, members of feminism's third wave have also acknowledged that the world has changed considerably since the 1960s and 1970s, and that the time has come for a new strategy.

This thesis is an exploration into the new generation of feminism, its relationship with existing cohorts, and the group's "place" within the Canadian women's movement as a whole. Who constitutes the "third wave"? What are their criticisms of second wave feminism? Are the critiques valid? How have members of the second wave reacted to their presence? I argue that women coming to feminism (or feminist activism) in the 1990s have experienced and continue to experience the world in a strikingly different manner than their predecessors. As Mary Celeste Kearney notes,

In a society which has finally acknowledged, if not adequately eliminated, its problems with misogyny, homophobia, racism and, to

⁴⁵ Rebecca Walker, ed., To Be Real: Telling the Truth and Changing the Face of Feminism, (New York: Doubleday, 1995) xxxii-xxxiv.

a lesser extent, classism and ageism, the newest generation of feminists [has been] dealing with issues barely foreseen during the women's liberation movement of the 1970s when liberal feminist concerns focused on establishing women's equality with men in the public sphere, and separatist feminists struggled to create an alternative culture by adhering to a pro-woman ethos.⁴⁶

Just as a number of definitive borders separate the ideologies of the first and second waves, the third wave of feminism exists as a new group in the diverse, ever-evolving women's movement. As well, the hostility that often marks relationships between generations appears to be alive and well. Bridging the gap between the two is one of the main goals of this work.

Of particular significance to this examination is its Canadian context. Myrna Kostash, in her text chronicling the social movements and activism of the 1960s in Canada, commented on the dearth of readily accessible Canadian information concerning the famous decade of "Flower Power." Kostash's prime irritant was that most accounts presented the Canadian experience as simply a northern reflection of the American event.⁴⁷ Kostash asserted that "the sixties" in Canada was significantly different from the movement in the United States, but that the mythology surrounding the decade has had a distinctly American flavour. The same holds true for historical accounts of the women's movement, as well as third wave analyses of second wave writings. While generational divisions within feminism have been examined by both second and third wave feminists from the south, the

⁴⁶ Mary Celeste Kearney. "The Missing Links: Riot grrrl – feminism – lesbian culture." in Sheila Whitely, ed., Sexing the Groove: Popular Music and Gender, (London: Routledge, 1997) 225.

⁴⁷ Myrna Kostash, Long Way From Home: The Story of the Sixties Generation in Canada, (Toronto: James Lorimer & Company, Publishers, 1980) 251.

distinction between the Canadian women's movement and the U.S. movement should be made clear.

However, just as "certain political and theoretical issues transcend international borders, ebbing and flowing between the two countries in symbiotic fashion," in some instances herein the use of American references and sources has been unavoidable.⁴⁸ In her text, The Trouble With Normal, Mary Louise Adams acknowledged the strong influence that sources from the United States have had on Canadian research and methods particularly with regards to popular culture, youth and sexuality. Adams stated that the "incursion of American products into the Canadian cultural marketplace creates difficulties for Canadian researchers interested in Canadian discourses."⁴⁹ Michael Bliss, analyzing texts on sexuality in Canada in the early nineteenth century, admitted that the most successful series of sex manuals in the country were American in focus and content, and that similar works written by Canadians on the subject either borrowed from or were in total agreement with writers from the south. "In this field," Bliss argued, "as in so many others, Canadians initially relied on a kind of cross-fertilization from the United States."⁵⁰ Consequently, the American sources that appear within this thesis have

⁴⁸ Constance Backhouse, "The Contemporary Women's Movements in Canada and the United States: An Introduction," In Constance Backhouse and David H. Flaherty, eds., Challenging Times: The Women's Movement in Canada and the United States, (Montreal/Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1992) 3-15, 3.

⁴⁹ Mary Louise Adams, The Trouble With Normal: Postwar Youth and the Making of Heterosexuality, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1997) 17. Adams cited the Massey Commission's use of American popular culture (including film, television and popular magazines) because of the overwhelming consumption of them by Canadians.

⁵⁰ Michael Bliss, "Pure Books on Avoided Subjects: Pre-Freudian Sexual Ideas in Canada," in Michiel Horn and Ronald Sabourin, eds., Studies in Canadian Social History, (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1974) 326-327.

been included because they have influenced Canadian theoretical perspectives on contemporary feminism.

This investigation focuses specifically on the English Canadian women's movement. As Tremblay has noted,

feminism in Quebec has become a mode of expression which is very different from that found elsewhere in Canada, particularly because of its historical evolution and its ties to Catholicism and nationalism...In fact, these two branches of the Canadian movement remain distinct; we recall the positions taken by francophone and anglophone feminists in the 1980 referendum...or during the Meech Lake Constitutional talks.⁵¹

Feminists from English Canada and Quebecois feminists have often shared similar objectives and there have been several successful collaborations between the two. However, a thorough analysis of third wave feminism in Quebec is beyond the scope of this paper.⁵²

The organization of this investigation is as follows. In Chapter 1, I link the divisions that have emerged within the contemporary Canadian women's movement in recent years to shifts in Canada's demography, and outline a new method of organizing the complexities of feminism. Using population data, I examine "generations" as a useful methodological framework for feminist analyses, and acknowledge the diversity and fluidity of feminism through the application of the "wave" metaphor. Is the "third wave" the feminist equivalent of "Generation X?" I

⁵¹ Tremblay, 292.

⁵² Sophia Phoca and Rebecca Wright, *Introducing Postfeminism*, UK: Icon Books, 1999) 5, have noted that distinct demarcations separate "American" and "French" feminisms, and that "postfeminism" has become part of academic discourse. Further explorations of a "third wave" in Quebec would be an interesting endeavor, one that would undoubtedly produce strikingly different results.

address and examine feminism's "generation gap," manifest in the tensions that plague relationships between and among the waves, and prescribe mutually respectful dialogue as a potential solution.

The significance of communication (actual, theoretical, and historical) is paramount to this study. As a result, the results of an experiment in "pure" dialogue among a diverse group of feminists form a significant proportion of Chapter 1. Although the information collected from the transcripts of the group dialogue do not form the base from which general conclusions are drawn, the data are utilized as a supplement to other analyses, and the *process* of cross-generational feminist dialogue is dissected. As well, select quotations from the participants (displayed in *Italics*) are interwoven throughout the body of this paper, to augment arguments that are more theoretical. Mistrust and hostility have always plagued relationships between members of different age groups, and feminist generations are no different in that regard. I argue that intergenerational dialogue is the most effective strategy – at both the conceptual and practical levels – for the women's movement as it approaches the millennium.

Chapter 2 builds upon the generational foundation established by the preceding section, and locates the third wave within the ongoing narrative of the women's movement. Using late nineteenth and twentieth century Canadian history as a guide, I delineate the borders of each of feminism's waves, and emphasize the social and political events that have reflected and influenced the perspectives and strategies of each generation of the contemporary women's movement. I illustrate

that the first and second waves of feminism were both the product of and a response to their environments, and argue that the third wave exists as a legitimate descendant of feminism at the millennium. To characterize the third wave, I position their perspectives in direct opposition to postfeminist and anti-feminist sentiment. I argue that younger feminists will become a more visible and invaluable component of the movement once women on both sides of the generation gap address the current complications through continued, mutually respectful dialogue.

Sexual equality, freedom, and self-expression were among the fundamental feminist goals of the 1960s and 1970s, and it was believed that "women's rights to sexual pleasure and to control their own bodies were symbolic of their right to social equality."⁵³ Judy Rebick, a noted second wave feminist, has stated that she "come[s] from the generation that thinks it invented oral sex," and that half of her youth "was spent believing that sexual promiscuity was a political act..."⁵⁴ Interestingly, the "claiming [of] one's body and consciously choosing the language used to describe it" is an integral part of the third wave's strategy.⁵⁵ In Chapter 3, I clarify and expand the analysis of the two feminist generations by isolating a single issue: women's sexuality. I illustrate that each wave has conceptualized women's sexuality and formulated strategies for change according to existing societal conditions, and note that many of the third wave approaches to sexuality resemble the strategies of the early women's liberation movement. I argue that the current

⁵³ Fillion, 179.

⁵⁴ Judy Rebick, "It's Character, Stupid," *Canadian Forum*, November 1998, 13.

divisions of the women's movement can be eradicated through the sharing of knowledge, experience and perspectives of women on both sides of the divide.

The concluding chapter reiterates the primary goals of this research: to grasp feminism's current "generation gap," to acknowledge the existence of the "third wave" of the women's movement, and to bridge the gap between the waves through continued dialogue. In essence, this research hopes to provide a more complete study of the state of the Canadian women's movement at the end of the 1990s, one that recognizes the limitations of postfeminist commentators, and acknowledges the existence of a third wave. The future of Canadian feminism is not postfeminism; it is a strongly supported, vigorously active, dynamic group of young women who are determined to push the struggles of the women's movement into the next century. The problems plaguing contemporary feminism – of respect, of participation, and of control – can be diminished through simple dialogue between and among feminists. Patient, sensitive, and "real" discussion will not only improve the bonds of solidarity among feminists of all ages, but will eventually assist in the eradication of popular (mis)conceptions of where the women's movement in Canada is headed.

⁵⁵ Gillespie, 1.

Chapter 1

"Identifying the Gap: Feminist Generations"

Radical social change requires both thought and action: action informed by reflection, reflection transformed by action...and so forth. That is why we cannot and will not define feminism once and for all. For what feminism is and does and thinks is a function of what is; and feminism, if it is to succeed in its revolutionary goals and aspirations, must (and does) change in response to the social reality it is itself in the process of transforming. What does not change is feminism's commitment to women, women's knowledge and values and women's liberation.¹

The Canadian women's movement has always been highly complex. In the last thirty-five years, striking differences between and among individual feminists have appeared, and women previously marginalized within the movement have had their voices and concerns heard. Re-examinations of the political and ideological heterogeneity of feminism as a conceptual framework occurred throughout each decade, and thorough documentation followed each theoretical modification. Accordingly, feminism has become harder to define, and the currents within the women's movement as a whole have become more arduous to label. As Adamson, Briskin and McPhail have noted, the ever-increasing complexities have been "further complicated by the fact that the practice of the women's movement – the way it organizes for change – is also constantly being transformed through self-criticism, through experience, and by changing historical circumstances."²

¹ Finn (1982) 299.

² Adamson, Briskin, and McPhail, 8.

The feminist slogan "the personal is political" provides one way in which definitional quandaries of feminism may be partially overcome. The maxim was created by early members of the second wave women's movement to express the movement's desire to link women's lived experiences to a broader political context. Intended to increase the visibility of women's personal issues in the public realm and to promote a shared condition among women, "the personal is political" epitomized the objectives of the early women's rights activists. As the women's movement expanded, the ideology of the adage shifted accordingly, and "has itself been reshaped in the context of different feminist currents."³ Many feminist scholars have argued that personal experience is paramount to political mobilization against women's oppression. Others have asserted that "power is recovered in the unity of theory and practice,"⁴ and that all feminist struggles must be waged at both the theoretical and practical levels simultaneously if they are to be truly effective.⁵

Nevertheless, as Karen Dubinsky has commented, "the relationship between theory and practice is never very simple":

While feminist theory prides itself on remaining relevant to and informed by women's experiences, attempts to "chart" the relationship between feminist theoretical concerns and the ongoing experiences of the women's movement must go beyond a reductionism which attempts to 'fit' one component neatly and unproblematically into the other.⁶

The following discussion builds upon the example set by "the personal is political,"

³ Adamson, Briskin and McPhail, 208.

⁴ Kostash (1980) 80.

⁵ Finn (1982) 299.

⁶ Karen Dubinsky, "Lament for a 'Patriarchy Lost?': Anti-Feminism, Anti-Abortion and REAL Women in Canada," (Ottawa: Canadian Research Institute for the Advancement of Women, March 1985) 1.

and outlines a new method of delineating the intricacies of the women's movement in Canada. Using population data, I examine "generations" as a useful methodological framework for feminist analyses, and link the current tensions within the women's movement with shifts in Canada's demography. I acknowledge the diversity and fluidity of feminism through the application of the 'wave' metaphor. Mistrust and hostility have always plagued relationships between members of different age groups, and feminist generations are no different in that regard. I argue that intergenerational dialogue is the most advantageous tool – at both the conceptual and practical levels – for the women's movement as it approaches the millennium.

The study of demography has been defined simply as "the analysis of the size, structure and development of human populations."⁷ Under such a broad definition, demographic investigations could reasonably incorporate an infinite number of variables, including geographical distribution of populations, natural resource allocation, family and financial planning, social welfare policies, and un/employment statistics. As Heather Jon Maroney has noted:

Even when developed market societies do not have a distinct population policy, they do make policy decisions with reference to demographic issues – they have a "demographic politics." In particular, wide-ranging concerns have been voiced about the consequences of low birth rates and aging populations (or "the demographic crunch") for economic and social vitality in market, Soviet and post-Soviet societies.⁸

⁷ Nicolas Abercrombie, Stephen Hill, and Bryan Turner, *Dictionary of Sociology*, (Markham: Penguin Books Canada, 1988) 63.

⁸ Heather Jon Maroney, "Canadian Feminism and Demographic Politics: Some Lessons From the South," in Meg Luxton, ed., *Feminism and Families: Critical Policies and Changing Practices*, (Halifax: Fernwood Publishing, 1997) 27.

Studies of population change and demographic forecasts have the potential to influence political decision-making and to affect a broad range of society's institutions. However, the concept of "generations" has not been extensively employed as an analytical or theoretical tool among academics until very recently.⁹

In Canada, the utilization of "generations" as a suitable framework for analyses was initiated, in part, by a heightened interest in social history by a number of scholars.¹⁰ The publication of a number of well-received texts concerning the volatile nature of Canada's population over the last century (and the impacts of that demographic shift) also served to broaden the scope of that interest. In 1995, former Minister of Finance-turned-financial planner Garth Turner released 2015: After the Boom, a 'how-to' text on successful retirement strategies. The following year, David Foot and Daniel Stoffman released what would become an almost immediate bestseller: Boom, Bust and Echo: How to Profit from the Coming Demographic Shift. Foot and Stoffman argued that a comprehensive analysis of demographic trends could not only lead to an understanding of the past, but also to reliable (and potentially lucrative) predictions for the future. In essence, the authors asserted that "demographics [can] explain about two-thirds of everything."¹¹ Michael Adams twisted that adage in his 1997 publication Sex in the Snow: Canadian

⁹ Kenneth McRoberts, "Introduction to 'Generations in Canadian Society'," *The International Journal of Canadian Studies* (Winter 1993) 6.

¹⁰ See Meg Luxton, More Than a Labour of Love: Three Generations of Women's Work in the Home, (Toronto: The Women's Press, 1980); Myrna Kostash, Long Way From Home: The Story of the Sixties Generation in Canada, 1980; and Doug Owsram, Born at the Right Time: A History of the Baby Boom Generation, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1996).

¹¹ David Foot and Daniel Stoffman, Boom Bust and Echo, (Toronto: McFarlane Walter & Ross, 1996)
2. Boom Bust and Echo 2000 has recently been published for the millennium.

Social Values at the End of the Millennium, stating instead that "demography is not destiny."¹²

Although the swell of publications concerning the financial implications of Canada's changing population has diminished, public interest in the historical patterns and recent shifts in the demography of Canadian society has not. Media attention to the "greying" of Canada has continued to perpetuate the significance of "generations" in the current social context. The impending threat of population aging has expanded the discussion from individual investment strategies and financial planning to debates on the future of the social welfare system (particularly the restructuring of geriatric care, homecare and OHIP provisions), education, housing, and employment. Analyses that have been conducted regarding the demographic changes in Canada's recent past (specifically, the shift from very high to very low birth rates in the 1960s and 1970s) have indicated that tension, an intergenerational hostility, has emerged in situations where the privileges and/or rights of one generation have impinged (or have appeared to encroach) upon the life-chances of another.¹³ Intergenerational hostility, popularly known as a 'generation gap,' has continued to permeate headlines, and the ongoing debate has largely concerned a struggle for identity, money and power between a younger, 'rebellious' generation and its predecessors.

The use of "generations" as a principal instrument of organization has not been without criticism. Judith Roof argued that the utilization of generational

¹² Michael Adams, Sex in the Snow, (Toronto: The Penguin Group, 1997).

¹³ McRoberts, 5.

metaphors "assumes a reproductive narrative that produces as many problems as its paradigm might resolve."¹⁴ She claimed that the adoption of generational frameworks, although convenient for analyses,

...means privileging a kind of family history that organizes generations where they don't exist, ignores intragenerational differences and intergenerational commonalities, and thrives on a paradigm of oppositional change.¹⁵

Roof rejected the use of "generations" as a useful empirical model, and asserted that such frameworks assume linear, chronological time. Such approaches, she argued, lead to a "reproductive and familial" understanding of change, and create "a perpetual debt to the past."¹⁶

Others have noted that the use of "generations" as a methodological tool holds the "danger of essentializing decades, like the '60s, the '70s, the '80s,"¹⁷ and that it necessarily "forces a degree of generalization."¹⁸ The application of stringent dates to define an entire group of individuals can be problematic, particularly because every society experiences an endless succession of births. Nonetheless, the concept has played an important role in the social sciences, particularly in examinations that seek to explain group differences in culture, interests, or political or social behaviours:¹⁹

Denying the force of generation as a category may in fact serve to prevent the questioning of its hold over us. Whether or not

¹⁴ Judith Roof, "Generational Difficulties: or, The Fear of a Barren History," in Generations: Academic Feminists in Dialogue, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997) 71.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 72.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 71.

¹⁷ E. Ann Kaplan, "Introduction 1: An Exchange," in Kaplan and Looser, eds., Generations: Academic Feminists in Dialogue, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997) 3.

¹⁸ O'wram, xiii.

¹⁹ Abercrombie, et al., 104.

"generations" promote "false" divisions, feminist generational schisms are having and have had material effects – effects, I would argue, that can be more profoundly experienced by the "next" generation than by the previous one.²⁰

Despite the conceptual confusion often associated with the idea, generational perspectives *are* significant. Creating frameworks and identifying differences and similarities (in both perspectives and needs) between and among generations "helps to make sense of an increasingly complex world."²¹

Any and all attempts at generational analysis, however, must be performed with caution. Every age group must be examined in the social, cultural, and historical context in which they were born and raised in order to establish a significant understanding of the particular group as a whole. An examination of the age group's internal attributes, or self-descriptions, as well as the group's relationship with other generations, is also pertinent to a comprehensive examination of a generation. However, an individual's date of birth does not necessarily denote identification with or affiliation to a specific generation. Although age disparity between groups of people has been the most predominant factor in analyses of intergenerational hostility, an individual's alliance with particular ideologies may also indicate association with a generation, regardless of when they were born.²² In other words, adherence to similar values and mores also constitutes identification with a "generation" – sometimes even more so than demographics. As

²⁰ Devoney Looser, "Introduction 2: Gen X Feminists?" in Kaplan and Looser, 33.

²¹ Robert Barnard, Dave Cosgrave and Jennifer Welsh, *Chips & Pop: Decoding the Nexus Generation*, (Toronto: Malcolm Lester Books, 1998), 2.

²² Marilyn Porter and Fenella Porter, "Making New Feminisms: A Conversation Between a Feminist Mother and Daughter," *Feminist Voices*, No. 6. (Ottawa: CRIAW, March 1999) 26.

the mother/daughter writing duo Marilyn and Fenella Porter have noted, the central question to all research on relationships between generations should be the way in which difference – in both age and opinion – places groups of people in a kind of ‘hierarchy.’²³

The last decade has witnessed a number of notable intergenerational debates. The overwhelmingly large number of children born during the period from 1946 to 1964 has held the interest of futurists, historians, and journalists alike, and the birth, growth, aging, influence, and affluence of the “Baby Boom” continues to receive public attention.²⁴ The early 1990s also marked the production of texts concerning the experiences of the generation born after the Baby Boom: Generation “X.”²⁵ Although each of the publications concentrated on a particular cohort of young people, all of them focused on the characteristics that made that generation unique. That particular generation gap was manifest in discussions regarding age, but also in historical analyses of social, economic, political, and cultural values.

Following the Second World War, four countries, Canada, the United States, New Zealand and Australia, experienced an unprecedented increase in their overall birth rates. Although the demographic specifics continue to undergo debate, the upsurge of births in Canada began around 1945, marked by a birth rate of approximately 24.3 children per thousand population to 28.9 per thousand

²³ Porter and Porter, 26.

²⁴ Owsram, xiii. Owsram, xiv, admits that the dates are somewhat arbitrary and that “in cultural terms the baby boom was born sometime between the late war and about 1955 or 1956”. John Kettle, *The Big Generation*, (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart Ltd, 1980), 19-20, maintains that the Boom consisted of 6,715,000 people born between mid-1951 and 1966, and dismisses birth rates from before and after that time frame as “not all that startling.”

²⁵ See particularly Douglas Coupland’s *Generation X*. (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1991).

population in 1947. Translated into actual numbers, the number of babies born in Canada in 1945 totaled just over 300,000. By 1947, that number had increased to 372,000, and by 1952, the number of babies born to Canadian women numbered more than 400,000.²⁶ The Baby Boom generation constituted the "very large group of people born within a few years of each other, growing up together, entering in new life experiences together, maturing and growing old together, and all the time doing so in a society that is several sizes too small."²⁷

Certain geographic areas in Canada experienced the swell in overall population size differently than others. During the 1950s, the population of Ontario grew by 35 percent. As historian Joy Parr reported, the birth rates in Ontario exceeded 26 per thousand population in the province throughout the decade. As well, European immigration into the province was extensive, accounting for approximately one-third of Ontario's overall population growth at that time.²⁸ In Quebec, on the other hand, the total post-war family size increased by only 6 percent.²⁹ Regardless of the regional disparities, one thing is certain: the Baby Boom period produced the largest generation known in history.³⁰

Contrary to popular belief, the unexpected growth in population was not

²⁶Owram, 4; Angus McLaren and Arlene McLaren, The Bedroom and the State, (Don Mills: Oxford University Press, 1997) 125 reported that Canada had a record 255,317 'now-or-never' births in 1941, and that the post-war baby boom followed: from 20.3 births per 1,000 pop. in 1936 to 28.0 in 1956.

²⁷ Kettle, 26.

²⁸ Joy Parr, A Diversity of Women: Ontario 1945-1980, Introduction, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1995) 4; McLaren and McLaren, 125-126

²⁹ McLaren and McLaren, 125-126.

³⁰ Susan A. McDaniel, "The Changing Canadian Family: Women's Roles and the Impact of Feminism," in Sandra Burt, Lorraine Code, and Lindsay Dorney, eds., Changing Patterns: Women in Canada, 2nd Edition, (Toronto: McLelland & Stewart, 1993) 424.

simply due to the return of Canadian soldiers to their wives and homes following the Second World War. Rather, it was the result of a convergence of late childbearing (those postponed by the war) and by an upsurge in early marriages with children born less than two years after wedlock. As well, post-war prosperity promoted an overall increase of family size.³¹ The redefinition of women's roles during the period also helped reshape the size and nature of the Canadian family:

In the post-war period, women returned to housework and motherhood, leaving the jobs in the labour force they held during the war...the appearance of women's magazines singing the praises of motherhood, of family, and of the joys of making meatloaf. The propaganda of the day pictured women at home and strong families as hedges against another war or as ballast in the Cold War.³²

Domestic metaphors pervaded most of women's activities at that time, and their roles became more family- and child- centred than they had been in the 1920s and 1930s.³³ As Mariana Valverde has noted, "the baby-boom era has come to represent a lost age of social naivet, political quiescence, and sexual conformity, an age in which – we imagine – women's worst fear was getting a bad perm."³⁴

By the end of the 1950s, when the Baby Boomers reached their pre-teen years, "the cult of the teenager" was firmly established.³⁵ Illustrated most vividly by the sheer purchasing power of the age's middle-to-upper class youth culture, the consumption of clothing, movie theatre and drive-in passes, records, and television

³¹ McDaniel, 424; McLaren and McLaren, 125; Oram, 4.

³² McDaniel, 425.

³³ Parr (1995) 5; McDaniel, 425.

³⁴ Mariana Valverde, "Building Anti-Delinquent Communities: Morality, Gender, and Generation in the City," in Joy Parr, ed., A Diversity of Women, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1995) 19-45, 19.

³⁵ Oram, 145.

shows increased exponentially. It was a time of uninterrupted and unprecedented economic growth, relative international peace, and the young generation "grew up under the glow of welfare state values."³⁶ By that time, as Doug Owsram has noted, many members of the Baby Boom generation had come to the realization that they were "something special."³⁷ By the mid-1960s, the standard of living in Canada was higher than it had ever been for any previous generation of Canadians. Central Canada was heralded as the country's industrial heartland, and the increased prosperity, "the golden age of capitalism in Ontario," created both the supply and demand for higher standards of social service than had ever been provided.³⁸

Demographers and futurists argue that, "*en masse*, larger generations carry more clout and ultimately have a greater impact on society."³⁹ The age group known as the Baby Boom grew to fulfill what Owsram has called "a special historical destiny."⁴⁰ The "Woodstock generation," the "revolutionaries," the "radical" counter-culture of the 1960s successfully transformed popular culture and rapidly became the focus group of virtually every institution: from government and education, to advertising and television programming. In essence, the decade in which the Baby Boomers came of age has become the defining period for the entire generation:

It was in 'the sixties' (a period that actually extends, in historical terms, through the early seventies) that the baby boom became conscious of itself as a generational force and began to think of itself as special, not for the economic affluence it had been given, but for the moral and personal attributes it possessed. The

³⁶ Barnard, et al, 15, 217.

³⁷ Owsram, 156.

³⁸ Parr (1995) 6.

³⁹ Barnard, et al., 13.

⁴⁰ Owsram, 309.

generation and the decade, with all the images it connotes, thus became inseparably linked.⁴¹

Due, in part, to the enormity of the Baby Boom's size and also to the tumultuous political environment (manifested both at home and abroad), the decade of the 1960s has come to be known as one of the great mythological eras of modern times. As a result, and also in retrospect, the social, cultural, and economic experiences of an entire group of North Americans have been branded into history.

In 1991, the generation trailing in the wake of the Baby Boom reached its own coming of age. That year marked the publication of Vancouver-based author Douglas Coupland's debut work of fiction. A North American bestseller, Generation X: Tales for an Accelerated Culture sealed the young writer's place in the literary world. More significantly, the novel also launched a media catch phrase that effectively labeled an entire group of people born in the late 1960s and early 1970s.⁴² Remarkably different from their predecessors in age structure and (apparently) values, the emerging generation was plagued by contradiction, and the mainstream media scrambled to define them. Given the poor economic circumstances in which they reached adulthood, the successors of the Baby Boom received a multitude of pejorative tags: the Baby Busters, the Lost Generation, the 13th Generation, Generation Redux, twentynothings, Generation Why? Generation After (after the 1960s, after it all happened), Generation Ecch! The Recycled

⁴¹ Owram, 136.

⁴² Coupland coined the term "Generation X" for his own cohort in the 1990s, but he borrowed the title from Billy Idol's punk band "Generation X," who co-opted it from Charles Hamblett and Jane Deverson, who originally penned it to describe the emerging young generation of the 1960s in their text, Generation X, (London: Tandem Books, 1964). Hence the tag "the recycled generation."

Generation, and the like.⁴³ Eight years and five novels later, Coupland's euphemism has endured the media bombardment of features and editorials concerning the plight of an entire generation destined to be little more than apathetic slackers, a group of people who have "no identity, standing for nothing, and going for nothing."⁴⁴

The Baby Boom generation assumed epic proportions largely in retrospect, through oversimplifications of events by the mainstream media and grandiose accounts of 'the decade of the sixties' by members of the cohort.⁴⁵ Generation X, a smaller and infinitely less influential generation in terms of broad structural change, has also been besieged with simple descriptions and comparisons to their large predecessor. Members of the younger generation have responded swiftly to such condemnations. As Kike Roach explained:

People of my age have been branded "Generation X" and accused of apathy and indifference. But our realities, anxieties, and accomplishments cannot be summarized or symbolized by a letter in the alphabet. Activism is not unique to any generation. It is not the property of the sixties, although there are a lot of important lessons to be drawn from that time. Progressive young people do exist, and there is still reason for us to organize.⁴⁶

Mainstream media attention to Generation X – and its uneasy relationship with the Baby Boom – has faltered dramatically from its original level only recently, but it can be assumed that the myths surrounding both generations will continue.

⁴³ See Moira Farr, "Talking 'bout YOUR Generation," *This Magazine*, (Vol. 25, No. 5&6, December 1991), Geoffrey Holtz, Welcome to the Jungle, (New York: St. Martin's-Griffin, 1995, and Neil Howe and Bill Strauss, 13th Gen: Abort. Retry. Ignore. Fail?, (New York: Vintage Books), 1993.

⁴⁴ Cash, as quoted in Peter Yannopoulos and Alex Gray, "Generation X: Literature Review and Hypothesis," (Aruba: 17-22 December, 1995) 4.

⁴⁵ O'wram, 217.

⁴⁶ Judy Rebick and Kike Roach, Politically Speaking, (Vancouver: Douglas & McIntyre, 1996) 10-11.

Although premises regarding the concept of generations provide useful fodder for pulp fiction novels, newspaper items, and stimulating dinner-table conversations, the actual 'Baby Boom versus Generation X' war has been waged by a limited number of Canadians. Anecdotal descriptions of "the way it was," and historical accounts of the "magnificent sixties," have generally been provided by those with a voice: white, relatively educated, heterosexual, middle to upper-middle class Canadians. Oworm admitted that "not all baby-boomers were students at university, much less students on a picket line. Moreover, many of the best-known radical leaders of the decade were pre-boomers."⁴⁷ Others concur, arguing that despite the accounts of the legendary decade of 'Flower Power', "those defiant attitudes never involved all young people or even most of the famous Baby Boom generation."⁴⁸

As Dionne Brand pointed out in her Toronto-based short story "Bathurst," the experiences of some Canadians during the decade of the 1960s were strikingly different than the ones that have made the Baby Boom famous:

The stakes were high for us. We were never going to be able to cut our hair and join brokerage firms twenty years later, we would never be able to shake our heads and pass it all off as youth, we didn't go to Woodstock...Our children would never have the floating televised-out Generation-X-only-means-white-folks-angst; theirs would be a deathly desperation. There was no comfortable identity to fall back on, no suburb waiting, it wasn't our mothers and fathers we were defying, it was history. We watched hippiedom crowd our destiny with freedom off the TV screens. We said, Ain't that just like white folks.⁴⁹

According to most popular accounts, the participants of the various social and

⁴⁷ Oworm, 160.

⁴⁸ Michael Medved, "The Wilting Myth of Flower Power," *The Ottawa Citizen*, (12 March 1998) A17.

⁴⁹ Dionne Brand, "Bathurst," in *Bread out of Stone*, (Toronto: Coach House Press, 1995) 70.

political movements of the 1960s were not stratified by race at all. Brand's story proved otherwise. Reflecting upon her own involvement in a number of political and social movements in the 1960s, Germaine Greer commented that the "Swinging Sixties" was really "just an ad slogan," and admitted that "the terrible thing about the 1960s was that we forgot about the class struggle – we thought revolution was like a religious experience. We had a distaste for discipline and an inability to organize."⁵⁰ These and other accounts illustrate that mythologies surrounding generations have been created, perpetuated, and maintained by the status quo (frequently white, well-educated, middle class scholars and journalists). Until thorough re-evaluations of history have become commonplace, similar narratives will remain "truths" within the pages of history texts and people's minds.

Many accounts of the events, attitudes, and experiences of those who came of age during the decade of 1960s have been guilty of perpetuating a distorted image of the past. However, the accomplishments of the political activists of the era and the significance of the historic period cannot be overstated. Dissatisfaction with political institutions and administrative tactics – both domestic and foreign – sparked fervent protests from the New Left, student groups, peace organizations and union workers around the world; demonstrations and rallies that often ended with riots.⁵¹

⁵⁰ Germaine Greer, as interviewed by Julie Wheelwright, "Contemporary Movement Born Out of '60s Manure," *Herizons*, (January/February 1987) 11.

⁵¹ Reports on the 1960s tend to focus on the events that took place in North America, specifically the anti-Vietnam war demonstrations. Other areas of the world were also undergoing massive social change during that period. "Bloody Monday", May 6th, 1968 marked one of the most violent days of the Parisian student revolt after 5000 students at the Sorbonne marched with support from the student and faculty unions. The actions of the students inspired sympathetic strikes throughout France, and approximately 9 million workers walked the lines by May 22nd. President de Gaulle reacted with swift deployment of military troops, and the French revolutionary furor dissipated.

Furious opposition to the social and political environment – from the war in Vietnam to the Soviet Union's invasion of Czechoslovakia to the assassination of Martin Luther King Jr. – was loud and visible on the streets, in municipal parks, at public events, in universities, and on national television. The activities of many members of the Baby Boom generation (and its cohorts) launched unprecedented structural changes in political and cultural institutions and in the perspectives of a multitude of Canadians. Perhaps most significantly, the 1960s sparked social justice and human rights movements that would sustain the struggle for social and political change up to the present time.

The women's movement rose from a number of diverse social and political grassroots activist organizations that emerged throughout the 1960s.⁵² Since that time, the women's movement has grown dramatically in both scope and size, and the success of feminism's struggles to make women's issues visible and valued in the public sphere has been immeasurable. Confirmation of the extraordinary achievements of the last 35 years of women's activism can be found virtually everywhere: in women's centres, women's health collectives, caucuses, and shelters; in Women's Studies programs at Universities; in non-governmental organizations at the regional, national and international levels; and in previously male-dominated fields of employment. In essence, the triumphs of the women's movement can be found "in places where women were not to be found before."⁵³

⁵² The rise of the Canadian women's movement will be discussed in much more depth in the chapters that follow.

⁵³ Rose L. Glickman, Daughters of Feminists: Young Women With Feminist Mothers Talk About Their Lives, (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1993) xiii; Porter and Porter, 24.

The women's movement has been susceptible to generational descent as well. Feminism's latest generation gap has been due, in part, to the ever-shifting global environment, the economic, social and political circumstances of the present period, and the increased "professionalization" of feminist organizations.⁵⁴ Intergenerational hostility has been expressed by a younger group of women and their feminist predecessors and has been visible in theoretical discourse (within academia) and in the public sphere (in popular books, news, radio, and talk shows, and the print media).⁵⁵ Just as a number of definitive conceptual borders separate the ideologies of the turn-of-the-century feminists and the "new feminists" of the late 1960s and early 1970s, women coming to feminism (or feminist activism) in the 1990s have experienced and continue to experience the world in a strikingly different manner than their predecessors. As well, the hostility that often marks relationships between generations appears to be alive and well.

It should be noted, however, that any exploration attempting to locate the perspectives and activities of each of feminism's generations in the context of the women's movement as a whole must recognize that the movement itself has not existed in a vacuum. One of the more difficult tasks of feminist historians and researchers has been to describe, clearly, what precisely constitutes 'the women's movement' as a collective while also recognizing the multitude of complexities

⁵⁴ Porter and Porter, 24-25 have argued (with particular reference to economic development) that the "professionalization" of the women's movement has permitted women to participate in previously male-dominated fields, has put women on the agendas in national and international human rights debates, but has also created authority structures within its ranks that must be recognized.

⁵⁵ E. Ann Kaplan, "Introduction 2: Feminism, Aging, and Changing Paradigms," in Generations: Academic Feminists in Dialogue, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997) 16.

intrinsic to it:

The women's movement has a shifting, amoeba-like character; it is, and has always been, politically, ideologically, and strategically diverse. It is not, and has never been, represented by a single organizational entity; it has no head office, no single leaders, no membership cards to sign. Indeed, much of the widespread support for women's liberation has had no organizational identification at all.⁵⁶

All feminist movements have been fundamentally concerned with the struggle to eradicate women's historical and structural oppression, but the social, economic and political environment of their activism has been strikingly different. While the women's movement in Canada must be viewed as an entity, the historical specificity of the activism of its members demarcates the generations within it.

The wave metaphor has provided a useful method for understanding the complexity of the women's movement:

When we speak of a wave, we typically mean "one among others." "Wave" just doesn't sound like the right word for the lone occurrence of something. Waves that arise in social and political milieus, like waves that arise in water, become defined only in context, relative to the waves that have come and gone before.⁵⁷

Each one of the women's movement's "waves" must be viewed as separate "species" – distinct movements with characteristics unique to time and place – within a continuous, larger struggle for women's rights. The women's movement in Canada has been multi-faceted since its inception; it cannot be compartmentalized as a solitary association of like-minded women, as "much of it was never organized

⁵⁶ Adamson, Briskin, and McPhail, 7.

⁵⁷ Cathryn Bailey, "Making Waves and Drawing Lines," *Hypatia*, Vol. 12, No.3 (Summer 1997) 19.

in the traditional sense."⁵⁸ While all generational investigations demand historical specificity if they are to be effective as theoretical or methodological frameworks, the diverse feminist persuasions characteristic of each wave must be acknowledged throughout such research.

Scholars and authors of women's social history texts have utilized the wave metaphor in recent years. The First Wave occurred at the turn of the century and waned as time progressed, and the Second Wave of feminism developed from the discord of the 1960s. The emergence of the contemporary women's movement, the Third Wave of feminism, has been difficult to arrange in such a linear manner.⁵⁹ As Micheline Dumont has noted,

France, at the moment, is being swamped by, in my opinion, a terrible concept called "l'après-féminisme." It sounds very much like "l'après-guerre." This insistence on time, on chronology, and on succession does not help to explain what is taking place. Historical time is a complex reality...Sometimes, however, a historical truth is disorderly...⁶⁰

Although the wave metaphor provides a more comprehensive framework to describe the fluidity of the women's movement, notions of a "first" and "second" and "third" wave of feminism suggest that historical and social change progresses in a direct, forward-moving fashion. Also, the sole utilization of "waves" may lead to distortions of the diverse reality of the movement itself. As Porter and Porter noted, the use of

⁵⁸ Hamilton, (1996) 52-53.

⁵⁹ It should be reiterated that "youth" is not a prerequisite for identification with the third wave of feminism. Although the emergence of 1990s feminism coincides quite neatly with the experiences of "Generation X," both should be viewed as ideological generations.

⁶⁰ Micheline Dumont, "Origins of the Women's Movement in Quebec," in Backhouse and Flaherty, *Challenging Times*, (Montreal/Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1992) 72-73.

only one unit of analysis may privilege "as its central identification, the experience[s] of a certain generation of white, middle class, northern women of a certain generation – that is, women of a certain 'common' experience."⁶¹

Clearly, the dynamics of the women's movement have been difficult to encapsulate in a clear methodological framework, much less a simple definition. To date, a plethora of descriptions have attempted to capture – even sketch – a comprehensive definition of what constitutes feminism. One denotation stated that feminism was a belief in the systemic disadvantage of women in modern society, one that advocated equal opportunities for men and women.⁶² Other descriptions have been more poetic:

Feminism is about change, about a redistribution of power. It is about challenging the status quo. It is a call for the redefinition of the family, the mosque, the temple, the church, and the synagogue, and of love. Change is threatening to those of us who wield power and those who do not. And because it is threatening, it is electric and alive and powerful and I want to touch it.⁶³

Others have suggested that the women's movement has never been composed of one particular group or preoccupied with one specific agenda. Instead, they regard the women's movement as "a number of traditions within a larger movement" dedicated to securing equality for women.⁶⁴

Although some members of the emerging new wave of feminism in the 1960s acknowledged their gratitude to and continuity with their predecessors, the second

⁶¹ Porter and Porter, 17-18.

⁶² Abercrombie, et al, 96.

⁶³ Samantha Sacks, "Why Are You A Feminist?" *Canadian Woman Studies* Vol. 17, No. 2 (1995) 143.

⁶⁴ Janet K. Boles and Diane Long Hoeveler, From the Goddess to the Glass Ceiling: A Dictionary of Feminism, (London: Madison Books, 1996) 21.

wave “also claim[ed] to be a distinctively new movement: a new ‘species’.”⁶⁵ Given the historical context in which the majority of them came of age, “it was hardly surprising that there was conflict between these two generations.”⁶⁶ Their parents’ postwar adherence to the values of thriftiness, self-sacrifice, and a strong work ethic, as well as their eagerness for respectability and status was an easy target for the growing cult of youth in the newly consumer-driven capitalist market of the late 1950s.⁶⁷ As Lynne Segal has noted, “large numbers of middle-class youth...with newly found egalitarian delight, hurried on down into the joys of the generation gap – rejecting middle-class ambition to dance, get high, and get laid.”⁶⁸

The perceived uniqueness of the “new feminism” of the late 1960s and early 1970s was articulated by many:

Thanks to the early feminists, we who have mounted this second stage of the feminist revolution have grown up with the right to vote...we have grown up with the right to higher education and to employment, and with some, not all, of the legal rights of equality...We do not need to suppress our just grievances. We now have enough courage to express them...We must begin to use the power of our actions: to make women finally *visible* as people...⁶⁹

Judy Rebick has also addressed the generational differences that distinguished second wave perspectives from those of the first wave. “When I was growing up, oral sex was never discussed...In those days,” she recalled,

“good girls” were supposed to remain virgins, resisting the fevered demands of their oversexed boyfriends. As my Aunt Ceil once told

⁶⁵ Bailey, 19.

⁶⁶ Lynne Segal, Straight Sex, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994) 2.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 2-3.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 3.

⁶⁹ Betty Friedan, “Our Revolution is Unique,” in Mary Lou Thompson, ed., Voices of the New Feminism, Boston: Beacon Press, 1970), 32, 43.

me when she suspected I was considering sexual relations with my boyfriend of the moment, "No man wants to buy a soiled plate from the shelf." But that was then and this is now. And between then and now, the early women's movement broke open Aunt Ceil's notions of sexuality. Women were sexual beings too. We insisted on engaging in sex for our own pleasure as well as the pleasure of our partners. Remember the right to orgasm?⁷⁰

Rebick argued that although the women's movement successfully shattered numerous traditional notions of gender roles, women's rights and sexuality, "the personal is still political...Despite 30 years of feminism, grotesquely sexist treatment of women still seems acceptable."⁷¹

The existence of a new, emerging feminist generation in the 1990s, when (and if) acknowledged by scholars, has proven to be problematic for those attempting to 'fit' it into the women's movement's evolutionary timeline. As multifarious as the first and second waves, members of the third wave have been classified as dissidents, as "postfeminists" who have been "less concerned about waving a feminist banner than focusing on personal needs...focus on the personal, to hell with the political."⁷² In that context, the third wave is labeled an apathetic group of ungrateful young women who have failed to acknowledge the achievements of their forerunners, and who subsequently deride all feminists as "anti-feminine, anti-family, and anti-motherhood."⁷³ Those who have recognized that progressive young feminists *do* exist have emphasized the generation's demographic

⁷⁰ Judy Rebick, "It's Character, Stupid," *Canadian Forum*, (November 1998) 15.

⁷¹ *Ibid*, 15.

⁷² Susan Crean, "Post Feminism and Power Dressing," in Twist and Shout: A Decade of Feminist Writing in This Magazine, (Toronto: Second Story Press, 1992), 123-124.

⁷³ Crean, 125.

relationship to themselves. As second waver Rose Glickman, editor of the anthology Daughters of Feminists, stated:

In a profound sense all women roughly between the ages of eighteen and thirty-five, whether they embrace or reject feminism, are the daughters of feminism, heir to its struggles, failures, and successes; inheritors, willy-nilly, of the heroic phase of the modern women's movement.⁷⁴

While serving to promote the more positive aspects of the third wave, such definitions also tend to perpetuate notions of a mother/daughter dichotomy. Presenting the second and third waves in binary opposition inflicts a mentor/apprentice relationship upon the two generations, and maintains the supremacy (and therefore the privilege and the power) of the older, more experienced, second wave feminist perspective.

Members of the third wave have struggled with the challenge of defining feminism (both for themselves and generally) and the task of determining the boundaries of the women's movement in the 1990s. That has required not only the theoretical deconstruction of stereotypes, traditional assumptions, and strategies, but also the active redefinition and renaming of women's disparate conditions. As self-described third wave feminist writer and academic Devoney Looser has argued, "younger feminists are *not* counterfeits in the face of the older and more genuine article. We are not the badly manufactured copies of second-wave originals."⁷⁵ The younger generation of feminists have expressed their desire to expand the meaning of feminism to include their own experiences and to bring together diverse

⁷⁴ Glickman, xlii.

⁷⁵ Looser, 44.

perspectives. As Fenella Porter explained:

This is clearly because their experience and the way in which they see their own identity as women does not fit into the linear structure of the women's movement as it has been defined by our mothers. Nor does it fit into the definition of 'feminism' as it has been defined and lived by our mothers. Feminism, if it is to include the experience of all women, needs to be much more diverse and complicated – uncontrollable even.⁷⁶

In other words, as jeannine de lombard has suggested, "waves – which, by definition, curve alternately in opposite directions – embody contradiction."⁷⁷ Members of the third wave have stretched the limits of "waves" and "generations" to incorporate diversity, include inconsistencies of thought and modes of activism, and confront the seemingly irreconcilable paradoxes of what constitutes feminism in the late 1990s.

In the introduction to her 1997 anthology entitled Click: Becoming Feminists, Lynn Crosbie recalled a recurring incident in which her students would begin a sentence with the qualifier, "I'm not a feminist, but...":

...They told me that they did not know what [feminism] meant, that it seemed to mean many different things. After giving them my standard line, via Robin Morgan, that feminism exists wherever women meet and talk and testify, I thought that confusion is what we have inherited after the fact. After the clearly defined and follow-the-dots feminism of the second wave.⁷⁸

Crosbie's students shared the convictions of many women coming to and struggling with feminism and feminist theory in the 1990s.⁷⁹ By definition, her students were

⁷⁶ Porter and Porter, 18.

⁷⁷ jeannine de lombard, "Femmenism," in Rebecca Walker, ed., (New York: Anchor Books, 1995) 21.

⁷⁸ Lynn Crosbie, ed., Click: Becoming Feminists, (Toronto: Macfarlane, Walter & Ross, 1997) 4.

⁷⁹ Crosbie, 4; Participants in the intergenerational group dialogue reported hearing similar statements from their colleagues, undergraduate women's studies students, and friends.

sufferers of what has become known as the "I'm not a feminist, but..." Syndrome. Even among women who support gender equality and many of the tenets that feminism has historically espoused, the word "feminist" has been said to evoke negative connotations which they seek to avoid.⁸⁰ But for what purpose?

Porter and Porter have suggested that young women reject the term 'feminist' as a form of resistance to and defiance against the power and authority (both real and perceived) of mainstream feminist commentators and organizations at the present time. The authors observed a significant generation gap between the second and third waves, and argued that older, established feminists have not taken the initiative to listen to and learn from the perspectives of the emerging generation. For their part, "younger feminists [have been] too busy resisting the power/authority of their 'mothers' to learn from them."⁸¹ Although generational schisms have been identified by Porter and Porter and others,

[women] have not confronted the actual structures of power, their pervasiveness and their enormous complexity in the feminist organizations that we set up. It is only by recognizing structures of power and authority within women's organizations and within the movement itself, and addressing them as such that we are able to take and use what is good, and discard what is bad, thus creating a more fluid and open space – generationally as well with regard to other 'differences.'⁸²

While countless differences among individual feminists and feminist groups within the women's movement have always existed, members of each wave have failed to face such tensions directly. As *MS* magazine editor Marcia Gillespie commented,

⁸⁰ Boles and Hoeveler, 160.

⁸¹ Porter and Porter, 18-19.

⁸² Ibid., 23-24.

"the way one woman expresses her feminism may cause other feminists to applaud, cringe, or rail against her." But, she added, that has been one of the many reasons why the movement has endured; "because of its ability to allow for difference, to encompass the idiosyncratic and iconoclastic."⁸³

Others have come to similar conclusions about the state and future of the women's movement.⁸⁴ Lynn Crosbie defined the women's movement simply as "individuals within a shifting series of contexts."⁸⁵ Her definition presented feminism as a constantly shifting social movement that, in recent years, has "had to expand to accommodate the difference and divergence of its constituents."⁸⁶ Young feminists in the 1990s have asserted that unresolved and/or unsatisfactory conditions for women persist in today's society, and that historical re-evaluations, challenges, debates, and discussions must continue in a number of forums. As well, third wave feminists have demanded that a conscious effort be made to include previously marginalized groups of women in the future. Like their predecessors, third wave feminists recognize that their personal experiences have legitimate political significance and that the need for collective struggle against the systemic discrimination of women has not diminished. However, they have also acknowledged that "the myth of a united sisterhood is just that, a myth."⁸⁷

A number of texts have compared and contrasted the differences and

⁸³ Marcia Ann Gillespie, "Equal Time," *Ms.* (September/October 1998) 1.

⁸⁴ Many proponents of these ideologies have referred to themselves and their contemporaries simply as "feminists," believing that (regardless of "wave") being pro-woman constitutes being a feminist.

⁸⁵ Crosbie, 5.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 4.

⁸⁷ Nan Bauer Maglin and Donna Perry, eds., "Bad Girls/Good Girls", (New Jersey: Rutgers, 1996) xiv.

similarities between and among generations of women in an attempt to bridge the gap between them and also to confront – and potentially alleviate – inter-generational hostility. Meg Luxton's More Than A Labour of Love: Three Generations of Women's Work in the Home was one of the first Canadian publications to explore generational change from a feminist perspective. Based on three generations of working-class homemakers in Flin Flon, Manitoba, Luxton's study analyzed women's unpaid work. Luxton outlined how domestic labour changed through different periods of time, and isolated the various forces that have shaped and changed women's work in the home.⁸⁸ Although the text did not specifically address the differences between generations of feminist perspectives, it effectively illustrated the historical specificity of experience and provided a useful framework for future demographic analyses focused upon a single issue.

Heather Jon Maroney incorporated demography and feminist theory in an article entitled "Canadian Feminism and Demographic Politics: Some Lessons From the South." Maroney was interested in determining to what extent demographic politics – and population policy in particular – could be a worthwhile issue for feminist debate.⁸⁹ Primarily concerned with feminist tactics in the political arena, Maroney sought to create a new strategic framework that would negate the divisiveness of identity politics and further the goals of the women's movement. "It is important to pay attention to claims made in the name of population or

⁸⁸ Meg Luxton, More Than a Labour of Love: Three Generations of Women's Work in the Home, (Toronto: The Women's Press, 1980).

⁸⁹ Heather Jon Maroney, "Canadian Feminism and Demographic Politics: Some Lessons from the South," in Meg Luxton, ed., Feminism and Families, (Halifax: Fernwood Publishing, 1997) 43.

demography," she wrote, "and not just as a practice of solidarity with women in less developed countries."⁹⁰ Examining the potential for fruitful, gendered analyses of development, Maroney argued that "feminists ignore demographic politics at our peril," and asserted that women should be aware of the incorporation of population data (as well as its manipulation) in decision-making processes.⁹¹ Relationships between feminist generations were not discussed in detail, but Maroney's article illustrated that demographics can indeed be worthwhile variables for future analyses.

Generations: Academic Feminists in Dialogue, an anthology of original essays contributed by feminist academics in different stages of their scholarly careers, was edited by Devoney Looser and E. Ann Kaplan and published in 1997. Unlike the previously mentioned texts, Generations directly addressed the ideological divisions that have emerged among feminists in recent years. Based on their acknowledgment of generational schisms within the women's movement in the United States, the editors suspected that "important conversations on feminisms and generations have happened (and are happening) as innuendo, hearsay and gossip."⁹² Generations was an attempt to retrieve such conversations, to explore the terms "feminism" and "generation" in the context of current prevailing stereotypes, attitudes, feminist divides, and impasses, and to foster increased dialogue within and across the waves. Although American in scope, the editors

⁹⁰ Maroney, 28.

⁹¹ Maroney, 28.

⁹² Devoney Looser and E. Ann Kaplan, Generations: Academic Feminists in Dialogue, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), x.

compiled interesting and informative documents actively engaged with “how and why perceived feminist generational divisions circulate, what generational explanations reveal, occlude, or perpetuate, and what it might mean to speak to – if not “talk through” – our supposed differences.”⁹³ While *Generations* did not delve deeply into the perceptions of the third wave (as many have not achieved professional status in the academy), the collection provides the necessary foundation upon which further discussions, explorations, and analyses of feminist generational relationships can build.

In commemoration of the twentieth anniversary of *Canadian Woman's Studies* and in acknowledgment of the approaching millennium, the editors of the journal selected “Looking Back, Looking Forward: Mothers, Daughters, and Feminism” as the theme for their Spring/Fall 1998 issue. Emerging from the first international conference on mothering and motherhood, held at York University in the fall of 1997, the anniversary edition sought to reopen the dialogue on mother and daughter relationships in textual form, and explore the connection of such relationships with feminism and the women's movement. Building on the wave metaphor, the articles utilized the notion of a mother-daughter cycle to link feminism's past and present, and sought to “validate the interdependence between feminism and mother-daughter empowerment” and create a stronger foundation for future strategies for the movement as a whole.⁹⁴

⁹³ Looser and Kaplan, x.

⁹⁴ “Looking Back, Looking Forward: Mothers, Daughters, and Feminism,” *Editorial, Canadian Woman Studies*, Vol. 18, No. 2 & 3, (Summer/Fall 1998) 5.

Most of the contributors opted to submit personal accounts of their experiences of feminist mothering or being a feminist daughter, but Andrea O'Reilly and Ursula Franklin extended that analysis. O'Reilly and Franklin both suggested ways in which the ways in which "othermothering" can strengthen relationships among feminist women from different generations. O'Reilly suggested that narrative (the telling and retelling of stories between mothers and daughters) and knowledge of women's history are fundamental to the formation of empowering, reciprocal mother-daughter relationships. While recognizing that the sharing of life experience does not, and should not lead to the formation of stringent models for change, narratives have the potential to offer "strategies of resistance, and hence construct an alternative script" for feminism.⁹⁵ Ursula Franklin concurred, stating that "the extension of the biological mother/daughter/sister relationship into a genuinely reciprocal solidarity among women – transcending age, race, and class – is one of the great gifts of feminism."⁹⁶ Franklin stated further that:

...it is important, particularly in the present political climate, to stress that feminism implies a reordering of human relationships away from the patriarchal models; feminism also implies the acknowledgment that the well-being of one group of women significantly depends on the well-being of all other women. I think that feminism extends and deepens all that is good and creative in mother-daughter relationships by enlarging the circle of reciprocal inter-generational giving and receiving of care and knowledge.⁹⁷

Franklin admitted that significant changes have occurred in the lives of women, and

⁹⁵ Andrea O'Reilly, "Mothers, Daughters, and Feminism Today: Empowerment, Agency, Narrative, and Motherline," *Canadian Woman Studies*, Vol. 18, No. 2 & 3, (Summer/Fall 1998) 16-21.

⁹⁶ Ursula Franklin, "Looking Back, Looking Forward," *Canadian Woman Studies*, Vol. 18, No. 2 & 3, (Summer/Fall 1998) 151-154.

⁹⁷ Franklin, 151.

asserted that women who now enjoy positions of power should recognize their privilege and that their conduct should be constantly "guided and informed by the collective experience of women when they were powerless."⁹⁸ While not promoting mother-daughter relationships as a form of mentoring in which an 'older,' more experienced feminist speaks to and informs a 'younger,' greener feminist, both Franklin and O'Reilly emphasized the need for constant, mutually-respectful dialogue across the waves. O'Reilly, reflecting on the stark conceptual differences between herself and her daughter, concluded that "this is ultimately the success of feminism; chameleon-like, it changes its hues as each generation recasts it in its own image."⁹⁹

Based on an interest in the past, present and future of women's social history, a recognition of the disparate conceptual approaches between women working in the field of history within the last 45 years, as well as the approach of the year 2000, Leila J. Rupp, editor of the *Journal of Women's History*, sponsored an electronic e-mail conversation among three 'generations' of historians: a "doctor-grandmother," "doctor-mother," and two "doctor-daughters," a dialogue published as "Women's History in the New Millennium: A Conversation Across Three Generations." Ranging from personal accounts of 'discovering' women's history to the ever-changing focus on certain events, to debates over the usefulness of particular methodological and theoretical approaches, the conversation marked the gravity of historical specificity:

If one defines intellectual history as what people who like to think are thinking about and the questions they are asking at any given

⁹⁸ Franklin, 153.

⁹⁹ O'Reilly, 20.

moment, then it makes a huge difference when an individual tunes in, so to speak.¹⁰⁰

The monitored e-mail dialogue revealed that ongoing discussions between “younger scholars” and “older scholars” are not only possible, but are also fruitful – and necessary – endeavours, as “individuals find their inspiration in different aspects of their experience.”¹⁰¹

The most current work of this sort is Anna Bondoc and Meg Daly’s edited collection, Letters of Intent: Women Cross the Generations to Talk About Family, Work, Sex, Love and the Future of Feminism, published in 1999. Utilizing cross-generational dialogue as their primary objective, the editors compiled twenty-two epistolary exchanges between young feminists and their feminist predecessors in an attempt to halt the media’s premature declaration of feminism’s death. Ranging in issue from the politics of inter-racial relationships to body image and self esteem to dealing with modern-day homophobia, the collection provides a diverse account of the strikingly different realities of women’s experiences at the current time. Perhaps more significantly, the interchanges provided a forum for young feminists to articulate their frustration with how their own feminist identity plays itself out in their everyday lives.

Bondoc and Daly recognized the importance of contextualizing the “letters” in terms of the wave metaphor: each of the “waves” were presented as distinct movements with characteristics unique to time and place, located within a

¹⁰⁰ Anne Firor Scott, Sara Evans, Susan Cahn, and Elizabeth Faue, “Women’s History in the New Millennium,” *Journal of Women’s History*, Vol. 11, No. 1 (Spring 1999) 28.

¹⁰¹ Scott, Evans, Cahn, and Faue, 28.

continuous struggle for women's rights. While recognizing that intergenerational hostility – or a "generation gap" within the women's movement exists, Daly stated that "if our struggles remain isolated or if we refuse to listen to each others' conflicting agendas, we have no movement – just a slew of individual therapy sessions." "Instead," she argued, "we might build a feminism whose members accept that the movement is as complex, undecided, unclear, but as driven, impassioned and necessary as the individuals who make it up."¹⁰²

An interesting, accessible, and informative collection, Letters of Intent was not without limitations. As the editors admitted in their disclaimer, the decision to prompt the younger generation to write the initial letter to their pre-selected "mentor" created an unnecessary "mother/daughter" power dynamic, one which left a number of the contributors (and readers) uncomfortable. Older women were designated the 'last word' on all issues, which left readers wondering how a prolonged exchange might have concluded. Further, many of the opening letters appeared to be hesitant. Perhaps the younger feminists' desire to maintain respect and admiration for their predecessors prompted many to be less frank with their critiques or concerns.

As has been illustrated, a number of feminist writers and scholars have acknowledged that generational differences have wedged a divide between the waves of the women's movement, and that the internal strife must be addressed. In some way, all of the authors were concerned with the often-precarious

¹⁰² Anna Bondoc and Meg Daly, eds., Letters of Intent: Women Cross the Generations to Talk About Family, Work, Sex, Love and the Future of Feminism, (New York: The Free Press, 1999) 7.

relationships between generations and were aware of the damage that intergenerational hostility could potentially render to the solidarity of the women's movement. Some attempted to bridge the gap between feminism's waves and sought out possible methods of easing generational tension and moving beyond misunderstandings and feelings of resentment. While all of the texts attempted to provide a more realistic account of intergenerational tensions at the current time, few recognized the "younger" generation as a new entity within the movement itself; as a *third* wave.

Further examinations of intergenerational hostility (both implicit and explicit) within the women's movement must be executed before the generation gap degenerates into petty spats over which group's feminism is more righteous or more real. In-depth analyses of the historical underpinnings of feminism and the women's movement should be conducted during such inquiries, studies that consider the historical specificity of each wave. More research should examine the actual (and perceived) ideological differences between the second and the third waves. Most significantly, much more talking – and listening – should take place. Not nearly enough work has been done in this regard, and not nearly enough articles have been written and published. Not nearly enough experience swapping has occurred. Discussing and debating different perspectives and sharing disparate experiences will lead to greater understanding of the source of generational divisions, and will eventually influence the future strategies of the women's movement as a whole.

Reconciling actual and conceptual differences between the waves should be

foremost on the women's movement's agenda at the present time. In light of the increasing external opposition to feminism and feminist strategies in recent years, the women's movement has often been portrayed as antiquated and ineffective, and mainstream media have served to perpetuate popular misconceptions. While internal conflict among diverse groups of women has been integral to the ever-evolving nature of the women's movement, the principal front of feminism – its mainstream “face” – must exhibit solidarity and resilience. A united feminist front, comprised of both seasoned veterans and young, eager, and fresh feminists, would significantly divert the attention of oppositional forces and permit the women's movement to continue (with fewer distractions) on its ongoing quest for change.

Understanding that each feminist generation has faced and will face circumstances strikingly different from another is a necessary move towards improving cohesion between the waves. Acknowledging those idiosyncrasies in respectful – and candid – dialogue is the first step in reconciling differences and moving forward. Illustrated by the previously mentioned texts on generational divides, reciprocal dialogues between and among the members of feminism's waves are essential to future strategies for change. However, they also brought to light the need for such discussions to take place within the context of gracious relationships, free of ideological one-upmanship, fear, and ranking. Communication must be viewed as a fundamental principle before ideological tensions within the women's movement can be resolved.

While effective dialogue across the waves has yet to be performed on a

significant scale, Judy Rebick and Kike Roach's 1996 collaboration Politically Speaking has provided the best indication of what is required: mutually respectful discourse among Canadian women concerning issues pertinent to the movement as a whole.¹⁰³ Politically Speaking provided readers with a series of dialogues between the authors – direct communication – on issues such as race, identity politics, the power of the media, violence against women and the future of the Canadian women's movement. While not presenting any significantly in-depth analyses of individual issues, the text illustrated how individual opinion can be shaped by identification with a specific cohort or cohorts, and emphasized the necessity of feminists to share their experiences with others. Third wave feminist Lisa Bryn Rundle praised Politically Speaking as "the kind of productive cross-generational feminist dialogue we should be aiming for," and commended the authors for their approach:

...this model – of sharing information about each other's experiences – fosters mutual understanding and information-sharing, rather than hard feelings and frustration. It allows dignity and keeps open the necessary passage for communication of knowledge and experience from those who have been in the women's movement for longer than many young feminists.¹⁰⁴

Rebick and Roach proved not only that distinct demarcations separate the perspectives of members of different generations, but also that intergenerational dialogue can indeed work. Misconceptions and assumptions about feminist generations can be alleviated through effective communication between the waves,

¹⁰³ Judy Rebick & Kike Roach, Politically Speaking, Vancouver/Toronto: Douglas & McIntyre, 1996.

¹⁰⁴ Lisa Bryn Rundle, "Make Room Sister, the Next Generation is Here," *Herizons*, (Fall 1998) 37.

and frameworks for new strategies for feminism's future could potentially emerge as a result.

Many third wave texts to date have called for a more tolerant, flexible, compassionate, and rational form of feminism, and most view communication as the key to a strong women's movement in the future.¹⁰⁵ However, most dialogues – whether direct, textual, theoretical, or anecdotal – have tended to lead to shrugged shoulders: more questions than viable options. In an attempt to foster honest, mutually respectful cross-generational feminist dialogue, I organized a group discussion on feminist heterosexuality on January 23, 1999. The participants, selected through purposive sampling, had similar theoretical backgrounds and had established congenial relationships in a graduate women's studies seminar a year before.¹⁰⁶ The women were aware of the nature of the study, and gave their formal consent to participate before the actual dialogue took place. The discussion aimed to revive a traditional feminist practice, that of "consciousness-raising," in a moderated, relaxed, and modern context, and sought to draw out the similarities and differences in perspectives on women's sexuality across the waves. The intent was to provide a forum for 10 feminists¹⁰⁷ to converse about the contradictions of their desires, their experiences, and the negotiations that constantly recur within male/female sexual relationships. Although generalizations from the transcripts will

¹⁰⁵ Third Wave perspectives on potential strategies for change will be discussed in Chapter 2.

¹⁰⁶ Margaret Anderson, *Mother Was Not a Person*, (Montreal: Black Rose Books, 1972) 163, noted that "women in consciousness-raising groups sometimes need more than two years of regular meetings, before sexuality can become an openly discussed matter."

¹⁰⁷ Lynn (49); Jo (23); Simone (24); Heidi (29); Laura (26); Story (28); Susan (48); Terry (32); Courtney (25); and Paulette (26). All of the participants names have been changed.

be made with caution, the responses revealed similar tensions, problems and concerns expressed by members of both the second and third waves.¹⁰⁸ Overall, the intergenerational group dialogue proved to be significant to and valuable for future explorations on intergenerational feminist relationships.

The discussion ranged from confessions of disappointment in bed to redefining the conditions of pleasure and desire, to the persistence of age-old dilemmas regarding women's reproductive rights and sexually-transmitted diseases. Overall, the discussion provided a diverse account of the varied sexual experiences of heterosexual women of different ages and backgrounds. Although peppered with laughter, the talk was overwhelmingly negative, and many of the participants articulated their dissatisfaction with how their feminist identity played itself out in intimate relationships. All of the women who participated have - or have had - problems dealing with their sexuality, and agreed that it was time to address how feminism can directly relate to their own personal lived experiences.¹⁰⁹

The dialogue also revealed a general discomfort about the issue of sexuality itself. Many of the participants felt at ease discussing sexuality on a theoretical level, yet expressed discomfort talking about sex as a personal issue – particularly with women a generation above. Following the group dialogue, I conducted follow-

¹⁰⁸ All participants were white, heterosexual and university educated. Nicolas Baxter-Moore, Terrance Carroll, and Roderick Church, *Studying Politics*, (Toronto: Copp Clark Pitman Ltd, 1994) 215 have stated that "different experts would rarely agree on the same 'representative' cases and such judgment samples may be subject to bias. Nonetheless, when working with very small samples, a carefully selected purposive sample may well be 'more representative' than a simple random sample of the same size." Members of the group were selected, in part, because of their previously-established kinship, group size, their shared knowledge of feminism and feminist theory, and generational diversity.

¹⁰⁹ Second and third wave perspectives on sexuality will be examined in-depth in Chapter 3.

up interviews with each of the participants in an attempt to retrieve their comments on the process of intergenerational feminist dialogue. They were asked about their level of comfort with the forum, the topic, and the discussion itself. As well, their thoughts on the effectiveness of dialogue as a potentially useful methodological tool for the women's movement in the future were solicited. When asked whether they would be willing to participate in a similar intergenerational group discussion concerning a single women's issue in the future, all of the participants agreed. Interestingly (but not surprisingly), all of the members of the 'younger' feminist generation linked the exercise with an early second wave feminist practice: that of consciousness-raising:

Jo: I think we take the stuff that we do as feminists, or even people becoming feminists – because I would say that I'm still in the process of becoming – I think that when you read the paper, learn what's going on, that's only half of it. The other half is getting in these discussions with people who you respect and bouncing around ideas, like the C-R groups of the Second Wave feminist movement. I think that we don't do enough of that...I think it's a good tool for us to learn more.

Story: Reminds me so much of consciousness-raising, in other times in the feminist movement, you know? I think that can be very useful for people. How do we learn anything if we don't talk about it, if we're all isolated in our different worlds, in our separate places, it's really important.

The desire to revive a traditional modern feminist practice was consistent with all of the responses, and aspirations for participating in similar exercises in the future (virtually regardless of subject matter) were overwhelmingly high. Consistent with many third wave declarations on the exigency of melding feminist theory learned in the classroom and feminism practiced in everyday life, all of the participants

stressed the importance of direct dialogue for the women's movement's future.

Intergenerational relationships between feminists have often been framed in terms of the mother/daughter dichotomy, one in which the 'older,' more experienced feminist assumes the role of mentor to the 'younger' feminist who watches, listens, and learns as her pupil. When asked whether she thought the group dialogue was an open one, Jo, who described herself as a "young, academic, feminist activist, but not entirely active in both," commented:

I think that – age and conservatism – I think that's the reason why some of us were holding back, because there were three people in the room who were – we didn't want to offend, right? We didn't want to say things like "fuck," you know? Things like that, we just didn't want to offend. And I didn't want to, we couldn't acknowledge that, because before we even got there, there were comments like, "oh, you think of me as your mother." Well, you know what? I really don't. And those comments do. And when you do touch my leg and go, "what do you think of that?" or "she just thinks I'm crazy," or "oh, she's going red!" well, I'm really not, but when you say that of course I'm going to squirm and say, "oh, that's so surprising to me!" But I think maybe it's because there was a high level of respect...They were older, yet still had the same ideological standpoint. Although, I'm thinking with Susan, I was tip-toeing around. Because some of the things that she said were very, I felt like I was talking to my mom, and I don't have this conversation with my mom and I don't really want to. So yeah, I think that's another reason why we held back, or why I held back...It would be interesting to take out those three "generational" people from the room and hear what we'd really say.

Members of the 'younger' feminist generation, aware of the similar theoretical backgrounds that the group shared, were acutely aware of power differences that existed among the participants. Many explained that the discussion was hindered, in part, by the presence of 'older' women in the group.

Participants of the 'older' generation, the second wave, tended to view the

group dialogue in a markedly different manner. Susan, “a happy latecomer to feminism,” was not aware of any hierarchies of power during the dialogue, but commented that her previously-held assumptions about the ‘younger’ generation of feminists were incorrect:

Susan: It was really neat to see what younger women were thinking about their sexuality, and it wasn't all free and easy like I thought it was, what with birth control and being educated, and, you know. Being powerful and all this, you'd think you'd have a great old time. So I was surprised that it isn't all wonderful...So I learned a lot about younger women, and their sexuality, and actually I called my daughter, just to see how she thought about stuff, because we've really never talked about it, and that was nice. Connected me with my daughter at that level, it was a bonus.

Lynn, a self-described “long-time feminist activist,” found that the younger members of the group were more comfortable with their sexuality – and with discussing matters of pleasure and desire – than she was as a youth:

Lynn: I think I learned a lot more about how young people have included sexuality and sex in their lives, as a necessary part of their lives. When I was that age group, we didn't talk about it, nobody talked about that. It just wasn't discussed! Picture it! ...It was good to be there. One of the things that I hoped that I could bring the group was that you could be 48 years old and have an active sex life. And it still feels the same as it did when you were 17, only you're a little better at it!

Although the ‘older’ participants noted distinct conceptual differences between the perspectives of the ‘younger’ members of the group and their own, none stated that age disparity caused tension or hindered the flow of discussion.

Courtney described herself as a “25 year old feminist, negotiating what feminism means to me at this point in my life.” She linked the discussion to the feminist maxim “the personal is political,” and commented that the dialogue

illustrated to her that her own personal frustrations, fears, and aggravation with language were common and shared among other women in her cohort. For her, feminism (in an amalgamation of theory and practice) should strive to redefine terms and reshape language to advance new theories of feminism (on sexuality and beyond) and to facilitate greater personal – and interpersonal – understandings:

Courtney: I'm just curious as to why they're all so scared to talk about it, about sex...And I think part of that for me was coming to feminism. At the same time, coming to feminism has also silenced that voice in the sense that you know it happens, it's great that women can talk about it in certain areas, but it's still lacking in some areas for some reason. Or maybe it's just the realization that I'm not the only one that it happens to, so I'm just another story that is THE story. There are a lot of contradictions involved, but if it wasn't for feminism, I don't think I would have ever admitted those things to myself, and that's part of it.

She, like other participants, stated that the lack of women's language to describe feelings and emotions impeded the depth of the discussion, and that "we got the words out, but we didn't get there. More talk is needed. I think we need to get to the good stuff. We know the theories, we know them too well, sometimes, but we need to get past that."

The follow-up interviews were profoundly revealing in two ways. First, all of the participants expressed ease with the other members of the group and with the subject matter during the dialogue. However, all of the women indicated in follow-up interviews that tensions existed which hindered and/or shaped the direction of the conversation. While inter- and intragenerational conversations were deemed valuable and necessary for women, for feminists, and for the women's movement as a whole by all of the participants, it was clear that many limitations to 'pure'

dialogue remain. Second, all of the participants agreed that much more discussion, honest, respectful exchanges of ideas, thoughts, and experiences were desperately needed among women and within the feminist movement.

The personal is still political, and will remain so, in various manifestations, until women's struggles have *all* been achieved. Until that time, it will be imperative for feminists – regardless of generational affiliation – to recognize and acknowledge the diverse examples, experiences and opinions of women with different personal histories and theoretical positions in order to learn, change and grow. Disparate and often-oppositional feminist positions have co-existed throughout the history of the women's movement, simultaneously informing and affecting awareness of women's conditions through discussion, debate, and the distribution of knowledge. Feminism has changed considerably as time has progressed, and it has expanded to include a multiplicity of voices. Generational divisions have emerged within the women's movement in recent years, and – corresponding with the fluidity of the wave metaphor – it can be predicted with certainty that the current discord will alter the definition of what constitutes feminism further.

Chapter 2

"Tracing Feminist Histories: Locating Feminism's Waves"

The ideas and practices of feminism are not static, but have evolved and changed over time, so that even when people become comfortable with some feminist ideas, the ideas themselves seem to shift and once again something unfamiliar, difficult and disruptive is demanded. Feminism has always pushed boundaries and changed what exists and is familiar. This is why it is constantly subject to criticism.¹

Since its emergence at the turn of the century, the dynamics of the Canadian women's movement have been difficult to encapsulate in a single, comprehensive definition. The problems associated with defining feminism have been due, in part, to the ever-changing nature of the movement itself. Each "wave" has borrowed from, incorporated, and built upon the theoretical and popular perspectives that have come before, and has adapted and changed to fit its own environment. The first wave of feminism emerged in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries "when basic human rights for women – voting and property rights – were won."² The second wave grew from the New Left and peace movements that actively opposed and sought to transform the social and political climate of the Western world during the decade of the sixties. That movement has been labeled the "second wave" in recognition of the formidable achievements of the turn of the

¹ Marjorie Griffin Cohen, "The Canadian Women's Movement," in Pierson, Cohen, Bourne & Masters, Canadian Women's Issues, Vol. 1: Strong Voices, (Toronto: James Lorimer & Company, 1993) 1.

² Wine and Ristock, 2.

century reformers, and also to distinguish the struggles and triumphs of its members from those of their predecessors.

The second wave identified itself as a unique movement, one that was separate and different from turn-of-the-century feminism. Similarly, the newest generation of the women's movement, the third wave, has attempted to voice its concerns and ideas about the current state of feminism, and has sought to distinguish itself as a new generation among the waves. That struggle – to be both recognized and heard – has been a difficult one to date. The success of a number of mass-market anti-feminist books, many written by young women, has led to the popular assumption that young feminists simply do not exist.³ As well, constant media proclamations of the 'death of feminism' have largely overshadowed the activities of progressive young people in recent years. Instead, reports have indicated that the country's younger generation is politically apathetic; a disinterested group more concerned with themselves than with social activism of any kind. Nonetheless, a new generation of feminists does exist, comprised of young women striving to keep the women's movement vital and alive.

The following discussion identifies this new generation of young women as a legitimate wave in the ongoing history of the women's movement. Building on the methodological application of "generations" established in the preceding chapter, I delineate the borders of each of feminism's waves, loosely defining the generations in terms of their writing, research and activism. Just as the first and second waves

³ See in particular the work of Kate Fillion, Donna LaFramboise, as well as recent texts by Danielle Crittenden and Wendy Shalit.

developed from and in response to the ever-changing social, political and cultural environment of their activism, the third wave marks the arrival of a new breed; one that both reflects and addresses the intricacies of the current historical moment. Determining the boundaries of what constitutes the newest generation of the women's movement is a complicated task, particularly in light of the current backlash against feminism. I argue that younger feminists will become a more visible and invaluable component of the movement once women on both sides of the generation gap address the present tensions through continued, mutually-respectful dialogue.

The first wave of feminism has been broadly defined as "the worldwide campaign for women's rights waged in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries."⁴ Historical reevaluations have shown that the movement was mostly Western in origin and predominantly organized by white, relatively well-educated, heterosexual, middle to upper-class Christian women in the early twentieth century. However, the early feminists' demands concerned a broad range of issues, including: education reform, married women's legal rights (including, to a certain degree, reproductive rights), improved employment opportunities and standards, property rights, child custody, financial independence, access to the political realm, and suffrage.⁵

⁴ Boles and Hoeveler, 134; Cheris Kramare and Paula Treichler, *A Feminist Dictionary*, (London: Pandora Press, 1985) 164-165 indicate that timing the first wave in this manner "presupposes a particular political and economic context...only relevant for the feminist movements which developed in the western world."

⁵ Adamson, Briskin, and McPhail, 35-36, also credited working-class women, whose participation in labour and union reform played a significant role in the first wave women's movement.

Throughout their challenges to the status quo, early first wave feminists utilized varying degrees of what has become known as “maternal feminism”: the belief that men and women have fundamentally different physiological and social roles in society.⁶ Despite the domestic traits suggested by their epithet, maternal feminists did not necessarily argue that woman’s “natural” roles as mothers and caregivers should relegate them solely to the private realm. In fact, the dominant perspective among turn of the century feminists was that women were innately “morally superior.” In addition, many turn of the century feminists were convinced that “women’s special role as mother gives her the duty and the right to participate in the public sphere.”⁷

One of the most significant victories of feminism’s first wave was the endowment of the franchise to large numbers of women in the country.⁸ Through the establishment of voting rights for women, the suffragists hoped to obtain a measure of control over political policy-making to influence reforms in family, property, and labour laws that affected the lives of both women and children. Although municipal voting rights for women were won early (1872 in British Columbia and 1883 in Ontario), the provincial franchise was not as easily attained. Manitoba was the first to grant women the vote in 1916, and the remaining provinces (with the exception of Quebec, who acceded in 1940) complied in the

⁶ Adamson, Briskin, and McPhail, 31; Boles & Hoeveler, 267.

⁷ Linda Kealey, ed., Introduction, *A Not Unreasonable Claim* (Toronto: The Women’s Press, 1979) 7.

⁸ J.L. Granatstein, *et al*, *Nation: Canada Since Confederation*, (Toronto: McGraw-Hill Ryerson, 1990) 306; and Doris Anderson, *The Unfinished Revolution*, (Toronto: Doubleday, 1991) 201 have argued that the “Persons Case” of October 18th, 1929, which marked the formal recognition of the “legal personhood” of women in Canada was a victory on par with the establishment of the vote for women.

years that followed.⁹ In 1917, the Dominion government passed the first federal enfranchisement Act. Select women, particularly women in the armed forces (most who served as members of the medical staff) and the immediate family members of active, retired, or deceased Canadian soldiers were permitted to vote in national elections. In 1918, a second Act granted the right to vote in federal elections to an increased number of Canadian women.¹⁰ The underlying reasons for the reformers' success continue to undergo debate. In retrospect, however, the triumph of the suffrage movement has been cited not only as the crowning achievement of the turn of the century women's movement, but also as a symbol marking the end of the first wave.¹¹

The social, political, and economic environment at the turn of the century provided the circumstances under which the first wave of the women's movement in Canada could emerge. Commercial prosperity and increased mechanization within urban areas led to the production of more industries, and the rapidly expanding factories relied heavily upon a continual influx of industrial labourers.¹² During the mid-nineteenth century, the development of Canadian manufacturing necessitated

⁹ Kealey, 10.

¹⁰ Kealey, 13; Anderson, 200. The endowment of the franchise during this period was not universal, as First Nations peoples, Japanese Canadians, and prisoners were denied such rights.

¹¹ Granatstein, et al, 202. While some reformers believed that the moral superiority of women would produce a more pacifist nation, "others had no such illusions...and campaigned for the vote using the argument that governments could scarcely govern in the interests of women and their families if only men cast ballots." Kealey, 14, stated (less cheerfully) that "despite their supposed maternal and pacifist qualities, women won the federal franchise, in the short term, because politicians knew they would assure the support needed for conscription."; Bailey, 20; Adamson, Briskin and McPhail, 30.

¹² Granatstein, et al, 69-79. By the 1820s, elaborate technology had taken over the manufacturing industry with the creation of iron mills; a development linked to the expansion of the railways throughout the 1850s. By the mid-1880s, primary iron, steel, and textiles were the industrial focus.

the employment of both women and children in factories as well as in the home, on a piecework basis.¹³ Employment opportunities for women certainly expanded for women at that time, particularly in urban areas. But most of that participation – ranging from factory work to clerical positions to more prestigious jobs like teaching and nursing – became characterized as “women’s work,” and was consequently unvalued, arduous, and poorly paid.¹⁴

A number of historians have suggested that the women’s movement in Canada lapsed into a politically dormant period for a number of decades after women obtained the franchise. However, research has revealed (and continues to convey) that a solid and steady tradition of feminist activity occurred throughout the early-to-mid twentieth century:

This era was not politically blank for women. Militant feminism was certainly silent; however, women’s social and political involvement was changing with that of the rest of society. When feminism resurfaced after 1965, it certainly did not come into being by spontaneous generation.¹⁵

Following the First World War, poor wages, high unemployment, and vulnerability to post-war inflation led many women to active involvement in a number of labour uprisings across the nation.¹⁶ Women’s support for the union movement increased with the rise in their overall participation in the labour force. Limited employment

¹³Alison Prentice, Paula Bourne, Gail Cuthbert Brandt, Beth Light, Wendy Mitchinson, and Naomi Black, Canadian Women: A History, 2nd Edition, (Toronto: Harcourt Brace & Company, 1996)130, 132 reported that women and children constituted 42% of the industrial workforce in Montreal in 1871, and 34% in Toronto, and that by 1891 more than 7000 young women worked for manufacturers.

¹⁴ Prentice, et al, 133; Granatstein, et al, 85.

¹⁵ Dumont, 77.

¹⁶ Prentice, et al, 250-251. Women in the garment and textile industries were particularly vigilant in their struggles over working conditions and adequate wages in the 1920s and 1930s.

opportunities and restricted access to “non-traditional” fields prompted women to protest in a number of urban areas. Access to higher education and control over family planning became fundamental issues to many activists in that period, and challenges to the institutions of marriage and motherhood continued.

Although the interlude between the first and second waves has often been considered a time of “relative feminist obscurity,” women were actively participating in many realms to effect change. The inclusion of women in unemployment insurance policies, the vote for women in Quebec, and equal pay laws all indicated a persistence of feminist voices throughout the interim.¹⁷ Adamson, Briskin and McPhail remind current feminists that the roots of contemporary feminism can be found in the feminist activism of the first wave. Liberal reform strategies, the radical creation of social alternatives, and other approaches to structural change, they argue, “have their origins in the political struggles of first wave feminists, although the names of those strategies have changed.”¹⁸ Their observations hold valuable insight: references to the triumphs of first wave feminism reinforce the notion that those women significantly influenced and affected many of the issues that persisted in the lives of women in the 1960s and 1970s.

The second wave of feminism “revived” the women’s movement with its emergence in the early 1960s, paralleling (not coincidentally) the ‘coming of age’ of the baby boom generation. In English Canada, the advent of the second wave was manifest in the establishment of branches of the Voice of Women (VOW), a

¹⁷ Cohen, 4-5.

¹⁸ Adamson, Briskin, and McPhail, 31.

grassroots association vehemently opposed to the testing of nuclear arms and the proliferation of weapons, in 1960.¹⁹ The publication of a number of groundbreaking texts at that time also influenced the development of feminism's second wave, and provided insight into the events that transpired during that period. Simone de Beauvoir's *Le deuxième sexe* caught the attention of many women, particularly in Quebec. Some readers of de Beauvoir's text declared that they "felt part of history in the making, our history as women, which had its own universe, separate and apart from that of the society around us."²⁰ The proliferation of knowledge reflected the shared nature of women's oppression at the time, and "the widespread political, economic, and social changes that were occurring in those years provided the context in which the women's liberation movement would grow."²¹

The development of new theories on women's oppression rapidly followed. One ideology in particular was to have an extraordinary effect on the future of the women's movement as a whole. It has been captured in Charlotte Bunch-Week's highly celebrated 1970 statement:

"There is no private domain of a person's life that is not political and there is no political issue that is not ultimately personal."²²

Adopted by proponents of women's liberation shortly thereafter, the maxim "the

¹⁹ Sylvia B. Bashevkin, "Independence Versus Partisanship: Dilemmas in the Political History of Women in English Canada," in Veronica Strong-Boag and Anita Clair Fellman, eds. Re-Thinking Canada: The Promise of Women's History, 2nd Edition, (Toronto: Copp Clark Pitman Ltd, 1991) 433. VOW is considered one of the original training grounds for independent women's organizations.

²⁰ Monique Bégin, "The Royal Commission on the Status of Women in Canada: Twenty Years Later," Challenging Times: The Women's Movement in Canada and the United States, (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1992) 25; See also Dumont, 83.

²¹ Adamson, Briskin, and McPhail, 37.

²² Charlotte Bunch-Weeks (1970), quoted in Francine Descarries-Bélanger and Shirley Roy, "The Women's Movement and Its Currents of Thought: A Typological Essay," (Ottawa: CRIAW, 1991) 1.

personal is political" captured women's imagination both in Canada and abroad.²³ Instances of gender inequality were brought into public debates, transforming them into what C. Wright Mills would have called "public issues of social structure."²⁴ In many ways,

"The personal is political" summarized an important link between personal life and overall political structures, and making this connection had a major impact on the way people understood the world...If the lives of women were to be changed in any fundamental way, the social structures that constrained women's choices would have to be changed first.²⁵

The realization that others shared similar experiences and that political solutions could be sought out to correct them eradicated a significant amount of the isolation felt by many women. As well, the elevation of personal experience to the level of political significance also led to the development of a new form of organizing: consciousness-raising (CR) groups.

CR groups were originally formed to provide an open forum for each woman "to explore herself, her relationship to men, her relationships with other women and also to a society where she finds herself in an oppressed interest group."²⁶ In many ways, CR groups epitomized "the personal is the political":

²³ Boles and Hoeveler, 137; McDaniel, 425.

²⁴ Abercrombie, et al, 157; Joanne Naiman, How Societies Work: Class, Power, and Change in a Canadian Context (Concord: Irwin Publishing, 1997) 23. For Mills, the comprehension of any event using a "sociological imagination" involved "the ability to transcend a problem's personal, individual qualities, so that it [could] be seen within the larger social and political milieu." When applied to Mills' theory, women's private problems, such as birth control, violence, or aging, ceased to be viewed on a solely personal level, but became political issues that inevitably involved institutional change.

²⁵ Adamson, Briskin and McPhail, 201.

²⁶ Anuradha Bose, "Consciousness-Raising," In Mother Was Not a Person, compiled by Margret Anderson (Montreal: Black Rose Books, 1972)174-177, 175.

Consciousness-raising deals with feelings, sentiments, emotions, gut reactions – the few attributes allowed us as women. It uses, maybe even exploits, these through intimate talk-sessions free of the element of role-playing and without 'objective guidance' (usually of a man!) For consciousness-raising groups have no discussion leaders. It refutes the traditional leader-led roles, the dominant-passive syndromes and the need for a hierarchy.²⁷

Given that consciousness-raising groups were fundamentally concerned with increasing women's awareness of the prevalence of their oppression, it was inevitable that they would "encourage women to think about acting politically" and become a tool for mobilization.²⁸ Over time, the groups became larger and more politicized, and many formed formal organizations, lobby groups, and women's centres. CR groups focused primarily on women's experiences and provided "the basis for the second burst of activity of the early women's liberation movement."²⁹

The social and political atmosphere in the 1960s within Canada and, to a certain extent, the global environment, provided a model foundation for grassroots organizing and activism. Like the "hippiedom" previously described, a strong sense of social justice and a desire for societal change pervaded the era, as well as the convictions of young revolutionaries. The "new age of affluence, bigness, specialization, professionalization, and bureaucracy" exhibited a growth in national prosperity, but it rapidly became clear that the allocation of material resources was less than equitable³⁰:

²⁷ Bose, 174.

²⁸ Boles and Hoeveler, 94; Adamson, Briskin and McPhail, 44-45.

²⁹ Nancy Adamson, "Feminists, Libbers, Lefties, and Radicals: The Emergence of the Women's Liberation Movement," in Parr, *A Diversity of Women* (1995) 253.

³⁰ Parr (1995) 6-7.

Poverty was 'discovered,' as were 'regional disparities,' and the Welfare State expanded, primarily through health, education and social programs. In this context of economic, social, and gender/sexual *bouleversement*, a heady, intoxicating rush of political protest erupted across Canada...³¹

Groups whose members had experienced marginalization from the centres of power began to surface at that time, demanding that their oppression be recognized and acknowledged in the political realm. More specifically, First Nations' fights for autonomy became publicly known, the struggles of the gay liberation movement became more visible, and Quebec's battles for self-determination made headlines across the country. Sparked by the merger of a number of peace organizations into the Combined Universities Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament, student-led protests opposing the war in Vietnam also increased dramatically. By 1964, the student "peaceniks" had expanded their agenda to include challenges to both ideological and political institutions: the systems of society they perceived as "fundamentally corrupt, unequal, and disempowering."³² The group emerged as an influential faction of the New Left in Canada, the Student Union for Peace Action (SUPA).

Incorporating "disillusioned liberals," "cultural anarchists," individuals with Communist or CCF-based anti-capitalist perspectives and many others, the eclectic youth organization was involved in a variety of controversial social issues of the time.³³ Despite conceptual differences, SUPA was remarkably cohesive:

...it was...the full-time dedication to a group, the engagement with ideas and principles that changed your life, determining the household you lived in, the people you made love with, the ways in

³¹ Becki L. Ross, *The House that Jill Built*, (Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 1995) 24.

³² Ross, 24; Kostash, (1980) xxv.

³³ Kostash, 6-7; Owrap, 221.

which you used your spare time, not to mention how you dressed, the books you read, the music that moved you. What you believed and how you lived were inseparable. Politics was not just a set of ideas and arguments; it was also a way of being, an instruction in how to live well, an invitation to determine values through action...³⁴

"These were the principles," Myrna Kostash explained. "In practice, however, they were distorted."³⁵ Other factions of the New Left emerged, sometimes rivaling but often working in conjunction with SUPA. These included the NDP's Waffle, and Maoist, Trotskyist, and Marxist-Leninist groups such as Red Morning, the International Socialists, and Rising Up Angry.³⁶ The Company of Young Canadians, the first government-sponsored organization for youth of its kind, was also established at that time.³⁷ With the exception of VOW and the formation of the Ontario Women's Bureau in 1963, very little of the organized social activism brewing at that time addressed women's concerns.³⁸

The inability of the largely male dominated New Left organizations to adequately recognize and represent women's concerns was a catalyst for rapidly growing feminist perspectives in Canada to proliferate. Women activists charged the Left with perpetuating the very same inequality within their own group that they had rallied against in society at large. The articulation of "the gap between the rhetoric of the male-dominated social movements and the way many women perceived their

³⁴ Kostash, 7.

³⁵ Ibid, 8.

³⁶ Ross, 246-247n.

³⁷ "It's Your Turn..." The Canada Committee on Youth (26 July 1971) 105-111. The federally funded research committee concluded that the CYC was plagued with structural, organizational, financial, and ideological inconsistencies that made it fragmented and generally ineffective as a functioning entity. Members of the CYC during this period take a more optimistic view of its accomplishments.

³⁸ Parr (1995) 6-7.

own treatment as activists *within* these movements" was met with defensiveness, contempt, and accusations that they were 'splitting the movement.'³⁹ Many leaders of the New Left argued that the emerging feminist perspectives were "not only outside, but hostile to, anti-capitalist, anti-imperialist ideology."⁴⁰

In the Fall of 1967, the burgeoning dissatisfaction among movement women culminated in a manifesto entitled "Sisters, Brothers, Lovers...Listen," presented by Judy Bernstein, Peggy Morton, Linda Seese and Myrna Wood at a SUPA conference in Goderich, Ontario. The paper raised themes that would become paramount to the establishment of an autonomous women's movement, ideas that attacked the structure of the New Left and addressed the political significance of sexual relations:

Perhaps the position of women in the sexual act, most often lying underneath the man, illustrates the social and economic position of women in society. Women feel they are still on the bottom, in all respects. The notion of human liberation is in direct opposition to the notions of efficiency, profit, accumulation of possessions. The separation of man from woman contributes to the maintenance of such a society.⁴¹

The authors held male leaders and organizers of the New Left accountable for postponing, and in many cases, refusing outright to fight for the liberation of women.⁴²

SUPA had virtually disintegrated by September 1967, but the growth of

³⁹ Hamilton, (1996) 49.

⁴⁰ Roberta Hamilton, *The Liberation of Women: A Study of Patriarchy and Capitalism, Controversies in Sociology*, Vol. 6 (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd, 1978) 77.

⁴¹ Judy Bernstein, Peggy Morton, Linda Seese, Myrna Wood, "Sisters, Brothers, Lovers...Listen..." Paper presented at SUPA conference, Fall 1967, originally reprinted by the New England Free Press. In *Up from the Kitchen, Up from the Bedroom, Up from Under: WOMEN UNITE! An Anthology of the Canadian Women's Movement*. (Toronto: Canadian Women's Educational Press, 1972) 33.

⁴² Hamilton (1978) 77; Kostash, 183, 184.

grassroots women's organizations across the nation steadily increased.⁴³ Women's break from the Left initially led to a critique of the inherent sexism of the capitalist system, but by 1972, the focus had shifted to the patriarchal oppression that women experienced in their daily lives. Known as "women's-centred organizing," the new feminist directive was women-focused, utilized consciousness-raising groups, provided space – literally and figuratively – for women to voice concerns, and tried "to figure out how to organize a world that would reflect women's needs and experiences."⁴⁴ The newly formed, publicly activist feminist Left attempted to create a new understanding of "the political." In Ontario, the Toronto Women's Liberation Movement (TWLM) was established as "a multi-issue feminist organization with roots in the New Left of the 1960s," and others soon followed suit.⁴⁵

The activism of the Women's Liberation movements of the late 1960s and early 1970s was primarily performed at the local level, "where the day-to-day issues women faced could be addressed in practical ways."⁴⁶ As Adamson, Briskin and McPhail have noted, community-based, "grassroots feminism" emphasized collectivity, consciousness-raising, meeting the often-diverse needs of individuals, and "reaching out to women 'on the street.'"⁴⁷ Also called "disengaged feminist

⁴³ Kostash, 25.

⁴⁴ Adamson, 268, 265.

⁴⁵ Ross, 24 revealed that the TWLM was created and run by white, heterosexual, university-educated women. She stated that "with virtually no mention of lesbian issues in the early TWLM's records and newsletters, the relationship of lesbianism to the women's movement, and to a broad socialist vision, sprung to the fore in the fall of 1970." Adamson, 273-274, concurred, noting that even though lesbians, working-class women, women of colour, First Nations women, disabled women, older women, and others actively participated in the movement, "the women's liberation movement voiced white, heterosexual, middle-class, and able-bodied assumptions and aspirations."

⁴⁶ Cohen, 13.

⁴⁷ Adamson, Briskin and McPhail, 12.

activism," the women's liberation movement (heavily influenced by the New Left) actively reviewed and commented on the established political system and resisted any connection to state influences.⁴⁸ Due, in part, to their political orientation and to their vehement desire "to create alternative structures and ideologies," women's liberationists were often viewed as the "radicals" of the women's movement⁴⁹:

"Women's Liberation" is frequently used as a catch-all expression to describe the entire current women's movement. But more accurately it is a branch of the movement that had its origins in the student activism of the early 1960s. These women, mainly Radical Feminists, have thus far been primarily concerned with analyzing the origins, nature and extent of women's subservient role in society.⁵⁰

As the women's liberation movement was associated with an extreme form of feminist activism and explicitly anti-capitalist sentiment, several non-partisan community-based women's groups sought to disassociate themselves from "the radical overtones of 'Women's Lib'."⁵¹ In recent years, however, the term "grassroots" has been used to differentiate between the community-based, hands-on feminist activism and the more public, politically-oriented feminist approach currently known as "institutionalized" or "mainstream" feminism.

Also known as "Women's Rights," institutionalized or mainstream feminism sought to change and improve the lives of women by working within established, traditional institutions such as political parties, government ministries, the

⁴⁸ Wine and Ristock, *Introduction*, 7.

⁴⁹ Linda Briskin, "Feminist Practice: A New Approach to Evaluating Feminist Strategy," in Jeri Dawn Wine and Janice L. Ristock, eds. Women and Social Change: Feminist Activism in Canada, (Toronto: James Lorimer and Company, 1991) 30-31.

⁵⁰ Noreen Lavoie, "What's in a Name," *Northern Woman Journal*, Vol. 2, No. 3, (Thunder Bay, July 1974), Reprinted in Documents: Chapter 1, Pierson, et al, Canadian Women's Issues, Vol. 1: Strong Voices (Toronto: James Lorimer & Company, 1993) 59.

⁵¹ Cohen, 13.

workplace, and the educational system.⁵² The institutionalized or mainstream face of feminism has been characterized, in part, by their persistent lobbying for change in the legislature and the judicial system. As well, mainstream feminist activists have labored to eliminate discrimination based on sex by attempting to modify the existing institutional arrangements of the Canadian State.⁵³ As Linda Briskin explained:

Mainstreaming operates from a desire to reach out to the majority of the population with popular and practical feminist solutions to particular issues...implicit in mainstreaming is the feminist commitment to transforming the everyday lives of women. This challenges the public/private split, and conventional notions of agents of change, and draws on the ideology of the personal is political.⁵⁴

The emergence of the "Women's Rights" branch of the women's movement was marked by the establishment of the Royal Commission on the Status of Women.⁵⁵ Under the aegis of the Canadian Federation of University Women and led by Laura Sabia, thirty-two women's organizations collaborated and itemized what they felt were women's "common concerns".⁵⁶ Called the Committee for Equity for Women in Canada, the coalition pushed for an official appointment in Ottawa to report on the Status of Women in Canada. Eventually, the alliance led to the establishment of a Royal Commission on the Status of Women in 1967.⁵⁷ In its 1970 report, the Commission "examined the status of women and made recommendations in the

⁵² Adamson, Briskin and McPhail, 12; Briskin, 30-31.

⁵³ Wine and Ristock, *Introduction*, 7.

⁵⁴ Briskin, 30-31.

⁵⁵ Lavoie, 58-59.

⁵⁶ Prentice, et al, 415; Anderson, 202.

⁵⁷ Kostash, 168; Bashevkin (1991) 434, Prentice, et al, 416; Adamson, 252-253.

belief that *there should be equality of opportunity to share the responsibilities to society as well as its privileges and prerogatives.*"⁵⁸

The published report on the Status of Women became a national bestseller, and sparked a number of other political initiatives. In 1971, a cabinet minister was allocated (albeit in a junior post and combined with another position) and given responsibility for women's issues. By 1972, an umbrella organization representing more than 500 women's groups across the country was established to lobby the federal government for implementation of the 167 recommendations made by the Commission in its report.⁵⁹ Constructed of group memberships and regional branches, the National Action Committee on the Status of Women (NAC) stands today as the only national women's group devoted to confronting the Canadian government on policy-making and procedures.

Proponents of institutionalized feminism had objectives similar to grassroots organizers, but each strategy used strikingly different methods to reach their goals. According to Briskin, the wide variance between the two approaches has been a vital part of the movement's success. She stated that a lone dedication to one strategy or the other could potentially limit the accomplishments of the movement as a whole, and asserted that:

The goal for feminist practice is the maintenance of an effective tension between the two; the dilemma is the tendency for feminist practice to be pulled toward one or other pole...disengagement can

⁵⁸ Royal Commission on the Status of Women in Canada (Ottawa: Ministry of Supply & Services Canada, September 28, 1970) xii.

⁵⁹ Anderson, 202, 212-213.

easily lead to marginalization and invisibility; mainstreaming to co-optation and institutionalization.⁶⁰

In Canada, the terms "mainstreaming" and "disengagement" have often represented "emphases rather than separate poles," and the approaches adopted by feminist activists have occasionally been the result of a "sometimes unwieldy and unsatisfactory synthesis of the two."⁶¹ Adamson has noted that stark distinctions separated women who called themselves "libbers" and those who considered themselves "feminists" (also known as equity feminists or women's rights feminists) in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Nonetheless, the media tended to lump all versions of feminism together, and "to the public...women's liberationists were all the same."⁶² Despite the conceptual and strategic differences between the two branches, the "Women's Movement" has come to describe "the entire spectrum of women's groups and activities."⁶³

One of the ways in which the women's movement initiated change in the political realm was through the analyzing, reclaiming and changing of language. The acknowledgment that language was sexist was fundamental to social change. As well, the recognition that the common use of the generic "he" was inappropriate to describe all human beings and "confusing, insufficiently accurate and not appropriate for scholarly discourse," was a significant part of that process.⁶⁴ The

⁶⁰ Briskin, 30-31.

⁶¹ Wine and Ristock, *Introduction*, 7.

⁶² Adamson, 256, 268.

⁶³ Lavoie, 58-59.

⁶⁴ Margrit Eichler, In: Caroline Andrew, ed. Getting the Word Out: Communicating Feminist Research (Ottawa: University of Ottawa Press, 1989) 5.

women's movement, following its reemergence in the 1960s and early 1970s, continued to thrive. As Glenda Simms noted:

Within the overall general framework of social movements, Canadian women can look at such positive changes and rejoice with their feminist leaders, thinkers, and activists, confident in the knowledge that even though there are still formidable barriers to their search for an equitable society, they have made significant gains during the present decade (1977 to 1987).⁶⁵

Members of the first wave of feminism continued their struggles for women's emancipation after the establishment of the franchise and the success of the Person's Case. Similarly, feminism's second wave – at both the grassroots and mainstream levels – has continued to scrutinize, rethink, and change perceived injustices within Canadian society. As well, the shortcomings of the women's movement, including the acknowledgment of class and racial bias within the movement itself, have been investigated at length.⁶⁶

The women's movement of the late 1960s and early 1970s has been touted as the initiator of a widespread "feminist consciousness." For Michele Landsberg, that consciousness has been the supreme success of the second wave, as "a whole generation began to challenge, question and reject stereotypes that were so uniformly enforced, they were invisible and kept us in gender-role prison."⁶⁷ On an individual level, many women recognized and addressed their membership in and commonalties with a group called "women." For society, the overall awareness of

⁶⁵ Glenda Simms, In: Caroline Andrew, ed. Getting the Word Out: Communicating Feminist Research (Ottawa: University of Ottawa Press, 1989) 89.

⁶⁶ Simms, 89; see also Sherene Razack, Looking White People in the Eye: Race & Culture in Courtrooms and Classrooms (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1998).

⁶⁷ As quoted in Judy Rebick, "Feminism and the Future," *Homemakers*, (May 1998) 66.

the unequal status of women increased dramatically. As well, and perhaps most significantly, large numbers of women acknowledged that structural change could only occur through their own knowledge of and active participation in women's causes.

In the last thirty-five years, feminism has achieved substantial structural changes in Canadian institutions, and the women's movement secured considerable advancements for women in their personal lives. Those successes have incited a backlash in recent years, as a number of concerted attempts by anti-feminist, right-wing forces have been made to undermine and/or reverse the progress of the women's movement. Susan Faludi addressed the phenomenon in her 1991 bestseller, Backlash: The Undeclared War Against American Women, arguing that "reactionary thinkers" have spread the notion that women, and feminists in particular, are to blame for America's economic and social ills:

The backlash is at once sophisticated and banal, deceptively 'progressive' and proudly backward. It deploys both the new findings of 'scientific research' and the sentimental moralizing of yesteryear; it turns into media soundbites both the glib pronouncements of pop-psych trend-watchers and the frenzied rhetoric of New Right preachers...Just as Reaganism and Thatcherism shifted political discourse far to the right and demonized liberalism, so the backlash convinced the public that women's 'liberation' was the true contemporary scourge – the source of an endless laundry list of personal, social, and economic problems.⁶⁸

In Canada, the roots of the current conservative backlash against feminism have been linked to the election of Prime Minister Brian Mulroney in 1984. Borrowing

⁶⁸ Susan Faludi, Backlash: The Undeclared War Against American Women, (New York: Doubleday, 1991) 12.

ideas originally implemented by the Reagan and Thatcher administrations and customizing them for the Canadian context, Mulroney's government employed a hands-off bureaucratic style, focused on expanded trade, and promoted a decentralized government. For nine years, the Conservative platform "clashed with women's movement views, particularly in English Canada, where Mulroney's policies on free trade and the constitution were bitterly contested."⁶⁹ Women's organizations were forced to reassess, reevaluate and attempt to confront the politics of the backlash as a result.

Anti-feminists have targeted other advancements made by the women's movement in Canada as well. Constitutionally protected rights, entrenched in Sections 15 and 28 of the new Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms in April of 1985, were specifically attacked by anti-feminist supporters of the time.⁷⁰ In the mid-1980s, Canadian women enjoyed formal legal rights not held by women anywhere else in the world, and it was felt – by some – that further demands by women's rights groups in the country were both unwarranted and unjustified:

Canadian feminists have ultimately been successful in convincing men and women alike of the immeasurable evils of patriarchy in the past – the domination, the oppression, and the injustices. Indifferent to female oppression, men are docilely retiring from

⁶⁹ Sylvia Bashevkin, Women on the Defensive: Living Through Conservative Times, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1998) 3-4.

⁷⁰ Ian Greene, The Charter of Rights, (Toronto: James Lorimer & Company, Publishers, 1989) 49, 51, 60; Bashevkin (1998) 81. Section 15(1) states that "every individual is equal before and under the law and has the right to the equal protection and equal benefit of the law without discrimination." Section 15(2) specifies that 15(1) does not constrain any law or program that was established for the sole purpose of alleviating discriminatory conditions that "disadvantaged individuals or groups" have experienced. Section 28 was the direct result of feminist organizing for sexual equality. It states that "notwithstanding anything in this Charter, the rights and freedoms referred to in it are guaranteed equally to male and female persons."

every area of society, giving way to all feminist demands, in compulsive efforts to atone for the past.⁷¹

"Canadian feminists," anti-feminist Betty Steele argued in 1987, "hav[e] successfully transformed our society into a matriarchy," thereby verbally discounting any and all efforts made by women and women's organizations to create the conditions necessary for improvement in the country.⁷²

The backlash against feminism remains a force today. The most vivid example can be found in Washington-based Canadian journalist Danielle Crittenden's debut book: What Our Mothers Didn't Tell Us: Why Happiness Eludes the Modern Woman. Crittenden posited that:

[f]or nearly thirty years, the public policies and individual ways of life that feminists have encouraged, and the laws they have pushed through, have been based on their adamant belief that women want more than equality with men or options outside their families; they want full independence from husbands and family. This is why the "solutions" we hear proposed by these feminists so dramatically fail to appeal to the majority of women.⁷³

Based on selective research and her own educated, wealthy, heterosexual "common sense," Crittenden's premise stemmed from her vision of the realities of the 'modern woman'. She believed that, because the women's movement told them to, a generation of "manless", "unhappy" women now delay marriage (and subsequently lose their "sexual power") in favour of careers, and postpone motherhood until they

⁷¹ Betty Steele, The Feminist Takeover: Patriarchy to Matriarchy in Two Decades (Toronto: Simon & Pierre, 1987) 9.

⁷² Steele, 12.

⁷³ Danielle Crittenden, What Our Mothers Didn't Tell Us: Why Happiness Eludes The Modern Woman (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1999) 24.

can no longer conceive.⁷⁴ Crittenden concluded that it was "at this intimate level that feminism has failed women."⁷⁵

Recent media headlines have termed feminism "The Great Experiment That Failed."⁷⁶ Others, promoting outright anti-feminist sentiment, have simply dismissed the women's movement as a relic. One submission to the "Letters to the Editor" section of the *Ottawa Citizen* articulated concern over the prevalence of "male-bashing and bias against males" by Canadian feminists. The headline for the letter read: "Is Male Bashing What Women Have Fought For?" and the article itself was displayed on the top, occupying a quarter of the page's copy.⁷⁷ Another headline, from the same paper, read: "Why Women Aren't 'Hot' Anymore." What followed was a lengthy description of why funding programs for youth, the elderly, and the disabled are valuable in today's society. "Women" were mentioned in two short sentences, buried deep within the text of the article: "but (the myth is) women have arrived. No one wants to fund something that's not new."⁷⁸ Similar sentiment materialized in April 1998, when the Liberal federal government removed core funding from women's organizations in Canada. Withdrawing the ongoing financial support under the pretense of "fiscal constraint," the National Action Committee on the Status of Women, representing almost seven hundred women's organizations

⁷⁴ Juliet Waters, "Where Mom Went Wrong," *Montreal Gazette* (8 February 1999); Naomi Klein, "Let's Hear it for the Little Lady in the Kitchen!" *The Toronto Star* (19 February 1999).

⁷⁵ Crittenden, 24.

⁷⁶ Nancy Gibbs, "The War Against Feminism," *Time*, Canadian edition (9 March 1992) 38, 40.

⁷⁷ Linda Turner, "Is Male-Bashing What Women Have Fought For?" *The Ottawa Citizen* (24 March 1998) A12.

⁷⁸ Susan Riley, "Why Women Aren't 'Hot' Any More," *The Ottawa Citizen* (23 March 1998).

across the country, was a casualty.⁷⁹

A new 'faction' has emerged out of the backlash against feminism, one whose opinions and literature have held the attention of the mainstream media in recent years. "Postfeminism" has been loosely defined as a term utilized in the United States to describe the supposed disintegration of the women's movement and the death of feminism following the defeat of the Equal Rights Amendment (ERA) in the 1980s.⁸⁰ Postfeminists assert that gender equality has been achieved, and that "feminism has become an anachronism, irrelevant to and even reviled by women, especially within the younger generation."⁸¹ A number of writings have been published, in scholarly style and form, in an effort to intellectualize postfeminist theory and legitimate it within the academy.⁸² Other postfeminists have emerged as clever, sarcastic, and irreverent writers of fiction.⁸³ Cris Mazza, editor of two contentious anthologies of postfeminist fiction, provided a definition of such works:

It's writing that says women are independent & confident, but not lacking in their share of human weakness & not necessarily self-empowered; that they are dealing with who they've made themselves into rather than blaming the rest of the world; that women can use and abuse another human being as well as anyone; that women can be conflicted about what they want and therefore

⁷⁹ Michele Landsberg, "Liberals Quietly Feeding NAC to the Barracudas," *The Sunday Star* (November 22, 1998) A2; Judy Rebick, column, *The London Free Press*, (November 26, 1998).

⁸⁰ According to Susan Bordo, *Unbearable Weight: Feminism, Western Culture, and the Body*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993) 241, "postfeminist" was originally used in 1919 by a Greenwich Village female literary group to describe the glamorous, "new woman" of the 1920s.

⁸¹ Boles and Hoeveler, 235.

⁸² See Patricia Mann, *Micro-Politics: Agency in a Postfeminist Era*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994) and Ann Brooks, *Postfeminisms: Feminism, Cultural Theory and Cultural Forms*, (New York: Routledge, 1997).

⁸³ See particularly Lily James, *The Great Taste of Straight People*, (Normal: Black Ice Books, 1997) and Cris Mazza, Jeffrey DeShell, and Elisabeth Sheffield, eds. *Chick-Lit 2: No Chick Vics*, (Normal: FC2, 1996) for examples of current "postfeminist fiction."

get nothing...Postfeminist writing says we don't have to be superhuman anymore. Just human.⁸⁴

Popular post-feminist texts have presented the second wave women's movement as antiquated, feminist sentiment, bogged down with the rules of 'political correctness.' Feminists have been portrayed anti-men, anti-sex, ugly, and obsessed with notions of women as hapless victims.⁸⁵

The popular press has announced the arrival a "postfeminist" climate in North America, one in which young, predominantly white, able-bodied, heterosexual women are exhibited as "successful and independent, and less likely to espouse 'dangerous' feminist ideals."⁸⁶ Dawn Currie, in her examination of young women's magazines, deconstructed a single advertisement to illustrate how the illusion of post-feminism has been pre-packaged and sold by the media. The ad, for anti-perspirant, featured a woman sitting between two men in business suits at a shoeshine stand, getting a polish. The slogan reads: "She's nobody's baby. She's nobody's fool. She knows what she wants. She just stays cool. Soft&Dri."⁸⁷ Currie noted that the scene, albeit contrived, was intended to depict reality:

The product is hard-working and so is the woman. She is successful. The product is soft, and so is the woman – that is, feminine, as indicated by the pink jacket. The woman is distinctively modern; she has successfully gained entry to a traditionally male domain. She uses the product, so it is distinctively modern."⁸⁸

⁸⁴ Cris Mazza, "What is Postfeminist Fiction?" in Cris Mazza and Jeffrey DeShell, eds, Chick-Lit: Postfeminist Fiction, (Normal: FC2, 1995) 9.

⁸⁵ See particularly Katie Rolphe, The Morning After (Boston: Little Brown & Co, 1993); Christina Hoff Sommers, Who Stole Feminism? (NY: Simon & Schuster, 1994); Rene Denfeld, The New Victorians (NY: Warner Books, 1995); and Meredith Maran, Notes From An Incomplete Revolution (NY: Bantam Books, 1997). Laframboise and Fillion are excellent examples of postfeminism in Canada.

⁸⁶ Imelda Whelehan, Modern Feminist Thought (NY: New York University Press, 1995) 240.

⁸⁷ Dawn H. Currie, Girl Talk, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1999) 137.

⁸⁸ Currie, 138.

The advertisement exemplified the myth of postfeminism and how it has been perpetuated in popular culture. It implied that the young, female audience of the magazine could have and enjoy what feminists want and, in some cases, have made possible, "without the feminist rejection of patriarchal heterosexuality."⁸⁹

Postfeminism has emerged in the 1990s as a simple discourse of women-centred individualism, power, and control, and provides limited analyses of feminism's past shortcomings and future directions. Based on the presumption that equal opportunities for all women are a reality, they have celebrated the successes of individual women in previously male-dominated realms. In doing so, postfeminists render the oppression of marginalized women even more invisible, and undermine the solidarity of feminism as it has existed in the women's movement as a whole. The current decade has witnessed the creation of many new postfeminist icons – highly visible, media-savvy women largely selected by the popular press. However, as Nan Bauer Maglin and Donna Perry, the editors of Bad Girls/Good Girls have noted, "while their individual messages vary...the overall effect of their work [has been] to suggest that because some women have prospered, the systematic inequalities facing all women have vanished into history."⁹⁰

By way of particularly (and, often, personally) nasty criticisms of feminism

⁸⁹ Currie, 138; Elaine Batcher, "Building the Barriers: Adolescent Girls Delimit the Future," in Greta Hofmann Nemiroff, ed. Women and Men: Interdisciplinary Readings on Gender (Richmond Hill: Fitzhenry and Whiteside, 1990) 150-164 came to the same conclusion as Currie by decoding the messages of Virginia Slims cigarette advertisements ("You've come a long way, Baby") and stated that such images give us the "truth" that "teenage girls living in a post-feminist era have the world of possibilities before them and are no longer limited by the restrictions placed on previous generations."

⁹⁰ Maglin and Perry, *Introduction*, xiv.

and its proponents, and clever manipulation of celebrity, power, and the authority to speak publicly provided by the media, postfeminism has chic, inoffensive, commercial qualities. It has become an easily absorbed, painless product for the public to buy.⁹¹ As bell hooks has commented, "like any other 'hot' marketable topic, feminism has become an issue that can be opportunistically pimped by feminists and non-feminists alike."⁹² hooks also expressed concern over the lack of knowledge of feminist praxis and the dearth of in-depth analyses in the work of postfeminists:

It is tempting for these young women to produce feminist writing that is self-indulgent, opportunistic, that sometimes shows no concern for promoting and advancing the feminist movement...reading work by new feminist writers, I am most often struck by how this writing completely ignores issues of race and class, how it cleverly makes it seem as though these discussions never took place within feminist movement.⁹³

hooks pointed out fundamental flaws in virtually all post-feminist assumptions: a focus on individual – usually white, able-bodied, heterosexual – women who have "made it" in the public sphere, and a failure to incorporate the realities of women whose lives are strikingly different than their own into their arguments. Postfeminist ideology has been, to date, analytically weak but – surprisingly – rhetorically persuasive. In a sense, postfeminism embodies what Katha Pollitt has called "the New Backlash": "in the Old Backlash, feminism was bad; now feminism is good –

⁹¹Alex Kuczynski, "Enough About Feminism, Should I Wear Lipstick?" *New York Times* (28 March, 1999) 4. Using mainstream fashion magazines as evidence, Kuczynski states that magazines like *Glamour*, *Cosmo*, and *MarieClaire*, "by virtue of the articles they choose to publish...seem to argue that their reader doesn't want or need feminism."

⁹² bell hooks, "Dissident Heat," in Nan Bauer Maglin and Donna Perry, eds., *Bad Girls/Good Girls: Women, Sex and Power in the Nineties*, (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1996) 58.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, 59.

it's just the women's movement that's bad...Call it the New Distraction – and wake me when it's over."⁹⁴

Highly conservative, media-friendly, and showered with the public's attention, the published works of postfeminists have received considerably more attention (resulting in widespread mainstream visibility) than the diverse struggles and accomplishments of third wave feminists.⁹⁵ To feminists of all ages and from a variety of ideological backgrounds, the production – and consumption – of such texts and promotion of a more subtle version of anti-feminism has come as a shock:

'Post-feminism' happened without warning. It seemed to arrive from nowhere...Now, it was argued, all had been achieved, in fact over-achieved, to the point that many men were left confused, their identities shattered, and many women struggled with over-expectancy. The irony is, however, that...despite its wide-ranging currency on dust jackets, on late-night talk shows and in 'serious' features articles, 'post-feminism' has rarely been defined. It remains the production of assumption.⁹⁶

Although the existence of postfeminist discourse can be construed as indicative of the remarkable victories of the women's movement, postfeminist literature to date has consistently failed to acknowledge that only privileged women have achieved success. As Porter and Porter have noted, "the privileged always tend to be blind to their privilege."⁹⁷

⁹⁴ Katha Pollitt, "What Did You Do In The Gender Wars?" in Maglin and Perry, eds, Bad Girls/Good Girls, (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1996) 8.

⁹⁵ See, for instance, the 29 June 1998 issue of *TIME* magazine, Canadian edition, Vol. 151, No. 25.

⁹⁶ Vicki Coppock, Deena Haydon, and Ingrid Richter, The Illusions of 'Post-Feminism', (London: Taylor & Francis, 1995) 3-4. See also Tanya Modelski, Feminism Without Women, (London: Routledge, 1991). Modelski juxtaposes theoretical and popular discourses of feminism and concludes that "postfeminism" is little more than a media construct.

⁹⁷ Porter and Porter, 21.

The widespread promulgation of postfeminist literature and anti-feminist sentiment throughout much of the mainstream media has perpetuated a stereotype of what constitutes a "feminist": "humorless, too angry, unconcerned about their appearance, and fanatically invested in 'political correctness'."⁹⁸ Reporting on the internal challenges of the women's movement in terms of "cat fights" or predicting feminism's inevitable demise has appeared to make better copy than accurate representations of third wave feminism:

Given the usual prurience of our popular culture, it's hard not to see in this lacuna a form of political censorship. Feminism, it seems, can be tolerated if it's angry but not lustful, or personal but not political. A feminism that mixes "man hating" with desire, that speaks of pleasure *and* oppression – a feminism, in short, that's rooted in the mucky, my-enemy-my-love contradictions of real life – is a far more disquieting story."⁹⁹

A glimpse at the October 1996 issue of *Homemaker's* magazine would support such a claim. The headline, for the month's cover story, read: "The New Face of Feminism." Below it, in capital letters, the subtitle stated: "Paula Todd – journalist, lawyer, TV host – doesn't need a tough, angry edge to be heard."¹⁰⁰

Given the barrage of conflicting images of 1990s feminism perpetuated by the popular press, third wave feminism has been difficult to pinpoint and even harder to define. What, and who, constitutes the "third wave" of feminism? That question has repeatedly proven to be easier to ask than answer. Although it has been tempting to describe the third wave of feminism in terms of what the generation is

⁹⁸ Bailey, 22.

⁹⁹ Ellen Willis, "Villains and Victims: "Sexual Correctness" and the Repression of Feminism," in Maglin and Perry, eds., *Bad Girls/Good Girls*, 53.

¹⁰⁰ Judy Steed, "The New Face of Feminism," *Homemakers* (October 1996) 13-20.

not, part of "the problem with categorizing [them] is the fundamental tenet of the third wave: navigating feminism's contradictions."¹⁰¹

Any exploration attempting to chart the movements of the next generation of feminism must understand that the third wave, like the waves that have come before, does not exist in a solid, ideologically unified form. Devoney Looser has identified several difficulties that the third wave has presented to scholarly investigations. She acknowledged that "some second-wave feminist angst has fixed itself on what "younger feminists" are doing (or not doing) to and with the feminist achievements of the 1970s and 1980s." In response, Looser suggested that the problematic nature of the "third wave" lies in the perception that they, as a group, lack cohesion.¹⁰²

Although there have been few thorough investigations conducted with specific reference to feminism's third wave, three specifics about the generation have been noted. First, due in part to the difficulty in locating generations in terms of a specific historical time and place, the existence of the "third wave" itself has been difficult to prove, and therefore problematic for in-depth explorations of any kind.¹⁰³ Third wave feminists have been largely self-defined and difficult to label philosophically, and, consequently, "the meaning of the term has been hard to pin down."¹⁰⁴ Second, third wave discourses have a strong tendency to be critical of the

¹⁰¹Catherine Orr, "Charting the Currents of the Third Wave," *Hypatia* Vol. 12, No. 3 (Summer 1997) 35.

¹⁰² Looser, 31-32.

¹⁰³ Heywood and Drake, 4, state that the generation constituting the 'third wave' was born between 1963 and 1974. However, "youth" is not necessary for identification with the third wave. Adherence to similar values and mores also constitutes affiliation – oftentimes more so than demographics.

¹⁰⁴ Orr, 29.

strategies employed by mainstream feminism, and have been inclined to emphasize the existence of ambiguities and contradictions in the lives of *all* women. Third wave feminists have acknowledged that multitudes of negative conditions persist in today's society; disempowering situations that remain to be named, discussed, challenged, and eliminated.¹⁰⁵ Members of the third wave believe that they exist as "an important part of the feminist future that stresses difference over consensus and where all kinds of women shape the definition of [their] own movement."¹⁰⁶

Finally, and perhaps most significantly, third wave feminism is not postfeminism. Some authors have posited that postfeminism exists as the next stage in the evolution of the women's movement and that postfeminist theory and ideology "signifies a shift in feminist theory."¹⁰⁷ However, none have – as of yet – written convincing, conceptually sound arguments, or presented persuasive evidence to suggest that postfeminists are indeed the feminists of the millennium. Third wave feminist ideology should be identified as existing outside of – indeed, as a rival to – postfeminism and the backlash against feminism, two powerful counterassaults on women's rights that have attempted to renounce the hard-won victories of second wave feminism.¹⁰⁸ Third wave feminism has been defined, very generally, as a resurgent interest and involvement of young women in feminist activism during the post-conservative government era. Its proponents consciously seek to include the

¹⁰⁵ P (Pris), message posted 1 September 1997 at *Room of our Own*, "Post-Feminism versus Third Wave: Fun w/Labels," www.cosmos.netgate.net/~pleiades/voices/gender.html

¹⁰⁶ Jan Wilkott and Miranda Wilkott, "Confessions of Two Good Girls," in Maglin and Perry, eds, 20.

¹⁰⁷ Sophia Phoca and Rebecca Wright, *Introducing Postfeminism*, (London: Icon Books, 1999) 3. See also Mann (1994) and Brooks (1997).

¹⁰⁸ Helen Shortall, "How What Isn't So Becomes Common Sense," *In These Times* (November 6-12, 1991) 19.

diversity of all women into their analyses, and attempt to use direct action in order to spread feminism.¹⁰⁹ Leslie Heywood and Jennifer Drake, the editors of Third Wave Agenda and self-defined third wave feminists, would agree and add that third wave ideology "contains elements of second wave critique[s] of beauty culture, sexual abuse, and power structures while it also acknowledges and makes use of the pleasure, danger, and defining power of those structures."¹¹⁰

While a number of edited texts concerned with the proliferation and potential effects of postfeminist literature have been published, very few have featured, much less targeted, "third wave" publications or perspectives specifically.¹¹¹ Third wave feminists have not been more silent than postfeminists on issues concerning women in the 1990s. Quite the contrary. Third wave feminists have voiced their comments, criticisms, and concerns through a wide range of media. In terms of mainstream, easily-accessible, printed works, however, their voices have been marginal. In the United States, two "third wave" anthologies have been noted: Barbara Findlen's Listen Up: Voices from the Next Feminist Generation, and Rebecca Walker's To Be Real: Telling the Truth and Changing the Face of Feminism. Contemporaries of Findlen and Walker have criticized both texts for presenting "a version of third wave feminism that relies, for the most part, on personal anecdote for their definitional

¹⁰⁹ Boles and Hoeveler, 279.

¹¹⁰ Leslie Heywood and Jennifer Drake, Third Wave Agendas: Being Feminist, Doing Feminism, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997) 3.

¹¹¹ See Maglin and Perry; Ann Oakley and Juliet Mitchell, eds. Who's Afraid of Feminism? (NY: The New Press, 1997); Coppock, *et al*, The Illusions of 'Post-Feminism'; Modelski, Feminism Without Women; and also Germaine Greer's The Whole Woman, (London: Bantam-Dell-Doubleday, 1999), in which she critiques the state of the women's movement in the 1990s in its entirety.

and argumentative strategies."¹¹²

Leslie Heywood and Jennifer Drake's anthology, Third Wave Agenda: Being Feminist, Doing Feminism, published in 1997, stands as one of the only texts that explicitly announces a "third wave" position in its contents. One other edited work, M. Jacqui Alexander, Lisa Albrecht, Sharon Day, Mab Segrest, Norma Alarcon, and Barbara Smith's Third Wave: Feminist Perspectives on Racism, was published in 1997 by a small, independent publisher, Kitchen Table: Women of Color Press, following grueling funding and scheduling problems.¹¹³ The work has been difficult to attain in the United States and is unavailable in Canada. As well, the feminist journal *Hypatia* released a special issue that focused entirely on the perspectives of third wave feminists in the summer of 1997. Canadian equivalents have yet to be produced.¹¹⁴

Interestingly, one of the only formal North American organizations (and the only American activist group) created by and for young women is called the Third Wave. Founded by Rebecca Walker, the Third Wave operates from within New York City, but financially sponsors young feminist activities throughout the United States. The organization's objectives are focused, and its mandate is clear:

The goal of Third Wave is to harness the energy of young women and men...by sharing information and resources between young

¹¹² Heywood and Drake, 2.

¹¹³ Heywood and Drake, 1, 18*n* suggested that the difficult road to publication was the result of the text's content (the book "challenges easily assimilated feminist stereotypes") and the marginal status of Kitchen Table: Women of Color Press, founded by Audre Lorde, in the mainstream publishing industry.

¹¹⁴ M. Ann Hall, at the University of Alberta, is awaiting publication of "Boxers and Bodymakers: Third Wave Feminism and the Remaking of Women's Sport." Currently only an abstract is available. As well, Lara Karaian, Allyson Mitchell and Lisa Bryn Rundle are working on an anthology of third wave feminisms tentatively titled Fostering Young Feminist Thought. A publication date is pending.

women, together creating a community in which members can coalesce, network, strategize, and ultimately take action around issues that affect us all. As a grant-making organization, we strive to be the thread that connects young women to the resources necessary to counter attacks on their personal freedoms.¹¹⁵

Embracing the diversity of all peoples and emphasizing the importance of higher learning, the Third Wave contributes to education and research scholarships, assists in the organization and establishment of advocacy groups, and provides leadership training. The Third Wave, led by a committee of young women and men, is a national organization that facilitates the increased visibility of young women in the United States. As well, it provides a support network (comprised of both feminists and funds) to strengthen young women's voices women in the public sphere. The Third Wave has recognized that "an entire generation of women is coming of age to find a future less optimistic than our mothers' vision," a future where "women are NOT equal and their lives are increasingly filled with obstacles and restrictions," and has sought to overturn trends of inequality, poverty, discrimination and violence.¹¹⁶

The third wave of the women's movement has not been simple to locate in Canada either, as third wave writings have been available solely through non-mainstream publications. However, in the Fall of 1998, Lisa Bryn Rundle, a young activist, writer, and avowed third waver, announced the arrival of feminism's newest wave on the Canadian scene in a cover story for *Herizons* magazine. Rundle acknowledged that very few readily attainable texts have been made available, particularly those reflective of the ideas of third wave feminists. She articulated her

¹¹⁵ "Are You Ready for the Third Wave?" www.feminist.com/3wave.html.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*

disappointment in the media's perpetuation of stereotypes about young women, particularly "the oft-quoted belief that young women have rejected feminism," which "is insulting to those of us who have committed to, felt proud of, struggled for and suffered because of our feminism."¹¹⁷ Part of the problem, according to Rundle, stems from a tendency to mistake postfeminism and anti-feminist sentiment as the universal sentiment among young people, a misrepresentation perpetuated by the popular press that inevitably undermines the credibility of all young feminists.

Third wave voices have been slowly emerging in Canada's print media. For the Fall/Winter edition of *Fireweed*, a quarterly publication for feminist compositions on politics, art and culture, the editorial staff granted Zoë Newman and Kelly O'Brien permission to use their journal as an outlet for their collection of third wave feminist voices. Like Findlen and Walker's texts, "Revolution Girl Style" provided valuable insight on the experiences of young Canadian women, yet it also materialized as an assembly of personal reflections, opinions and stories. Another third wave text, produced in conjunction with The Student's Commission and funded in part by Status of Women Canada, was Challenge the Assumptions, a young woman's guide to explorations of Canadian and international issues through gender, race, and class analyses. Launched nationally on 29 May 1998, the book stands as one part of a multimedia educational package designed for use in a classroom environment. While thoroughly blending both theoretical and experiential frameworks into a practical and interesting pedagogic tool, it has been unavailable to the mainstream consumer and has not received public prominence in any way.

¹¹⁷ Lisa Bryn Rundle, "Make Room, Sister: The Next Generation is Here," *Horizons* (Fall 1998), 24-25.

Canadian poet and writer Lynn Crosbie has produced two unique collections, both containing the voices of current feminists not often represented in the mainstream. The first was entitled The Girl Wants To: Women's Representations of Sex and the Self. The text contained the work of alternative contemporary female illustrators, authors, artists, poets, musicians, and stream-of-consciousness thinkers who have been "engaged in an effort to delineate the multiple facets of female sexuality and subjectivity."¹¹⁸ Click: Becoming Feminists, was Crosbie's second collection, published in 1997. Based on her impression that the current women's movement needed to become more accommodating of difference and diversity, the editor actively sought out contributors who had successfully melded feminist theory and practice into their arts and their lives. Crosbie admitted that she knew that "their spins on the subject would vary wildly, and was not disappointed when all of them responded as individuals within a shifting series of contexts."¹¹⁹

One third wave feminist has described her cohort as the first generation to come of age at a time when "women's rights" was a well-known term, one not only discussed in public and learned in the classroom, but *expected*. The realization that their convictions were not easily actualized at work, at home, and in interpersonal relationships did not feed a distaste of the women's movement, but a renewed interest in feminist struggles:

We are the women coming of age now. We are putting a new face on feminism, taking it beyond the women's movement that our mothers participated in, bringing it back to the lives of real women who juggle jobs, kids, money, and personal freedom in a frenzied

¹¹⁸ Lynn Crosbie, The Girl Wants To, (Toronto: Macfarlane, Walter & Ross, 1993) xi.

¹¹⁹ Lynn Crosbie, Click: Becoming Feminists (Toronto: Macfarlane, Walter & Ross, 1997) 5.

world. Women may have been granted grudging access to the job market, but we *still* bear much more of the burden than men ...and all the old stereotypes that keep us from being respected unless we act like men remain firmly in place. We've had enough!¹²⁰

Tackling the issues that pervade the lives of all women in the 1990s while simultaneously conducting continual negotiations between contradiction, diversity, and difference has become the goal of third wave feminism. Not surprisingly, that aim has necessitated "rethinking what movements might look like, what activism might look like, [and] what "identity" and "community" might mean."¹²¹

Third wave feminists have incorporated approaches borrowed from a variety of forms of social activism, historical debates over sexual politics, global perspectives, and individual experiences. In doing so, they have attempted to create and apply practical, but highly complex, analyses to the broad range of issues facing women today. One of the fundamental goals of third wave feminism has been to develop critiques that can adapt to and work with the "the multiple, constantly shifting bases of oppression in relation to the multiple, interpenetrating axes of identity, and the creation of a coalition politics based on th[o]se understandings – understandings that acknowledge the existence of oppression, even though it is not fashionable to say so."¹²² A wide variety of issues have been viewed as crucial to third wave analyses, including: dealing with homophobia and racism, classism, privilege, body politics (body image, health, sexual pleasure, exploitation, and surviving sexual harassment and abuse), ableism, and Western

¹²⁰ Kim Allen, "Welcome to the 3rd WWWave!" <http://www.io.com/~wwwwave/>

¹²¹ Jennifer Drake, "Third Wave Feminisms," *Feminist Studies*, Vol. 23, No. 1 (Spring 1997), 99.

¹²² Heywood and Drake, 3.

superiority. Members of the third wave have also been active in addressing and discussing both the power and the discomfort they find in feminism.¹²³

One of the successes of the second wave was the development and establishment of women's studies programs throughout North American post-secondary educational institutions, an achievement that has had a significant effect on third wave perspectives. An interdisciplinary field of research and instruction, women's studies has traditionally included not only the study of women, but also the incorporation of feminist theory, queer theory, and theories of race, ethnicity, and class in its curricula. The legitimacy of women's studies as a program of study has influenced other fields of research as well, and many academic departments have incorporated feminist methodologies within their own theories of analysis.¹²⁴ While not all members of the third wave are or have been students of women's studies departments across the country, many of the published third wave writings to date have been produced by graduates of women's studies programs in Canada.

Faculty and students in women's studies have felt the effects of the current backlash against feminism, as individual courses and entire programs have been subjected to attacks by critics who charge that they promote biased and

¹²³ Denise Campbell and Bindu Dhaliwal, Challenge the Assumptions! TG Magazine, The Students Commission (1998) 2-5; Rachel Giese, "Feminism as Relevant Now as Ever," *The Toronto Star*, (7 December 1998); Rundle, 25; Drake, 101.

¹²⁴ While the academic recognition of feminist perspectives in other fields (such as sociology, politics, and anthropology) has increased, feminist theory has not been thoroughly incorporated within such studies. In most cases, gender remains isolated as a single, separate issue in most disciplines. As well, and as contributors to Jacqueline Stalker and Susan Prentice's edited text The Illusion of Inclusion, (Halifax: Fernwood, 1998) make clear, gender inequalities persist within university environments. Much more work remains to be done in this regard.

exclusionary pedagogy.¹²⁵ Samantha Sacks, in an article entitled "Why are you a Feminist?" described her own experience of the stigma. When asked by one of her peers what her major was, she replied,

Women's Studies. And of course, a glassy-eyed stare settles over my partner's face. Sometimes it conveys condescending humour, sometimes hate, sometimes astonishment, sometimes indifference spliced with ignorance. The combinations are endless. If I were to mix the ingredients of these myriad gawks and gapes and leers, I could make a vicious cocktail, as the one thing these ogles have in common is their absence of genuine interest.¹²⁶

Other third wave feminists have admitted to having experiences similar to Sacks. Commenting on the pejorative tags commonly attached to identification with women-centred avenues of study, one writer stated that "the consensus among some young women seems to be that if you are going to stick your neck out and tell people you are a feminist, know what you're talking about, be prepared to be teased, and don't come on too strong."¹²⁷

For some, the response to such negative reactions has been to arduously seek out and find existing feminist literature that both reflected and informed their modes of thinking. bell hooks, Audre Lorde, Dionne Brand, Marilyn Frye, Lee Maracle, Hazel Carby, Ntozake Shange, Susan Bordo, Nicole Brossard, and Carol Vance have all been cited as "honoured" representatives of contemporary feminist thought, as their works present "languages and images that account for multiplicity and difference...negotiate contradiction in affirmative ways...challenge cultural and

¹²⁵ Boles and Hoeveler, 304.

¹²⁶ Samantha Sacks, "Why are you a Feminist?" *Canadian Woman's Studies* Vol.17, No.2 (1995) 143.

¹²⁷ Carmichael, F1.

political purity, and...give voice to a politics of hybridity and coalition."¹²⁸ Although they may not explicitly – or consciously – adhere to any or all of the labels, "the form and the content of third wave expressions of the personal" have been shaped by a unique blend of postmodern, poststructural, and multicultural ideologies.¹²⁹

The third wave has recognized that conservative, postfeminist attacks on the women's movement in recent years have been supported by little more than a cursory knowledge of feminist theory and women's social history. In response, members have begun to launch a counter-attack: a challenge to reestablish the term "feminism" as a viable and necessary force for improving the conditions of women in current times. That has prompted many third wave feminists to repeatedly demonstrate, to their second wave predecessors in particular, that they *do* know their feminist history, that their perspectives are legitimate, and that they are not "reinventing the wheel." Third wave feminists have actively included a broad range of feminist perspectives in their analyses, those which locate power – who has it, who doesn't, why, and how do we change it – as essential to substantive and

¹²⁸ Shana Calixte, "Who's Afraid of the F Word?" *AGENDER* (Ottawa: Carleton University Womyn's Centre Newsletter, April 1999) 1; Heywood and Drake, 9; Drake, 104.

¹²⁹ Susan Sanford, Kim Bewick, and Michelle Lobkowitz, "Feminism Our Style." *Ragedy Anne*, www.ualberta.ca/~ssanford.html (Edmonton: August 1998) have specifically called themselves postmodern feminists (the ezine is currently on hiatus as its editors search for a new domain); Seigal, 46. Defined as an intellectual movement modified by feminist theory, postmodernism rejects traditional assumptions about truth and reality and emphasizes the plurality, diversity, and multiplicity of women. Duggan and Hunter, 4-5, stated that their version of postmodernism was based on "the necessity of intervening from within the uneven developments and contradictions of a capitalist culture, grasping at every opportunity for progressive change, without generating unrealistic (and often tyrannical) fantasies of revolution, or being willing to settle for minor tinkering with the status quo." Parr, (1990) 8, defined "poststructuralist feminist criticism" as the deconstruction of binary oppositions in society, to "rethink the categoricism that canonizes gender, class, race, ethnicity and nationality, so as to see past the conceptual signage which has illuminated the previously invisible."

enduring change.¹³⁰ The first and second waves of feminism “were political but they were also, intrinsically, theoretical challenges to the relations of domination and subordination between men and women.”¹³¹ Similarly, third wave feminists have sought to utilize the conditions of women’s everyday lives as a conceptual tool, one that can adequately deal with the contradictions of applying feminist theory to practice. To the third wave, the feminist struggle has not ended. However, the arena for the battle has changed, and new strategies must be developed accordingly.

Multitudes of social and political events have shaped the ideologies of the third wave of feminists, circumstances that distinguish the generation from the second wave. The contemporary women’s movement had been firmly established as a significant social mechanism for change by the time most third wavers reached adulthood. One young feminist stated that “even those of us not lucky enough to be raised by feminists have found other avenues to discover and integrate feminism into our lives: women’s studies, a huge body of feminist fiction and non-fiction, community and school-based activist groups, [and] the occasional sitcom.”¹³² Susan Cole has also acknowledged the difference between the feminist generations:

Women in their twenties are emerging into a world quite different from the world we encountered when feminism grew up in the late sixties. To many young women, the word ‘feminism’ is not charged with a sense of newness and excitement the way it was twenty-five years ago. They don’t experience feminist ideas as a fresh body of breakthrough cosmic concepts that reverberate wildly through their

¹³⁰ Coppock, Haydon and Richter, 42.

¹³¹ Roberta Hamilton, “Feminist Theories,” *Left History*, Vol. 1, No. 1 (Spring 1993) 29.

¹³² Barbara Findlen, *Listen Up: Voices From the Next Feminist Generation*, (Washington: Seal Press, 1995) xiii.

consciousness. They don't relate to feminist thought as something they need in the way we needed it twenty-five years ago.¹³³

Three and a half decades have passed since the emergence of the second wave, and third wave ideology stands as one of the strongest indicators of their forerunner's successes.

Third wave feminists have also witnessed a number of significant political changes that directly affected the status of women in Canada. The announcement of Canada's first female Prime Minister in 1993 was initially "greeted as a sign of progress for women," but Kim Campbell's rapid demise diminished the victory in just four months.¹³⁴ Globalization has also become a reality for members of the third wave, and the increased awareness of international political, environmental, and social issues as well as domestic economic affairs has influenced their mindset. Judy Rebick commented that while 1980s feminism focused on "single issues," the women's groups of today would not be able to follow suit. Globalization, the rise of neo-conservatism, and the overwhelming preoccupation of all levels of government with fiscal constraint and "the bottom line," has meant that women participating in the women's movement of the 1990s and beyond will be forced to take the "overall picture" into account.¹³⁵ Devoney Looser agrees, suggesting that the emergence of third wave feminism at the turn of the millennium has not been coincidental. She stated that "we are living through a moment of looking back and taking stock, and

¹³³ Susan G. Cole, *Sex, Violence & Pornography*, (Toronto: Second Story Press, 1995) 9.

¹³⁴ Susan Riley, "Ms-Representing Feminism? The Troubling Ascent of Kim Campbell," *This Magazine* Vol. XXVI (May 1993) 13.

¹³⁵ Rebick and Roach, 91.

it is not surprising that such reflection has found its way into our scholarship." Members of her generation, the third wave, "start from different places from where our second-wave counterparts started, and as a result we may end up in locations that are now unrecognizable – even unthinkable."¹³⁶

The Internet and other communication technologies that have emerged since the 1960s and 1970s provide another example of the historical specificity of the third wave.¹³⁷ Electronic media – particularly the Internet – have the potential to reduce the significance of geographic separation among activists, and provide an instrument through which "innovative group boundaries" may form through the anonymity of social categories.¹³⁸ Many members of the third wave have begun this process. As Rundle has stated, "zines, the Internet, riot grrrls (punk rock power feminism), girl bands and cartoons are all part of the space young women have carved for themselves to speak, shout and scream their feminist views."¹³⁹

For those who seek to use electronic media for the creation of grassroots action, the potential for a new mode of activist organization appears positive:

The new media bridge space, class, culture, and appearance constraints. They also let organizers "broadcast" or "narrowcast" to sympathetic others – if media access is provided to target audiences. Further, just as these electronic media obscure stigmatizing differences among participants that might otherwise limit persuasion, they highlight verbal and technical competencies that may serve to enhance credibility.¹⁴⁰

¹³⁶ Looser, 45.

¹³⁷ Unfortunately, the influence of computer technologies on emerging methods and new modes of activism and organizing has not been examined to a great extent to date.

¹³⁸ Michele Andrisin Wittig and Joseph Schmitz, "Electronic Grassroots Organizing," *Journal of Social Issues*, Vol. 52, No. 1 (Spring 1996) 58.

¹³⁹ Rundle, 26.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid*, 58.

Rita Alfonso and Jo Trigilio, and E. Ann Kaplan and Devoney Looser, writing on the emergence of the third wave, utilized the medium of electronic e-mail messaging to formulate their ideas and compose their works. Both articles (printed in their original electronic correspondence form) began with a note acknowledging the 'newness' of the form of their dialogue. All of the authors agreed that computer technologies have the potential to improve direct communication between and among feminists throughout the world, and posited that the Internet could become a significant tool for feminist discourse in the future.¹⁴¹

Due, in part, to the unorthodox modes of activism adopted by the younger generation and of the lack of positive support from the popular press, much of the third wave's work has been deemed 'not activist enough' to some second wave feminists. However, others have noted that the participation of young women – particularly students – has been increasing steadily, despite the lack of media coverage. Judy Rebick, commenting on the APEC inquiry protests that occurred in 1998 across Canada, stated that "today's young people are beginning to hit the streets to protest an unjust economic system that is even more devastating."¹⁴² The National Action Committee on the Status of Women has also addressed the activism of the third wave, and has made moves to increase the visibility of young feminists in the organization. First, they established a Young Women's Caucus. The creation

¹⁴¹ Rita Alfonso and Jo Trigilio, "Surfing the Third Wave: A Dialogue Between Two Third Wave Feminists," *Hypatia*, Vol. 12, No. 3 (Summer 1997) 12; Kaplan and Looser, 1-2. Interestingly, none of the authors examined the limitations of electronic feminist organizing. Access to computers and the Internet remains limited to select few, and not all women share the computer skills required to use the technology.

¹⁴² Judy Rebick, column, *The London Free Press* (9 December 1998).

of a new Executive position soon followed: a Vice President for Youth.¹⁴³ Still in the early stages of its development, the Young Women's Caucus' mandate has been clear: "to provide representation for young women within NAC; to empower young women; and to initiate projects that address the rights and best interests of young women in Canada."¹⁴⁴ Preliminary meetings led to a desire by members of the caucus to organize a second *Young Women Unite!* Conference, to support the *No Means No* Campaign and Student Strike 2000 (projects initiated by the Canadian Federation of Students), and to participate in Women's World March 2000. Increasing funds allocated to the caucus, improving their outreach through expanded recruitment campaigns, and improving the accessibility (for young women with disabilities and women living in poverty) of NAC's annual meetings, are also on the agenda.

Members of the third wave have utilized various media and new technologies – particularly the Internet – for their own political interventions, a rapidly expanding trend which illustrates the extent to which activism has taken on different forms in the last decade. Web sites and personal web pages devoted to the empowerment of young women have infiltrated cyberspace, and the participation of women in such "groups" has steadily increased. Third wave activist "organizations" such as The Third WWWave, (e)merging, maxi, geekgirl, V&ICE, and Room of Our Own (as well as online versions of print magazines) have provided alternative spaces for younger feminists to learn feminist history, to discuss personal and community issues and

¹⁴³ Denise Campbell holds the first VP Youth position. It should be noted that the VP Youth is considered a "mentoring" position, and the delegate does not hold Executive voting privileges.

problems, to ask questions, and to present viable solutions for change. The majority of the sites contain expansive lists of links; direct references to sister organizations on the Internet, book publication lists, essays, and upcoming activist events.¹⁴⁵

One of the earliest demonstrations of explicit political activism among young feminists emerged in the early 1990s in the form of "riot grrrls." Riot grrrl music first emerged in Britain as an aggressive feminist reaction to the virgin/whore dichotomy preserved by the societal ideals of femininity. Riot grrrl's lyrics and performances made it vividly clear that many issues deemed important to the second wave had not been resolved, and asserted that new issues also demand immediate attention.¹⁴⁶ Originally utilizing the medium of punk music to articulate their militant message, riot grrrl missives rapidly expanded into the publication and distribution of 'zines as well as Internet web sites and pages.¹⁴⁷ Due, in part, to the infiltration of American music in the Canadian music industry and culture, as well as the lack of national boundaries in cyberspace, the riot grrrl message reached young

¹⁴⁴ Minutes from the Young Women's Caucus, NAC Annual General Meeting, Hull: 6 June 1999.

¹⁴⁵ The Third WWWave, www.io.com/~wwwave/; (e)merging, www.caramia.g-net.org/emerging/; maxi, www.maximag.com; geekgirl (Australia) www.geekgirl.com.au/; V&ICE, www.celeste.list.to; and Room of our Own, www.cosmos.netgate.net/~pleiades/voices/gender, all provide information on and discussions about issues pertinent to feminists in the 1990s. Also of interest is a project created and designed by a Queen's University student on the Women's Movement in Canada, found at www.film.queensu.ca/Projects/Squeezeboxdays/Canada.html, as an entire page has been devoted to the "new feminism" of the 1990s.

¹⁴⁶ Kearney, 218, has noted that links have been made between the riot grrrls of the 1990s and the radical feminism of the early second wave women's movement, particularly the lesbian womyn's community which grew from feminism's radical wing in the 1970s.

¹⁴⁷ Courtney Love and Bikini Kill have been cited as the forerunners of the riot grrrl movement in terms of music. Heywood and Drake, 5, describe Love as an "equity feminist, postmodern feminist, and victim feminist all at once, [combining] the contradictory aspects of these discourses in a way that recognizes and makes use of complications that young women working within dominant culture face today." See also www.geocities.com/Wellesley/6788/index2.html, and www.riotgrrl.com for good examples of 'ezines' – online versions of the independently designed, produced and distributed paper 'zines.

feminists north of the border.

Demonstrative of third wave contradiction and complexity, riot grrrls were often highly critical of the second wave, rejecting what they often perceived as feminist prescriptions on how to dress, behave, fight, and think. Performers frequently used their own bodies as the medium for their message. Essentially, riot grrrls attempted to infuse feminist politics and popular culture with unique, sometimes brash forms of "confrontational cultural activism which rely less on exposing gender differences than on deconstructing them."¹⁴⁸ The women became popularly recognized for their aggressiveness (hence the grrrowl in their name), the personal tone of their messages, and an abhorrence for the misogyny, ageism, racism, homophobia, rampant commercialism and hierarchy they experienced in their daily lives. Riot grrrls attempted to provide an alternative coalition of feminists to which women in the 1990s could relate. Although the riot grrrl movement has not developed into anything more than a marginal counterculture to the norm, its tenets have had a profound effect on members of the third wave, and have filtered into many of the generation's writings.

Many of those writings have taken the form of 'zines: small, independently published and distributed magazines based on a specific theme or topic. Operating on a low budget (or none at all), and often consisting of little more than stapled

¹⁴⁸ Mary Celeste Kearney, "The Missing Links: Riot grrrl – feminism – lesbian culture," in Sheila Whitley, ed., Sexing the Groove: Popular Music and Gender, (London: Routledge, 1997), 225; Alfonso and Trigilio, 13; Boles and Hoeveler, 251. Riot grrrls displayed their bodies as political messages in an attempt to debunk stereotypes of women. Wearing combat boots and baby doll dresses, some riot grrrls were known for "writing 'slut' on their skin to preempt society's judgment on them."

photocopies of columns, editorials, commentaries, and illustrations, zines have been one of the more accessible print venues for third wave feminist perspectives.¹⁴⁹ In 1993, *BUST* magazine made its debut in the American zine scene. Originally developed as an alternative to mainstream beauty and fashion magazines like *Jane* and *Cosmopolitan*, the small publication grew rapidly in both size and popularity, providing a unique commentary on the lives and experiences of young women in contemporary North America. In 1998, the zine became a full-fledged magazine, with a wider distribution area (and broader readership), more pages, and a glossy cover. In the summer of 1999, the editors of *BUST* released The BUST Guide to the New Girl Order, a mammoth collection of the most notable writings of the magazine.¹⁵⁰ *BUST* has specifically targeted an audience aged twenty to thirty-something years of age since its inception, and its essays tout the views of a feminist generation decidedly different from the second wave.¹⁵¹

Another glossy publication emerged in the 1990s citing objectives similar to *BUST*, but with an expressed focus on the barrage of negative female images depicted in fashion magazines, television shows, Hollywood film productions, and in the advertising campaigns of large corporations. To the editors of *BITCH: Feminist Response to Pop Culture*, life for women at the millennium has been analogous to a "sick good news/bad news joke":

¹⁴⁹ For a survey of zines in North America directly related to girl culture, see Tristan Taormino and Karen Green, eds., The Girls Guide to Taking Over the World: Writings from the Girl Zine Revolution, (New York: St. Martins Press, 1997) and Trina Roboins and Carla Sinclair, eds., From Girls to Grrlz: A History of Women's Comics from Teens to Zines, (San Francisco: Chronicle Books, 1999).

¹⁵⁰ Debbie Stollar and Marcelle Karp, The BUST Guide to the New Girl Order, (Penguin USA, 1999).

¹⁵¹ *BUST* can also be found online at www.bust.com.

The good news: Feminism's gains in the last 30 years have meant vast changes in women's lives, and the last five have wrought even more. Sexual harassment is now actionable. Date rape is no longer met with an automatic assumption that its victim was a cocktease who deserved whatever she got...The wage gap between the genders is narrowing, and women have more economic power than ever before. The bad news: Feminism is routinely ridiculed in the news and entertainment media, its tenets distorted by the willful ignorance of writers and commentators who insist that feminists have gotten everything we ever wanted and we should stop whining already...Sexual harassment is now a punch line or a sound bite, while abuses of all kinds of power are still rampant in the workplace. Date rape is seen as a problem already solved, while activists and those still providing much-needed services are dubbed whiners and accused of restricting natural male sexual behavior. It's only certain women who are benefiting from the narrowed wage gap: the income gap between the rich and poor is wider than ever, with women suffering the brunt of increasing poverty.¹⁵²

The magazine solicits material from individuals who offer arguments that acknowledge "the contradictory and sometimes uncomfortable details that constitute the realities of women's lives."¹⁵³ *BITCH* challenges popular assumptions about femininity and provides space for direct replies to everyday sexism, and contributors adamantly reject the popular assumption that we have entered a postfeminist age.

In 1998, a group of young female high school students formed the "Grrrls Coalition," a group loosely based on the personal politics of the riot grrrls. Emphasizing the importance of articulating and communicating personal concerns, fears, and ideas, the group attempted to provide a pressure-free atmosphere for young women. The coalition's mandate was to provide a non-judgmental forum for dialogue, to offer support and encouragement, and to create an environment in

¹⁵² "So What Are We Doing Here, Anyway?" *BITCH: Feminist Response to Pop Culture*, mission statement. www.bitchmagazine.com/mission.html.

¹⁵³ www.bitchmagazine.com/mission.html.

which women's issues, rights, and history could be discussed. "Gender bias in education, homophobia, date rape, AIDS, racism, breast cancer, abortion, women in the workplace – nothing is out of bounds."¹⁵⁴ Grounded in the notion that the most significant concerns of young women have always included self-image, sexuality, relationships, and personal safety, the Grrris Coalition has attempted to define young women's "personal," permit it to be shared, and to provide the encouragement to make it political.

Many third wave discussions of the women's movement have concerned the practice of "identity politics" by some members of the second wave. According to some, the belief that certain dimensions of a person's biological makeup (such as sex, colour, ethnicity, dis/ability, sexual orientation, or age) constitute a basis to form a "community" has created unnecessary borders between groups of women. Identity politics have perpetuated the notion that we, as individuals, can only fully comprehend (and therefore write about) conditions that we have experienced or people like ourselves.¹⁵⁵ Other writers have attacked second wavers for the promotion of "victim" status among specific groups of women marginalized both inside the women's movement and in society as a whole.¹⁵⁶ Jodi Dean has argued that:

...feminists today have run up against the limits of the particular: experience cannot ground the category "woman" because someone

¹⁵⁴ Janice Turner, "Grrri Talk," *Canadian Woman's Studies*, Vol. 17, No. 4 (winter, 1998) 119.

¹⁵⁵ Manji (1997) 35.

¹⁵⁶ For a compelling argument against the use of identity politics, see Jean Bethke Elshtain's Democracy on Trial, CBC Massey Lectures Series, House of Anansi Press, 1995. Elshtain argued that defining groups of people in terms of their shared oppression instead of as "free citizens" leads to resentment on the part of those participating, increases state control, breeds individualism, and contributes to the loss of civil society.

will always be excluded. Emphases on particularity blind us to the multiplicity of our inter-connections...But we have to be willing to claim, and justify our claim, that many of the ways in which we have been connected and particularized are wrong because they are coercive and exclusionary. The issue is which conception of universalism best accords with feminist calls for inclusion and accountability.¹⁵⁷

Heywood and Drake concur, stating that "communities today have to be imagined on different bases than that of the separatism of identity politics."¹⁵⁸ A third wave solution has been to debunk the notion that only one manifestation of female empowerment exists, and instead "offer an array of non-dichotomous possibilities."¹⁵⁹

The previously-described postfeminist position can be traced directly to a small group of privileged, "upscale" women who have utilized the "crass-commercialism" of popular culture and advertising to channel their individualistic (and often misogynist) perspectives.¹⁶⁰ The attributes of postfeminism – homogeneous, indolent, and anti-feminist – do not apply to feminism's third wave. The newest generation of the women's movement has, to date, represented a variety of philosophies and practices, stretching across the entire ideological spectrum. The third wave has asserted its devotion to the perpetuation of feminism with vigor. Nonetheless, Baby-Boom-versus-Generation-X style debates concerning the third wave's lack of cohesion, concern, and overall aversion to activism (and the

¹⁵⁷ Jodi Dean, Solidarity Among Strangers: Feminism After Identity Politics (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996) 142.

¹⁵⁸ Heywood and Drake, 17.

¹⁵⁹ Rebecca Walker, To Be Real: Telling the Truth and Changing the Face of Feminism (New York: Doubleday, 1995) xxiv.

¹⁶⁰ Crean, 126.

second wave's inability to listen or to change) have persisted. Complaints by senior feminists that "young feminists are not political enough," that third wavers "are into theory rather than practice, into showing rather than doing," continue in women's organizations, publications, and at less-formal gatherings.¹⁶¹ Unfortunately, very little intergenerational dialogue has occurred.

Not all second wave feminists have mistaken postfeminists as feminism's third wave. Susan Cole, writer and long-time feminist, recognized the negativity directed towards the younger generation of feminists by her contemporaries, and stated that "they worry that decades of thought and activism are being lost on an X-centric generation of desensitized cyber-freaks. I am not so worried."¹⁶² Cole argued that young women's critiques of the movement and participation in untraditional forms of activism can be viewed as a major success of the second wave movement:

Let's be glad of that. We helped create an environment in which women coming into their twenties already have some confidence in their own empowerment and in their ability to make an imprint on the world."¹⁶³

Barbara Findlen also viewed feminism's current generation gap as evidence of the perpetual resilience of the women's movement. She stated that the emergence of the third wave, and the criticisms that have resulted, can be viewed as a barometer of the movement's overall impact, since "feminism is a movement for social change – not an organization doing a membership drive."¹⁶⁴

¹⁶¹ Looser, 39; Rhonda Lenton, "Academic Feminists and the Women's Movement in Canada: Continuity or Discontinuity," *Atlantis*, Vol. 16, No. 1 (Fall 1990) 57.

¹⁶² Susan G. Cole, *Sex, Violence & Pornography* (Toronto: Second Story Press, 1995) 9.

¹⁶³ Cole, 9.

¹⁶⁴ Walker, xiv.

Notwithstanding reports of a resurgence in grassroots student activism and despite the often desperate attempts of third wave voices to be heard, young feminists continue to feel the need to prove their presence, defend their legitimacy and verify both their political and "practical" feminist credentials.¹⁶⁵ Rundle asserted that "one of the commonalities among the diverse group known as young women is the feeling that the women's movement doesn't really believe they exist."¹⁶⁶ Emmy Pantin articulated her vision of contemporary feminism and feminist activism much more frankly:

I'll be the first to admit that I don't have any inane notions about making the world a better place for my grandchildren, never seeing the fruits of my labour. That's just an old Jedi mind trick to get you to accept sweat and toil for nothing in exchange. Fuck that shit. I want to make the world a more comfortable place for myself. If you think this is selfish, think of it this way: the more selves we give room for, the more voices are heard in the end. My interest is in having my voice heard. If that means I have to listen to yours first, well, we've struck a bargain. In order to make the world more comfortable for me and for you, we have to agree to listen to each other and mesh ourselves into an us. Now that's what I call art.¹⁶⁷

Much of the writing, poetry, art, and activism of the third wave has been inspired by a desire to diffuse over-arching definitions of what constitutes both feminism at the millennium. As well, there has been an eagerness to disassociate their generation from simple, pejorative tags, to gain increased public visibility, and to be heard as a legitimate voice in the women's movement.

Although highly critical of second wave feminism at times, third wave

¹⁶⁵ Siegel, 47.

¹⁶⁶ Rundle, 26.

¹⁶⁷ Emmy Pantin, "Recently, Somebody Asked Me Why I am an Activist," *Fireweed*, "Revolution Girl Style," 59/60 (Fall/Winter 1997) 10.

feminism should not be understood as merely a form of dissidence within the women's movement. Members of both the second and third generations of contemporary feminism have disagreed with and been angered by each others perceptions, but continued discussion between the waves could potentially bridge the generation gap. Kike Roach indicated that there has been "a mutual mistrust and lack of respect" between the older and younger participants of the women's movement that has created a barrier to effective, respectful dialogue and progress. She added that mainstream popular culture has been guilty of perpetuating a homogeneous stereotype of what the sentiments of young women actually are. Roach stated that "young feminists who diss our elders are promoted and touted as cutting edge, even though their critiques do not advance feminist thought."¹⁶⁸ In looking to the future, Roach prescribed the continued adherence of young feminists to organized women's groups and increased reciprocal dialogue among feminists of all ages and backgrounds.

The experiences of *all* feminists – regardless of generational affiliation – must be shared, but that has not been the tendency to date. Lynette Bondarchuk, editor of the feminist journal *Errata*, commented that "a lot of the older women do not understand young women, which is part of the problem. A lot of the issues women were fighting for/against when the women's movement began are not really comparable to the issues that young women deal with today."¹⁶⁹ The following

¹⁶⁸ Rebick and Roach, 94.

¹⁶⁹ As quoted in Amy Carmichael, "Is the Feminist Fight Over? *The Toronto Star* (3 March 1998) F1, F3.

chapter examines one such issue in-depth: female sexuality. Sexuality has been a highly contentious issue for feminists since the 1960s, one that the third wave has embraced as one of its prime concerns. It is argued, as it has been throughout, that continued dialogue between and among the waves – honest, mutually respectful discussions, as opposed to mentor relationships – about the legacies, experiences, and problems of feminism must act as the primary guideline for future change.

Chapter 3

"Bridging Generations: Putting Sex on the Table"

"Too long has the whole process of love-making and marriage been wrapped up in mystery."

~ Nellie McClung, 1916.¹

"We are crippled by our ignorance about our bodies. Not knowing how our bodies are put together and how they work means we have no control over ourselves... We must begin to understand and love what we are and what we can become. We must look at our bodies and understand their complexity, diversity and uniqueness. We must find out what we feel like, look like, taste like, smell like. We have to redefine our womanhood and sexuality in our own terms."

~ *The Other Woman*, 1972.²

"Thanks to feminism, the "free love" of the 60s, Hollywood, therapy, self-help and how-to books, radical primitivism, and a renewed conservatism, we are now blessed with sex in the 90s: a nice mix of openness, repression, confusion, pierced body parts, and Guess jean ads. These days, we have feminists producing porn alongside born-again virgins. We're experiencing the dawn of virtual sex, attending S&M trade shows, and shopping at sex supermarkets ...Sex gets us excited about a lot of things. For women, sex is about power and learning how to enjoy ourselves while holding in our stomachs..."

~ Josey Vogels, *My Messy Bedroom*, 1995.³

Since the "revival" of the women's movement in the late 1960s and early 1970s, the struggle of feminists to assert and regain control over their reproductive rights, choice, and sexuality has been of fundamental import. In both the public realm and in the home, second wave feminists challenged the socially enforced domesticity

¹ As quoted in Margaret Andersen, ed., *Mother Was Not A Person*, (Montreal: Black Rose Books, 1972), 163.

² "Getting Into Our Bodies," *The Other Woman*, Vol. 1, No. 1 (May/June 1972) 15.

³ Josey Vogels, *My Messy Bedroom: Love and Sex in the 90s*, (Montreal: Véhicule Press, 1995) 11-12.

that beleaguered their foremothers. Women sought to reclaim their bodies' use and function, "to wrest control away from the state, the medical establishment, institutionalized religion, pharmaceutical companies, advertisers, pornographers, institutionalized censorship, [and] the violence of men."⁴ While the women's movement achieved relative agreement and remarkable success over issues such as availability and access to contraception and abortion, the debates on sexuality have not been as unifying or as victorious. Mariana Valverde, in her 1985 text Sex, Power and Pleasure, commented that "the mere mention of the word "sex" is more likely to cause anxiety and create suspicion than to generate solidarity and hope for the future."⁵ Valverde's observation is just as fitting today.

The third wave has criticized a number of second wave perspectives, arguing that they are either incompatible with or inapplicable to the growing concerns of many women at the millennium. However, the debates surrounding women's sexuality have wedged an obvious divide between the waves. The sharing, naming, and politicizing of the oppression experienced by individual women in the course of their everyday lives was foremost on the feminist agenda when the second wave women's movement began. Epitomized in the slogan "the personal is political," women's sexual emancipation and the transformation of women's erotic experiences were believed to be the first of many steps towards the goal of sexual equality. By the late 1970s, however, the focus on disrupting existing definitions of women's

⁴ Ruth Roach Pierson, "The Politics of the Body," in Ruth Roach Pierson, Marjorie Griffin Cohen, Paula Bourne, and Philinda Masters, Canadian Women's Issues: Twenty-Five Years of Women's Activism in English Canada, (Toronto: James Lorimer & Company, Publishers, 1993), 98.

⁵ Mariana Valverde, Sex, Power and Pleasure, (Toronto: The Women's Press, 1985) 14.

sexuality had changed. Mainstream feminists turned their concentration to women's sexual victimization: sexual danger, repression, and violence against women by rape, harassment, incest and physical abuse. As Valverde has noted, "some leading feminist theorists [chose] to concentrate on male sexual violence as a single-issue campaign without connecting it to struggles for women's sexual rights."⁶

Sexuality has become a hot topic in the 1990s, one that has pervaded virtually all facets of popular culture, the media, and mass-market advertising. Postfeminism, as it has been described, utilizes the public fixation with and consumption of sexuality to the advantage of its proponents, raising postfeminist texts to the top of bestseller lists, increasing the visibility of postfeminist authors in the public eye. By touting the image of fresh, "progressive," independent, sexually free and aggressive women, postfeminism has been successful in reinforcing negative stereotypes of feminists, effectively feeding the ongoing backlash against feminism. Notwithstanding negative reviews of postfeminist literature on women's sexuality, members of the second wave have not responded to the resurgence of general interest in sexuality, particularly in sexual relations between women and men.

The third wave has reacted to the perceived mainstream feminist preoccupation with male danger and female victimization, and has illustrated a visible interest in feminist analyses on women's sexuality and sexual pleasure. Women who identify as (or with) the third wave have attempted to revive the early second wave feminist debates on women's sexual autonomy in a uniquely modern

⁶ Valverde, 15.

manner: one that incorporates theories of the past while relating to the diverse personal experiences of women today. Surprisingly, the ideological generation gap that has emerged regarding women's sexuality has received little attention from feminists and academics to date.

This discussion follows the second and third wave debates on women's sexuality through twentieth-century Canadian history. Locating feminist perspectives on sexuality in their historical contexts not only clarifies the complexity of generational arguments, but also reveals distinct demarcations between the second and third waves. Strikingly different generational perspectives emerge through the investigation of various feminist theories on sexuality and strategies for women's sexual empowerment. I illustrate that each wave has conceptualized women's sexuality and formulated strategies for change according to their environment; that theories of analysis have developed in reaction to (and as a reflection of) existing societal conditions. I argue that the existence of generational division emphasizes further the need for increased dialogue between and among the waves of the women's movement.

The Canadian postwar period has been characterized by dramatic economic shifts, increases in the general standard of living, and overall population growth. As well, the Cold War years witnessed a revival in the perceived significance of women's domesticity coupled with an overarching protectionist stance towards the nuclear family, one that was self-sustaining, and, as Mary Louise Adams has pointed out, "normal":

As represented by married, middle-class, heterosexual couples and their legitimate offspring, the ideal family was at once seen as a source of affectional relationships, the basis of a consumer economy, a defense against Communism, and a salient metaphor for various forms of social organization, from the nation to the high school class.⁷

Postwar sentiment was distinguished by a "cult of orthodoxy": the family was supreme, marriage was honoured, and childbearing was exalted, leaving "little room for alternative approaches."⁸ Divorce was frowned upon, working women were criticized, childless couples were chastised, spinsters were pitied, and "expert" advice on the "boundaries between normality and deviance" flourished through the media, educational institutions, and mental health professions.⁹

The birth and development of healthy, socially "well-adjusted" children within a narrowly defined (monogamous and heterosexual) family unit were considered paramount to the maintenance of a sound postwar nation. "Proper" gender roles were strictly upheld, and children born and raised within that framework were manifestations of upstanding citizens, "good" parents, of "normal", married sexuality and, in theory at least, of marital harmony.¹⁰ The gendered construction of sexual mores also magnified during the postwar era, and the sexual 'double standard' was firmly established:

Girls were told that, if they lost their virginity, they also lost their value to boys...Boys were convinced that it was somehow a loss of

⁷ Adams, 20.

⁸ Doug Oram, Born at the Right Time: A History of the Baby Boom Generation, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1996) 253.

⁹ Oram, 253; Adams, 31.

¹⁰ Gary Kinsman, The Regulation of Desire: Homo and Hetero Sexualities, (Montreal: Black Rose Books, 1996) 192; Adams, 32.

honour (and propriety rights?) to marry a girl who had 'given herself' to someone else.¹¹

The glorification of the "modern" marriage perpetuated and maintained stringent sex roles, and children born within conjugal unions were the public display of "normal" sexuality.¹² It followed, then, that pre-marital sex, promiscuity, masturbation, and homosexuality were abhorred, and "sexual danger came to be identified with the "public" realms of social life."¹³ Marriage was considered the only legitimate site for healthy relationships between men and women, and heterosexual "sex was the glue that would hold them together."¹⁴

Despite, or perhaps because of, the preoccupation with the continuation of the nuclear family and "sexually charged" marriages, information on and guides concerning sexuality flourished in the postwar years.¹⁵ The publication of the Kinsey reports, Sexual Behavior in the Human Male in 1948, and Sexual Behavior in the Human Female in 1953, marked the first of many challenges to mainstream assumptions about human sexuality. Kinsey's work revived the study of sexology in North America, and brought sexuality into public discussion.¹⁶ Based on "scientific," empirical studies of the sexual behaviours of a sample of the white American population, the reports also questioned the standard of heterosexuality, bringing a

¹¹ O'ram, 257.

¹² Adams, 35, 24.

¹³ Kinsman, 192.

¹⁴ Adams, 33.

¹⁵ Adams, 37 noted that marriage manuals and sex guides published in the postwar years focused on birth control, divorce, sexual crimes, and sexually-transmitted diseases.

¹⁶ Erwin J. Haeberle, ed., The Birth of Sexology, (Washington: 1983) *Intro*, 4-12. Ivan Block coined the term "sexology" at the turn of the 19th century in Berlin to describe the scientific and scholarly effort devoted to the understanding of sex. Kinsey's research revived interest in the field.

range of sexual acts to the debate: homosexuality, premarital sex, oral sex, anal sex, and masturbation.¹⁷ As Adams has noted, "in his description of sexual behaviour, heterosexual intercourse was just one of many possible activities in which North Americans engaged to satisfy what Kinsey understood to be a natural need for orgasm."¹⁸

Kinsey concluded that his research failed to find any significant anatomic or physiological evidence to support the assumed sexual difference between men and women, arguing that both experienced similar orgasms during the sexual act.¹⁹ As Lynne Segal has noted, however, Kinsey's results were predicated on the prevailing attitudes of the postwar era:

Kinsey thought that it was not moral or religious denunciation of 'immorality' but scientific enlightenment which would teach men and women to be 'more effective marital partners.' He believed...that a liberal rather than a repressive attitude to sexual expression was best suited to a more prosperous world in which men and women were...encouraged to believe that they had become 'equal partners' – equal consumers – in the intellectual and social life of Western cultures.²⁰

Public reaction to the volume on female sexuality was overwhelmingly negative: critics questioned the potential moral implications of the project's findings and doubted the ethical foundation of the research. "Clearly," as Adams has noted, "it was one thing to talk about men's sexual activity and quite another to talk of

¹⁷ See Alfred C. Kinsey, Pomeroy, W.B., Martin, C.E., Sexual Behavior in the Human Male, (Philadelphia: W.B. Saunders, 1948); and Alfred C. Kinsey, Pomeroy, W.B., Martin, C.E., and Gebhard, P.H., Sexual Behavior in the Human Female, (Philadelphia: W.B. Saunders, 1953).

¹⁸ Adams, 37, also noted that "Canadian reviewers made little of the fact that Kinsey's material was American."

¹⁹ Kinsey, *et al*, (1953) 641.

²⁰ Lynne Segal, Straight Sex: Rethinking the Politics of Pleasure, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994) 89-90.

women's."²¹ In less than one year, the clamor over the female volume led to a public denouncement of Kinsey by the American Medical Association for creating a "wave of sex hysteria."²² The Rockefeller Foundation withdrew its funding for the Institute of Sex Research shortly thereafter.

Despite the controversy, the Kinsey reports served as the primary reference guides for policy-making throughout the later postwar years, and helped to legitimize the discussion of sex in mainstream media. Radio, television, and the print media all provided outlets for a variety of commentaries on sexuality.²³ Attitudes towards sexuality were changing, but "old taboos lingered, and contradictions abounded between marriage expectations, personal fears, and social restrictions."²⁴ As O'ram noted: "the 1950s was, sexually, at war with itself."²⁵ Despite the strong push for the maintenance of sex roles and women's domesticity, a counter-position was emerging; one which would attempt to change traditional notions about sex.

The late 1950s also gave way to a new medium of expression (and consumption) for many of the generation's youth, one that would also play a significant role in the transformation of ideas on sexuality: rock'n'roll:

²¹ Adams, 36.

²² Segal, 88.

²³ Kinsman, 159. O'ram, 259; Ross, 13, 14; www.playboy.com. 1953 also marked the release of the premiere issue of *Playboy*, a glossy publication featuring images of "photographic fantasy" for the "modern man". Seventy-thousand copies of the first issue (featuring Marilyn Monroe on the cover and in centerfold) hit North American newsstands in December, and 54,175 issues of the 44-page magazine were promptly sold. Ross has noted that the products of the growing commercial sex industry at the time (particularly films, magazines, and pulp fiction novels) featured "gay female characters [and] all-female settings," and that themes of violence, "strange seductions," alcoholism and heterosexual conversions were commonplace. Such texts were largely written by men for male consumption.

²⁴ O'ram, 257.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 259.

First there was the music. The great waves and rolling of it, smashing to smithereens the decorous cadences of the life of a middle class teen-aged girl, her drudgery over textbooks, the constant supervision of her life, calf-length skirts and blouses buttoned up to her neck, no jeans allowed! Sit straight, knees together, smile, use deodorant, shave your legs, watch your language young lady! The benumbing fear of bad boys, blood, and going too far, nothing else was ever going to happen: being a nice girl, a good girl, doing her duty, forever and ever plain, shy and afraid just like this; and then came the music, circa 1958.²⁶

Rock and roll was the product of a unique amalgamation of diverse musical forms – blues, jazz, country, and pop. It was “music produced by heretofore marginalized individuals in the music business,” and the new genre changed the music industry’s target market, and the perspectives of consumers themselves.²⁷ The modern hybrid of music and the unusual breed of entertainers who performed it simultaneously reflected and fed the society that consumed it:

Lynn: The dancing, I mean the dancing was part of the sexuality...I just loved to dance, because you could just do whatever you wanted. You didn't have to have the guy leading you in all the dance steps. It was part of the Revolution, you know? To have freedom when you moved and to be sexy when you moved.

Popular music culture, mirroring the changing ideological climate of the era, was laden with sexual overtones from its onset. Young people utilized the “overwrought rhythms and hysterical vocals of the performers” on the radio, television and in dance halls in defiance of the rigid structures of sexual expression, revealing yet another counter-discourse to mainstream thought.²⁸ The stage for the “sexual

²⁶ Kostash, 107.

²⁷ David Sanjek, “Can a Fujiyama Mama be the Female Elvis? The Wild, Wild Women of Rockabilly,” in Sheila Whitely, ed., *Sexing The Groove: Popular Music and Gender*, (London: Routledge, 1997), 149.

²⁸ Kostash, 112, Sanjek, 149.

revolution" was slowly being set, a revolution that promised to burst apart traditional postwar ideas on sex and sexuality.²⁹

By 1961, the society's steadily-increasing open-mindedness appeared to be affecting the political realm as well. The Planned Parenthood Association of Canada was established that year, and the Health Protection Branch of Health and Welfare Canada authorized the sale of the birth-control pill.³⁰ Technically the Pill was illegal, as access to, information on, and prescriptions for the newly approved contraceptive continued to be restricted by the Criminal Code.³¹ Following pressure from many newly formed women's groups and Planned Parenthood, the Trudeau government revised the Code and legalized the advertising, public distribution of information, and the sale of contraceptives in 1969.³² However, the legalization of the Pill was not the sole cause of what would become known as the "sexual revolution":

Such an erosion of old moralistic statutes was spontaneously taking place across the Western world in the 1960s. The liberalism, permissiveness, or flexibility of the age was attributed by some to the practical ethos of a prosperous consumer society that chafed at any restraint, by others to a humanitarian if not libertarian desire to separate at last law and morality.³³

²⁹ O'ram, 261. By 1960, "most Canadians would agree that sex was natural; [and that] sexual desire and its accommodation were essential for the well-adjusted human being." He also argued that societal views on censorship were loosening, that long-term secularization reduced fears of sin, the rapidly expanding commercial (hetero)sex industry affected perspectives on sex, and that the baby boom generation became adults in a more sexually "open" era than in any time in Canadian history.

³⁰ Naomi Black, "The Canadian Women's Movement: The Second Wave," in Burt, Code and Dorney, eds., *Changing Patterns*, (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart Inc, 1993), 171; McLaren and McLaren, 132, noted that the Planned Parenthood Association was established after Barbara and George Cadbury heard that a pharmacist in Toronto had been imprisoned for selling condoms in 1960.

³¹ McLaren and McLaren, 132; O'ram, 267 has noted that the Pill was originally introduced solely for married women, and that it was particularly difficult for unmarried women to find physicians to prescribe the Pill.

³² Pierson, 98.

³³ McLaren and McLaren, 135.

Legal contraception was a major – and very visible – breakthrough for heterosexual women in the 1960s, as access to the Pill eliminated both the fear of pregnancy and the potential stigma attached to single motherhood. However, prevailing notions of the dangers of premarital sex and promiscuity had to be rejected by the Boomers before the “sexual revolution” could take place.

The adoption of the Pill by Canadian women was sporadic, and generally concentrated in urban areas. As well, the response to oral contraceptives varied from woman to woman, as the use of the Pill was dependent upon her doctor, her religious and/or moral beliefs, and her financial position.³⁴ Nonetheless, the availability of the Pill made it possible for some women to enjoy a degree of sexual emancipation:

Lynn: ...as far as a 'sexual' revolution, I'd say leaving home, and moving into a city was a big step. And I don't know if any of the people in my circle of friends weren't sexually active – we all were.

Paulette: Because of the pill?

Lynn: Because of the pill. And because no one was going to tell our mothers!

For others, particularly women actively participating in New Left organizations (and enduring the rampant sexism within such groups), the “freedom” gained via reliable contraception was received with both personal and political optimism. As the authors of a 1972 feminist manifesto predicted: “once childbearing becomes one option among many, and women have some power to control their destinies, they may well be less ready to accept subservience as an inevitable part of their

³⁴ Owram, 267.

condition."³⁵ However, many feminist activists were aware of the limitations of sexual autonomy in a society where women's subordination continued, and sought to politicize sexual relations:

The submissive role of women in the sexual act is inseparable from the values taught to people about how to treat one another and about the possibility or impossibility of a human relationship between men and women. Woman is the object; man is the subject. Women are screwed; men do the screwing. Men see sex as conquest; women see it as surrender.³⁶

Others have recalled feeling as though the 'sexual revolution' was something that occurred outside of their own experience. Although born into membership with the baby boom generation, they did not feel kinship with the "free love" mythology that pervaded the time:

Susan: I guess it all started with birth control in the 60s, that's what really brought about the freedom. It was all of a sudden someone saying, "OK, it's all right now," that was the key that opened the door so that women felt that they could have sex without pregnancy ...That's the whole thing about birth control too, you could have sex just like the guys, you could be as free as the guys. I still never felt the same.

In retrospect, the so-called "sexual revolution" failed to liberate most women from exploitation or from firmly established gender roles. Instead, the fluid perceptions of sexuality in the 1960s "only partially modified behavioural prescriptions for women in a sexual relationship and...the use of contraceptives [fell] in line with conventional gender-role demands, leaving women vulnerable to both old and new

³⁵ Judy Bernstein, Peggy Morton, Linda Seese, Myrna Wood, "Sisters, Brothers, Lovers...Listen..." in Up From the Kitchen, Up From the Bedroom, Up From Under, WOMEN UNITE! An Anthology of the Canadian Women's Movement, (Toronto: Canadian Women's Educational Press, 1972) 34.

³⁶ Bernstein, et al, 35.

kinds of exploitation.”³⁷ While the revision of the Criminal Code removed formal restrictions placed upon contraceptive use in Canada, women’s struggle for control over their bodies had just begun.³⁸

The technological and political advances leading to the “modernization of sex” in the 1960s had contradictory effects on women’s self-image, sexuality, relationships, and politics.³⁹ Masters and Johnson’s Human Sexual Response, published in 1966, again brought sexuality into public discourse, but with a twist. Like Kinsey, the team found that women and men experienced orgasm in similar ways, but added that “her physiological capacity for sexual response *infinitely* surpasses that of man.”⁴⁰ Stressing that sexual encounters should focus primarily on women’s sexual gratification via stimulation of the clitoris, the findings seemed promising for the sexual liberation of women in both heterosexual and lesbian relationships. However, the social and historical dimensions of women’s sexuality were not investigated to any great extent. Instead, sex therapy was prescribed for marital difficulties: sex researchers concentrated predominantly on treating the perceived sexual dysfunction of the individual or couple.⁴¹ Valverde has commented

³⁷ Esther R. Greenglass, A World of Difference: Gender Roles in Perspective, (Toronto: John Wiley & Sons, 1982) 120.

³⁸ McLaren and McLaren, 136, 142; Pierson, 99. After the reforms of 1969, the decriminalization of abortion and the debates over free access to abortion services became a strong focus of the women’s movement. The 1970 Abortion Caravan – which traveled from Vancouver to Ottawa to publicly demand access to safe and legal abortions – has been cited as one of the first large-scale national campaigns of the Second Wave woman’s movement; Hamilton, (1996) 64, added that abortion “was only the most dramatic aspect of a thorough-going assessment of reproductive rights and female sexuality” occurring during that era.

³⁹ Valverde, 36.

⁴⁰ As quoted in Segal, 96.

⁴¹ Segal, 97-99; Haeberle. Discussions of individual’s personal sexual histories between couples was discouraged in favour of finding fast methods of increasing the sexual response patterns of the woman.

that, while the twentieth century “discovered” women’s sexual pleasure, women were then “expected to be sexual athletes, to “work at” sex, and to live up to unrealistic expectations of multiple orgasms.”⁴²

The “sexual revolution” has been characterized by a growing acceptance of premarital sex, an increased focus upon the successful pursuit of sexual activity and performance, and also by a surge in public interest and the publication of texts concerned with the maximization of pleasure.⁴³ Undoubtedly, the growing body of knowledge and increase in the availability of information about the human body contributed to the perceived societal openness about sexuality. Myrna Kostash summarized the “ideology to this ‘revolution’”:

If personal freedoms and self-determination of the personality are good things, then, inasmuch as sexuality is inextricable from the personality, a person has the inalienable right to sexual self-expression and self-creation. Furthermore, a person’s sexuality belongs not to society and its marriage-brokers, but to that person.⁴⁴

Proclamations of the existence of sexual liberation followed the increase in public discussions of sexuality. The perceived acceptance of alternative forms of sexual expression, the annihilation of taboos against premarital sex, the subversion of the institutions of monogamy and marriage, and the encouragement of sexual self-expression also led to announcements of a “Sexual Revolution”.⁴⁵

Popular and academic discourses agree that the decade of the 1960s was

⁴² Valverde, 36.

⁴³ Greenglass, 112-113.

⁴⁴ Kostash, (1980) 112.

⁴⁵ Greenglass, 112-113; Kostash, 112.

distinguished by a liberalization of attitudes towards sexuality. Authors also concur that the generation that came of age in that era effectively threatened traditional notions of sex, marriage, and the structure of the family.⁴⁶ To those who were actively participating in radical movements advocating social transformation, including members of anti-capitalist and anti-authority student movements and the New Left, the eradication of sexual inhibitions was pertinent to their cause. In many cases, the liberation of sexuality was "an essential part of the New Left idea of 'living your politics': the sexual revolution...was a democratic utopia to be realized in the present – something one *did*, here and now."⁴⁷ However, the open-minded ideologies of some failed to construct the utopia that it promised for all:

...the women's liberation movement of some years later...expose[d] the operations of much of the sexual revolution for what they were: fraudulent. Double standards prevailed in the vocabulary of sexual put-down, responsibility was evaded in the rhetoric of non-possessiveness, and the insistence on the personal construction of sexuality foreshadowed the propaganda that would take the legitimate demands of people for self-determination and hand them back as pornography.⁴⁸

Despite the seemingly egalitarian overtones of the era, the discourse of the time "seemed to be serving a very old conservative agenda: women servicing their men – their activity stripped out of any deeper personal, social or political context which might highlight conflict, confusion or any number of other troubling incongruities of experience."⁴⁹

⁴⁶ Adamson, Briskin and McPhail, 58; Greenglass, 118.

⁴⁷ R.W. Connell, "Sexual Revolution," in Lynne Segal, ed., New Sexual Agendas, (New York: NY University Press, 1997) 60-61.

⁴⁸ Kostash, 113.

⁴⁹ Segal, 99; see also Kostash, 185.

Although the years from 1968 to 1972 have been depicted, in retrospect, as the "permissive moment" in North America, members of the new feminism and gay politics at that time began to ask "permissive for whom?"⁵⁰ Becki Ross noted that:

Pockets of outspoken, white, middle-class women seized the moment to recast publicly the terms of female (hetero)sexual subjectivity, both practically and discursively: the elimination of the madonna/whore dichotomy, the liberation of masturbation, the reclamation of clitoral orgasm, and, for some, the celebration of celibacy. They were cynical about a 'sexual revolution' that seemed to ensure more exploitative males access to female bodies.⁵¹

Women mobilized in consciousness-raising groups, formed women-centred collectives and political organizations, and utilized public spaces to aggressively express their anger over the pervasive nature of women's oppression.⁵² Those groups provided forums for women to openly display their resolve to challenge sexual discrimination against women at any cost.⁵³ One of the initial objectives was to denounce and dispel the inaccurate premises underlying "those heterosexual practices predicated on the assumption of the priority of a male sexual urge and a male right to sexual pleasure."⁵⁴ Feminist activists sought to expose the sexual double standard that celebrated men for "sowing their wild oats" and divided

⁵⁰ Connell, 61; Joy Parr, (1995) 7.

⁵¹ Ross, 112-113.

⁵² The contemporary gay liberation movement emerged from the New Left as a unified force during this period. Kinsman, 288, 290-291, has noted that the resistance of transvestites, gay men and lesbians to a "routine police raid" at the Stonewall Tavern in New York in June, 1969 marked the emergence of the modern gay movement, as the event spawned a multitude of new gay liberation groups across North America.

⁵³ Adamson, 263, noted that beauty pageants were among the many targets of protesters. The first challenge occurred in 1968 when Toronto Women's Liberation protested against a winter bikini contest, holding up meat-cutter's charts to illustrate that the contestants were involved in marketing their flesh. Others soon followed. The protests "attracted media attention to the women's liberation movement and provided an opportunity to address the audience who attended such events directly."

⁵⁴ Hamilton (1996), 65.

women between "whore" and "virgin". Sexuality, it seemed, was becoming politicized.

Due, in part, to the possibilities accorded to some by the Pill as well as the influence of the ideology of "free love," many women began to redefine their sexuality for themselves. For some, the focus was on women's active pursuit of sexual pleasure located outside the confines of marriage, free from the economic and sexual dependency associated with the institution.⁵⁵ Kate Millett's Sexual Politics and Anne Koedt's "The Myth of the Vaginal Orgasm," both published in 1970 and widely distributed, provided the initial foundation for such aims. Rejecting notions of female sexual dependency and availability, Millett and Koedt asserted that widespread patriarchy, in its various forms, deliberately acted to deny women access to pleasure from their own bodies.⁵⁶ Both texts argued that all sex between men and women was political, because gendered relationships were based on power and control. Furthermore, "the clitoris provided the clue to, and the means to undo, the suppression of female sexuality for reproductive ends."⁵⁷

Feminist publications across Canada quickly followed suit. The premiere issue of a grassroots feminist publication, *The Other Woman* (1972), featured full-page articles with labeled diagrams encouraging women to take control of their bodies, to examine themselves carefully with mirrors and to understand and be comfortable

⁵⁵ Ibid, 65.

⁵⁶ See Kate Millett, Sexual Politics, (New York: Avon Books, 1970) and Anne Koedt, "The Myth of the Vaginal Orgasm," in L. Tanner, ed., Voices from Women's Liberation, (New York: Mentor Publishing, 1970).

⁵⁷ Segal, 35-36.

with their own anatomy. "We must learn that we do not merely inhabit our bodies – we are our bodies; it is important to understand them!"⁵⁸ Subsequent issues continued the trend, promoting self-knowledge as key to sexual emancipation and arguing that "the more you know about your body, the easier it is to show someone else what gives you pleasure."⁵⁹ Masturbation was presented as fundamental for women to take control of their sexuality, and varying techniques were provided as guides. As well, the journal provided a number of references and extensive book reviews of other sources of information on women's sexuality.⁶⁰ Unlike the texts provided by sexologists, the new feminist writings looked outside of the sexual relationships of married, heterosexual couples. Instead, they attempted to increase the knowledge, and in effect, the confidence of women to define and control their sexuality for themselves.

As Ruth Roach Pierson has noted, "it was a short step from such revelations to the proposition that men were not needed for women's bodily pleasure."⁶¹ The shift of focus from the vagina to the clitoris as the site of female pleasure linked directly to critiques of the institution of heterosexuality. New terms, like "homophobia" and "woman-identified," were introduced, and the "political lesbian" emerged in the early 1970s. Ross argued that the feminist maxim "the personal is political" was epitomized not only by the "angry rule-breaking" of political activism,

⁵⁸ "Getting Into Our Bodies," *The Other Woman*, Vol. 1, No. 2, (September 1972) 15.

⁵⁹ "Very Pleasurable Politics," *The Other Woman*, (April/May 1973) 15.

⁶⁰ Chris Fox, "Review: How to Handle a Woman," *The Other Woman*, Vol. 4, No.2, (March/April 1975) 21. Fox reviewed The Nomadic Sisters' Loving Women and Betty Dodson's Liberating Masturbation.

⁶¹ Pierson, 106.

but also through the creation of positive lesbian identities. She asserted that "lesbians argued that loving women, not fucking them, was a logical extension of their commitment to the eradication of women's oppression."⁶² Despite the insights of lesbian activists at the time, the early writings of the Canadian women's movement were suspiciously devoid of lesbian voices: "with the exception of one short piece in Women Unite!...the pervasive non-coverage of lesbianism [wa]s only sporadically interrupted by brief, sensationalized accounts in the custom of *Time* magazine's smear of Kate Millett's bisexuality in 1970."⁶³

As Valverde has noted, lesbian "invisibility [wa]s not really a blessing."⁶⁴ Other historians have concurred, remarking that the relationship between straight feminists and lesbians was fraught with tension, suspicion, and confusion, and that "too much fear and not enough honesty" plagued the communication between the two.⁶⁵ The women's movement was not immune to homophobia. Some heterosexual feminists expressed concern that an overt articulation of lesbian demands and the designation of "out" lesbians as spokespersons for the movement would weaken the credibility of feminism.⁶⁶ One woman recounted her experience of marginalization within a women's liberation group based in Toronto, and suggested that women attempt to bridge the gap between heterosexuality and lesbianism:

⁶² Ross, 115, 85.

⁶³ Ibid., 45.

⁶⁴ Valverde, 89.

⁶⁵ Ross, 26.

⁶⁶ Pierson, 106.

I resent being put in the position of being a token lesbian, a strange species who must always be defining to other women why I am gay, while no heterosexual women are put in the position of having to define why they are straight...If we want to see a strong women's movement, one that we can really say is about our lives, we had better start to rid ourselves of the power trips that we inherited from male-dominated society. If we let our feelings come out with women, on every level, sisterhood will start to feel a lot realer.⁶⁷

The "lesbian problem" was highly controversial in the eyes of the public and within the movement itself. In retrospect, the emergence of the gay liberation movement had an exceptional impact on feminism by "forcing the discussion of issues of sexuality and insisting that feminists grapple with heterosexism."⁶⁸

By the middle of the 1970s, the issue of lesbian existence expanded feminist critiques of the institutions of marriage, the family, and what Adrienne Rich named in her article, "Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence." Rich identified the marginalization of lesbians in the women's movement, and stated that it was not sufficient for feminist analyses to simply acknowledge that lesbian texts exist. Using 'feminist' texts of the era to illustrate the heterocentric presumptions of straight women in the movement, Rich concluded:

Heterosexuality is presumed as a "sexual preference" of "most women," either implicitly or explicitly. In none of these books, which concern themselves with mothering, sex roles, relationships, and societal prescriptions for women, is compulsory heterosexuality ever examined as an institution powerfully affecting all these; or the idea of 'preference' or 'innate orientation' even indirectly questioned.⁶⁹

⁶⁷ "Women's Liberation AND Lesbians," *The Other Woman*, Vol. 1, No. 1, (May/June 1972) 16-17.

⁶⁸ Adamson, Briskin and McPhail, 58-59.

⁶⁹ Adrienne Rich, "Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence," *Signs*, Vol. 5, No. 4 (1980), 64.

Rich argued that men secured and maintained power over women through the socially sanctioned rite of marriage, and that heterosexual relations were not necessarily "natural" but created through socio-cultural reinforcements. As well, she urged heterosexual women to "reflect on the privilege of the arrangement they had 'chosen'."⁷⁰ As a consequence of Rich's (and others') critiques, some heterosexual second wave feminists felt the need to reconcile with themselves (and others) that they were "sleeping with the enemy":

Anger is a constant companion in my feminist bed...I often wonder why I continue to sleep with men. Why, after all, when all of my friends are women, when I do my politics with women and my socializing with women, do I keep falling for men? Part of it is training, part of it is Oedipal, part of it is habit, and part of it is that I love their trim, hard bodies...⁷¹

Rich's "compulsory heterosexuality" provided feminists with a conceptual framework through which a number of theories on sexuality could intersect.

By the late 1970s, however, mainstream feminism became "strategically more concerned with violence against women and economic issues than with sex and sexual pleasure."⁷² A survey of the articles published in the feminist paper *Broadside* from 1979 to 1985 reveals that the women's movement had indeed altered their approach to the issue of women's sexuality at that time. The institution of marriage continued to be a site for analyses, but the new strategy focused primarily upon women's continued economic and legal reliance on men and

⁷⁰ Pierson, 107.

⁷¹ Joanne Kates, "Once More With Feeling: Heterosexuality and Feminist Consciousness," in Fitzgerald, Guberman, and Wolfe, eds., *Still Ain't Satisfied*, (Toronto: The Women's Press, 1982), 79.

⁷² Lorna Weir and Eve Zaremba, "Boys and Girls Together: Feminism and Gay Liberation," *Broadside*, Vol. 4, No. 1 (Oct 1982) 6-7.

the legalities of the Divorce Act.⁷³ Men's sexual violence against women had also become a serious point of concern, and the political and legal battles regarding rape and sexual assault were thoroughly documented.⁷⁴ The "problem" of pornographic materials also captured the editorial and feature space of many pages of *Broadside* during that period.⁷⁵ The sexuality debates had indeed begun to change, and analyses of sexual danger rapidly superseded discussions of women's personal empowerment, pleasure and desire.⁷⁶

Other, smaller items in *Broadside* dealt with aspects of sexuality reminiscent of the debates on sexuality conducted earlier in the movement's history. Some were concerned with the minimal representation of lesbian existence within women's organizations and the continued marginalization of lesbian identities and voices within the women's movement as a whole. Others were direct appeals by lesbian feminists for inclusion and space within the more mainstream women's movement.⁷⁷ Interestingly, *Broadside* printed only three articles during that period directly pinpointing the need to more thoroughly analyze compulsory heterosexuality and

⁷³ See Cynthia Hastings Zinck, "Marriage Contracts: Make Them And Break Them," Vol. 1, No. 10 (Sept 1980) 5; and Zinck, "Divorce Canadian Style," Vol. 2, No. 3, (Dec 1980/Jan 1981) 6.

⁷⁴ See "A Rape is a Rape," Vol. 1 No. 9, (July/Aug 1980) 9; Krin Zook, "Institutionalized Rape," Vol. 2, No. 1&2 (Oct/Nov 1980) 27; Joni Miller, "Rape: Violation by the Criminal Code," Vol. 2 No. 3, (Dec 1980/Jan 1981) 5; and Gilliean Chase, "Bill C-127: Is Rape Obsolete?" Vol. 4 No. 6 (Apr 1983) 3.

⁷⁵ See Susan Cole, "Confronting Pornography," Vol. 3, No. 2 (Nov 1981) 10; Marcela Pap, "Porn-Again Male," Vol. 4, No. 3 (Dec 1982) 14; Anne Cameron, "Hard Core Horror," Vol. 4, No. 4 (Feb 1983) 5; "Snipping Up Snuff," Vol. 4, No. 4 (Feb 1983) 7; Cyndra MacDowell, "Extra-Censory Perception," Vol. 4, No. 6 (Apr 1983) 4; Lisa Freedman and Susan Ursel, "Obscenity Deleted," Vol. 4, No. 6 (Apr 1983) 5; and Susan C. Cole, "Combatting the Practice of Pornography," Vol. 5, No. 10 (Aug/Sept 1984) 6-7.

⁷⁶ These discussions continued at the grassroots level. Mainstream feminists, the more visible, public "face" of the women's movement switched their focus to more political, policy-based issues.

⁷⁷ Eve Zaremba, "The Invisible Community," *Broadside*, Vol. 1, No. 10 (Sept 1980) 4; Zaremba, "Voicing the Unspeakable," Vol. 2, No. 9 (July 1981) 19; Lorna Weir and Brenda Steiger, "Coming Together in a Hot Gym," Vol. 2, No. 10 (Aug/Sept 1981) 7; Judy Stanleigh, "What is This Thing Called Love?" Vol. 3, No. 6 (Apr 1982) 7.

heterosexual relationships, and lesbians wrote them all.⁷⁸ It was not until 1984 that two short pieces on heterosexuality and heterosexual sexual pleasure made *Broadside's* pages.⁷⁹

Sexual equality and women's sexual freedom were two of the fundamental feminist goals of the late 1960s and early 1970s, and women's right to sexual pleasure and to control their own bodies symbolized their right to social equality. The struggle for reproductive rights, the revelatory discovery of the clitoris as the central site of female sexual response, the publication of feminist journals, and the establishment of women-centred groups created "a thrilling sense of new possibilities" for women and the women's movement.⁸⁰ However, sexual emancipation proved more complicated than was originally thought. As Valverde noted, "endless doubts and heartbreaks about non-monogamy, about faked orgasms, about the political correctness of heterosexuality more or less stifled that first wave of sexual liberation."⁸¹ By the mid-1970s, mainstream feminist praxes had turned its attention away from the personal aspects of sexuality and focused predominantly on legal, political, and social policy-making and change. Issues such as violence against women and pornography moved to the forefront of the feminist agenda, and "in a climate of rage it was virtually impossible for lesbian, bisexual, or

⁷⁸ Weir and Zaremba, "Boys and Girls Together: Feminism and Gay Liberation," 6-7; "Aimez-vous les hommes?" Vol. 4, No. 2 (Nov 1982) 14; Lilith Finkler, "Lesbians Who Sleep With Men," Vol. 5, No. 2 (Nov 1983) 4.

⁷⁹ Joanne Kates, "50-50 Sex," Vol. 5, No. 6 (Apr 1984) 9; Mariana Valverde, "If Freud Were A Woman..." Vol. 5, No. 6 (Apr 1984) 9.

⁸⁰ Leonore Tiefer, Sex is Not a Natural Act and Other Essays, (Boulder: Westview Press, 1995) 115.

⁸¹ Valverde (1984) 9.

heterosexual feminists to claim the right to sexual pleasure."⁸²

The decade from 1980 to 1990 witnessed a number of direct responses to the perceived feminist fixation on the potential "dangers" of sexuality, reactions manifested in the growth of diverse writings and theories on women's sexuality. Within the movement and on the public stage, the pornography debates intensified in a series of political and cultural battles. Neo-conservative right-wing thinkers and organizations grew in scope and size, scrutinizing sex education curricula and contesting the the scope of legal rights for lesbians and gay men. As well, anti-feminist groups captured the popular media's attention and stole numerous headlines.⁸³ Despite (or perhaps because of) increased attacks by reactionary traditionalists and the feminist backlash, the emergence of a new vision of an older strand of feminist thought began to emerge. In 1985, the Women's Sexuality Conference was held in Toronto, announcing the resurgence of "feminists who wanted to get beyond the lesbian versus heterosexual divide and to welcome women of all sexual preferences, celibate and bisexual women included, to the pursuit of an enhanced understanding of women's sexuality through co-operative discussion and study."⁸⁴ Their primary objective was to "eroticize equality":

...perhaps it's time to seriously rethink Freud's old question: what do women want? We know what we don't want, and we are beginning to understand how we got into this mess. So the question about our erotic needs keeps coming back to us – the

⁸² Ross, 113.

⁸³ Duggan and Hunter, 1; Bashevkin, (1998) 190, noted that REAL Women (Realistic, Equal, Active for Life), an anti-feminist lobby group against policies such as equal pay for work of equal value, sex education for youth, abortion, divorce reform, employment equity and public child care provision, emerged as a significant threat to the women's movement in 1984.

⁸⁴ Pierson, 108.

return of the repressed – and we ask the old question with a new emphasis: What do *we* women want?...Eroticism is about the *what*, the brass tacks of sex.⁸⁵

The pervasive violence against women (reinforced by the continuation of articles in feminist journals on the prevalence of sexual assaults, the rights of sex workers, and the complex pornography debates) contributed to a climate of anger and fear.⁸⁶ “Pro-sex” feminists attempted to revive dialogue on women’s sexual pleasure and desire and reassert the need for sexual expression and exploration as a necessary step towards women’s liberation.⁸⁷

The publication of Carole Vance’s edited text Pleasure and Danger: Exploring Female Sexuality marked the first tangible evidence of what would become – in the eyes of the media as well as many younger feminists – a significant split in the perspectives of feminists in the women’s movement. Vance argued that while second wave feminists increased women’s sexual autonomy and broken down old assumptions of women’s asexuality and male sexual dominance, they failed to alleviate the sense of vulnerability, guilt, fear, and shame that many women experienced in their own sexual encounters. Vance called for a reconnection of the complexities of women’s personal sexual experiences with theoretical critiques of male violence and the patriarchy:

⁸⁵ Valverde (1984) 9.

⁸⁶ See Lisa Freedman, “Sex, Trade and Commerce,” *Broadside*, Vol. 6, No. 8 (June 1985) 8-9; Debi Brock, “Sex and the Single Committee,” Vol. 7, No. 3 (Dec 1985) 8,9; Debi Brock, “Beyond Images: Hookers and Feminists,” Vol.7, No.6 (April 1986) 8-9; Megan Ellis, “Prostitution: Cause and Effect,” Vol. 8, No. 3 (Dec 1986/Jan 1987) 4; Mariana Valverde, “Bill C-54: Moralism over Feminism,” Vol. 8, No. 8 (June 1987) 6, 14; Lisa Hagen-Smith, “Pornography Update,” *Horizons*, Vol. 2, No. 1 (April 1984) 16-17, to cite just a few examples.

⁸⁷ Black, 155; see also Susan C. Cole, Power Surge, (Toronto: Second Story Press, 1995) 37, originally published as “Sexuality and its Discontents”, in *Broadside*, Vol. 6, No. 6 (April 1985) 8-9.

...we admit that it is not safe to be a woman, and it never has been. Female attempts to claim pleasure are especially dangerous, attacked not only by men, but by women as well. But to wait until a zone of safety is established to begin to explore and organize for pleasure is to cede it as an arena, to give it up, and to admit that we are weaker and more frightened than our enemies ever imagined.⁸⁸

Although the text was criticized for typecasting second wave feminists as perpetrators of stringent moral standards and anti-sex, the works of pro-sex feminists helped return the issues of desire and pleasure to the sexuality debates.⁸⁹

In 1996, Judy Rebick recalled the sexuality debates of the past and stated that while it had become important for feminists to recognize and affirm lesbian sexuality for a time, there was an over-correction of heterocentrism, as the issues of pornography and sexual violence overtook those of heterosexual pleasure. Rebick said that "it became impossible to talk positively about it in political circles. Then came the issue of sexual violence in general and the discourse of consensual sex disappeared."⁹⁰ Other feminists have concurred, stating that even a decade after the emergence of women-identified approaches heterosexual women continued to grapple with their sexual orientation and their feminist politics.⁹¹ "Even celibacy," as Ross has noted, "carried a male referent. Like bisexuality, it signaled fence-sitting."⁹²

⁸⁸ Carole S. Vance, Pleasure and Danger, (Boston: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1984) 24.

⁸⁹ Cole (1995) 39.

⁹⁰ Judy Rebick, as quoted in Kostash (1996) 16.

⁹¹ Dinah Forbes, "Difficult Loves," Who's On Top? The Politics of Heterosexuality, (Toronto: Garamond Press, 1987) 48. Forbes, 49-50 provided four reasons why the analyses of male power in the late 1970s and early 1980s failed to disentangle the complexities of heterosexuality and feminism: an oversimplification of the issue of power; the application of a fixed standard of male domination; an inability to incorporate the varying life experiences of women; and the adherence to an implicit assumption that women are "weak, powerless, and dependent on men as long as we maintain sexual relationships with them."

⁹² Ross, 117.

There has been a surge of public discussions of women's sexuality in recent years, and mainstream second wave feminists have been the predominant targets for criticism. As illustrated in Chapter 2, postfeminists posit that the feminist struggle for sexual liberation was a noble one, but that it was conducted through the perpetuation of dangerous dichotomies: object/subject, passive/aggressive, and female/male. Kate Fillion described this phenomenon as the preservation of an age-old sexual script. She argued that, as a direct result, "the common language used to discuss sexuality in the public arena...[has been] predicated on women's passivity and oppression."⁹³ Postfeminists assert the erroneous assumption that the women's movement advanced a single, antiquated vision of what constitutes "good" feminism, and "good" feminist sex through the promotion of women's victimization and men's inherent lechery. Their arguments have perpetuated the stereotype that *all* feminists hate men, believe in the essential "goodness" of women, lack a sense of humour, are preoccupied with sexual danger, and are anti-sex.

The popular press has latched on to (and, in many ways, helped create) the new, aggressive female sexual archetype in recent years. Heterosexual, white, able-bodied, well-educated, financially successful, aggressive, and overtly sexual women have received an enormous amount of print space and air time for their assertions that women in the 1990s have "made it." While postfeminists generally do not pay homage to the second wave, images of their success and the popular acceptance of their work perpetuates the notion that the feminism of the 1970s achieved empowerment and sexual agency for all women. Emerging in mass-market books,

⁹³ Fillion, 223.

works of fiction, in glossy magazines, and on television, such women (even the fictitious ones) have been touted as the heirs of the sexual revolution and, often, the new faces of feminism.⁹⁴ Donna LaFramboise has declared that "only someone blissfully ignorant of history could believe that the sexual revolution has done the average woman more harm than good."⁹⁵ "At the beginning of the sexual revolution," she argued,

a truce was declared in the gender wars for a few brief years – at least among some segments of the population. Rather than being used as leverage, sex was freely enjoyed. Men and women reveled in each other's beauty, sharing their bodies comfortably and lavishly.⁹⁶

The point of the sexual revolution, LaFramboise asserted, was freedom: "freedom from appalling ignorance, senseless guilt, and needless fear."⁹⁷ Postfeminists like LaFramboise, neglect to acknowledge the negative sexual experiences of women during the so-called sexual "truce." As well, postfeminists paint an inaccurate image not only of the women's movement's recent history, but also of the contradictory sexual experiences of many women today. Nonetheless, the image of the "modern woman" of the 1990s has been the "bad girl," one who has rejected the perceived "tyranny of contemporary sexual politics" brought about by feminism and who has

⁹⁴ Stephanie Nolen, "Girls Just Wanna Have Fun," *The Globe and Mail*, (13 February 1999); Renzetti, C1, C4; Kate Fillion, "Bitch: Who Deserves the Finger," *The Globe and Mail*, (25 April 1998), D11; Ian Nathanson, "Speaking of Women," *The Ottawa Sun*, (2 March 1999); Valerie Gibson, "Women's Success Scares off Men," *The Toronto Sun*, (2 March 1999). See Dawn Walton, "Feminist Role Model or Ditz Broad?" *The Ottawa Citizen*, (29 June 1998); and Kingwell, 77-78. American prime time television character "Ally McBeal" has been touted as feminism's new role model in *TIME* magazine.

⁹⁵ Donna LaFramboise, "Freedom, Baby," *The National Post*, 18 March 1999, A18.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, A18.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, A18.

been aggressively taking matters into her own hands.⁹⁸

The representation of women in the 1990s as brash, fiercely independent, successful, and sexually aggressive predators has not been entirely unwarranted. As British writer Helen Fielding, author of one of the best-selling "bad girl" novels of the 1990s, has claimed, "in real life, women do like to have a good time, go out to bars, get pissed and have a cigarette, and it doesn't mean they're prostitutes."⁹⁹ Many women have reaped the benefits of the gains made by their predecessors, and have enjoyed their independence – sexual and otherwise – in a variety of ways. The postfeminist image (which has also become known as babe-feminism, do-me feminism, and capitalist feminism) has been a sexy, alluring one. Postfeminists appear glamorous, confident, strong, stylish, more than slightly narcissist, and completely in control – a representation that stands as the antithesis of the stereotype of victim feminism. Despite the media-friendly appeal of the independent, post-feminist seductress, the depiction has not been representative of the lives of most women.

The image of the "bad girl" presented by both the media and postfeminists such as Amy Friedman, Kate Fillion and Donna LaFramboise has been backed by inaccurate knowledge of the history of the women's movement itself. As well, the visible success of few privileged women in Canada has been presented as evidence of postfeminism's arrival. Representations of "enlightened" women have

⁹⁸ Wendy Dennis, Hot and Bothered: Sex and Love in the Nineties, (Toronto: The Penguin Group, 1992) 3.

⁹⁹ As quoted in Renzetti, C4. See Fielding's Bridget Jones's Diary, (London/Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1997).

consistently referred to a version of 1970s-style feminism which they believe embraced women's sexual pleasure as an unproblematic venture: one that provided the means for women to pursue sexual self-empowerment in virtually any social sphere. But, they argue, the women's movement changed its ideological stance to one that prevented women from expressing their sexual "power," and focused solely on the experiences of marginalized women:

My sisters in struggle and I were trying to shake off the shackles of a consumer-mad, sexist, racist society. Those ads featuring glamorous, honey-skinned blondes with legs that went on forever made us all nervous, anxious, tense...There was just one problem. Those women I knew who were, by North American standards, classically attractive, felt ashamed. I know I was embarrassed to be white, handsome, fine-complexioned, attractive to men. I hoped no one would notice that I was.¹⁰⁰

Postfeminists, eager to illustrate that women in the 1990s have indeed "made it," have done so at the expense of non-white, disabled, lesbian, bisexual, and transgendered people. Their accounts of "liberated" lifestyles and their conceptions of sexual freedom fail acknowledge the range and diversity of early feminist writings, and have ignored the reality of sexual danger in many women's experiences. As well, postfeminists have displayed no recognition of their power and privilege as white, educated, able-bodied, heterosexual women.¹⁰¹

Early feminist writings that emphasized the significance of women's sexual freedom did not ignore the existence of sexual danger in many women's lives. Instead, they argued that women's sexual emancipation could not occur without a

¹⁰⁰ Friedman, 32-33.

¹⁰¹ Jane Gerhard, "The Personal Is Still Political: The Legacy of 1970s Feminism," in Maglin and Perry, 41.

more thorough sense of women's realities as well as a realization of the need for social, economic and political rights.¹⁰² Critics of postfeminism have concurred:

The enactment of sexual subjectivity where there is none is as unimaginable as the enactment of power as a subjectively generated force when it has no objective existence. It should not have to be further belabored that there is no power feminism where there is no power, and that its absence there calls into question its operations here.¹⁰³

Although writings by postfeminists succeed in rendering the women's movement a relic, they have done so by promoting an ethos of individuality, one that rejects the value of commonality between and among women and renounces organized women's movements. Postfeminists discount and ignore the experiences of marginalized women in Canada, and hinder the potential for increased knowledge of the diverse nature of women's sexual experiences. If, as Valverde has suggested, sexuality should be examined as a social and collective process, then "individual freedom to imagine and to act is not enough...if we start criticizing traditional morality only to fall back into an empty notion of the inviolability of individual desire, we will have no tools for analyzing why a white man might want to turn a black woman into his sexual slave, or why a black woman might 'consent' to this."¹⁰⁴

In direct contrast to the seemingly 'liberated' sexuality of the postfeminist woman and also contributing to the increased discussion of sex in mainstream

¹⁰² It should be noted that Valverde (1995) 19; Kinsman, 227, 306-307; and Ross, 219, have all illustrated that pro-sex feminism, gay/lesbian cultural formations and the pursuit of sexual pleasure through 'alternative' means (S&M, porn and erotica, various bars and baths and establishments for people with diverse erotic preferences") have always existed in Canada, and they did not dissipate when the mainstream women's movement began to target violence and policy issues more actively in the mid-1970s.

¹⁰³ Lillian S. Robinson, "Subject/Position," in Maglin and Perry, 186.

¹⁰⁴ Valverde, 202.

media, anti-feminist submissions to the current debates have also portrayed the women's movement as outmoded, although in a very different manner:

Carelessly, thoughtlessly, casually, sex – in the short space of a single generation – went from being the culminating act of a committed love to being a precondition, a tryout, for future emotional involvement. If any...Sexual rules create sexual solidarity among women. If men feel that they can flit from woman to woman, they will. They will enjoy our ready availability and exploit it to their advantage. But if women *as a group* cease to be readily available – if they begin to demand commitment (and real commitment, as in marriage) in exchange for sex – market conditions will shift in favour of women.¹⁰⁵

Others have claimed that feminism's past struggles for emancipation have resulted in "virginity being scorned as a sign of subservience, sexual relations being reduced to a banal form of social interaction...and a denial of specific roles within the family."¹⁰⁶ Arguing that a "return to modesty," (virginity, chastity, and sexual restraint) would be more advantageous for women to reclaim power and control in their relationships with men, anti-feminist conjectures have been voiced by heterosexual women who have benefited directly from the battles waged by the previous generation of feminists.¹⁰⁷ Despite their narrowly-defined, traditionalist vision of the family and relationships, lack of thorough historical analyses, and often blatant misuse of statistics, such women have secured considerable popular attention by mocking the perceived fanatical character of feminism, and presenting themselves as rational "moderates."

¹⁰⁵ Danielle Crittenden, What Our Mothers Didn't Tell Us: Why Happiness Eludes the Modern Woman, (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1999) 30, 35.

¹⁰⁶ Daniele Starenkyj, Women's True Desire, (Richmond, Ulverton House Publications, 1996) 32.

¹⁰⁷ See also Wendy Shalit, A Return to Modesty: Discovering the Lost Virtue, (Toronto: HarperCollins Canada, 1999).

There are numerous similarities between postfeminist and anti-feminist attitudes on sexuality. Both present the women's movement as a monolithic entity, focused solely on the experiences of a small sample of white, financially-stable, heterosexual women. Both assert the primacy of the individual, and encourage women to fulfill their "duties" rather than affirm their rights. To many, "the very notion of the victim has become synonymous with self-indulgent misery now that individuals are considered to be primarily responsible for their fate."¹⁰⁸ Located predominantly within the mainstream popular press and mass market books, post-feminist and antifeminist arguments on sexuality depict the women's movement as obsolete, and contribute to the ever-increasing polarization of progressive liberal sentiment and ever-growing traditional and reactionary thought.¹⁰⁹ They present the women's movement as the mastermind behind stringent sexual and moral codes and as the promoters of a villain-versus-victim mythology. In effect, "feminism loses both ways: while women's rebellion against sexism is diverted to the war against sex, feminists get blamed for the big sexual chill."¹¹⁰

The anti-feminist call for more restrictive sex roles and a return to an era of socially sanctioned normative heterosexual relationships and marriage has been generally dismissed as a benign (but persistent) threat by the women's movement. However, as exclusionary, homophobic, and counter-productive to feminism's goals

¹⁰⁸ Lise Noël, *Intolerance: A General Survey*, Translated by Arnold Bennett, (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1994, 238.

¹⁰⁹ Nolte, 204.

¹¹⁰ Ellen Willis, "Villains and Victims: "Sexual Correctness" and the Repression of Feminism," in Maglin and Perry, 51.

as postfeminism has been, the sexy allure of its tenets has been more difficult to ignore. Postfeminism is the antithesis of defensive. Through their seemingly open acknowledgment of the erotic, their sexually-aggressive demeanors, and their open promotion of beauty culture indulgences (again, completely devoid of analysis), postfeminism has emerged as a mindset that could be construed as significantly more fun than victim feminism. Third wave feminists have recognized that self-indulgent postfeminist perspectives have not acknowledged power imbalances that continue to exist between men and women (and also among women) and offer little – if any – admittance of their privileged positions in society.

While third wave perspectives regarding sexuality have just begun to emerge, much of the writing to date begins from a location similar to that of the pro-sex feminists of the 1980s: where the early second wave feminists left off. The desire to conduct analyses of body image, self-esteem, desirability, sexuality and sexual pleasure – free from the perceived negative repercussions from other feminists – has been strong in third wave writings. To many members of the third wave, those pursuits have revolved around continual self-analysis and personal negotiation, an attempt to reconcile a desire to create their own version of “femininity” and their fear of betraying their allegiance to feminism and the struggle for female empowerment:

I know I shave my armpits, and I’m not a lesbian, nor do I hate men. So I guess according to society’s stereotypical boundaries surrounding the term “feminist,” I am not a feminist... “Am I a feminist?” my response is simply this: Yes! Yes I am a feminist because I believe that women should be given equal rights to men,

equal opportunities, equal choices and an equal voice. I live my life on a daily basis being proud of the fact that I am a woman...¹¹¹

For some, that has translated into a strong defiance of preconstructed notions of what constitutes a "beautiful" female body. For others, it has meant indulging in beauty culture: fashion magazines, make-up, hair products, and slinky fashions previously viewed as fodder for the male gaze:

For me, being a femme means that I take pride in wearing just the right shade of lipstick, drawing the perfect black line above my eye-lashes, keeping my legs smooth, and smelling good. Being a femmenist means knowing I am just as attractive when I don't wear makeup, shave, or put on perfume.¹¹²

In contrast to anti-feminist sentiment, third wave feminists have rejected claims for returning to the (mythological) past as a solution to contemporary women's issues, and believe that taking that direction would inevitably lead to both repressive and regressive policies and politics. Returning sexuality to the postwar ideal, "in a reconstructed conventional heterosexual family would entail forcing women back into male-dominated homes, and gays into closets."¹¹³ As well, the third wave consumption of the products of beauty culture, unlike the whims of postfeminists, has not been without analysis. Instead, third wave feminists' emphasis has been focused on redrawing the boundaries of what constitutes beauty, femininity, and sexuality, and the roles that they play in every individual's quest for self-

¹¹¹ Ramona Parkash-Puni, "Assumption: Feminists are men-hating lesbians who think women are better than men," in Campbell and Dhaliwal, 58-59.

¹¹² delombard, jeannine, "femmenism," in Rebecca Walker, ed., 29-30.

¹¹³ Ian Lumsden, "Sexuality and the State: The Politics of "Normal" Sexuality," in Nemiroff, 197-198.

empowerment.¹¹⁴

Some third wavers have critiqued the mythologies surrounding the decade of the 1960s, arguing that, while the sexual revolution “was largely about women saying *yes* (to really prove themselves liberated) a new movement is empowering them to *also* say no, *along with when, where and how*. As a result, women are more closely examining what turns them off – and also what turns them on.”¹¹⁵

Jennifer Drake concurred, and explained:

Third Wave women talk a lot about pleasure. This could be because we’re young or because we’re such well-trained consumers or because we’re into some kind of playful postmodern aesthetic or because we watched too much TV growing up, but I can’t dismiss this, for it’s such a hunger and a joy in Third Wave texts...clearly, the pleasure-seeking impulse makes its unruly way through the personal and political play with sex/uality, but it also consistently informs Third Wave claims to feminism itself...¹¹⁶

Shirking the potentially social repercussions (or basking in the rebellion of them), many third wavers have exerted their entitlement to engage in any and all sexual activities they deem pleasurable. Such women have assumed agency and control concerning what they “want” sexually. Crosbie commented (with more than a hint of sarcasm), that “we’re seeing the slow, last windings of feminism’s greatest claim,

¹¹⁴ The complexities of the body have been addressed through the analysis of ‘the politics of hair.’ Noliwe Rooks, “Hair-Raising: African American Women, Beauty Culture and Madame C. J. Walker,” University of Iowa, (August 1994), critiqued the effects of hair-straightening on black women in the US, and Christina Gallagher, “Hair Politics” *zingmagazine*, Vol. 6, (NY, 1998) discussed the political implications of Caucasians dreadlocking their hair. Both provide insight into whether the adoption of certain hairstyles by particular groups constitutes cultural/racial appropriation or an attempt to transcend racial lines. Wendy Traas, “Splitting Hairs: Creative Expression vs. Self-Normalization in Women’s Hair Care,” Brock University, (April 1999) explored the complex relationship between hair and women’s identities by combining theories of self-transformation, self-maintenance, and the cultural production of self with in-depth personal interviews.

¹¹⁵ Paula Kamen, “Acquaintance Rape: Revolution and Reaction,” in Maglin and Perry, 140.

¹¹⁶ Drake, 106.

that girls can do anything...We can screw, we can swear, we can do drugs. What that leaves us is the option of moral degeneracy, which is what men have been accused of all along. That's the paradox."¹¹⁷

The remarkable achievements of the diverse feminist and gay struggles of the past that challenged traditional assumptions about the "naturalness" of sexuality and helped transform discourses on sexuality and sexual pleasure into a legitimate topic for public discussion have influenced third wave perspectives and analyses. Third wave feminists begin with the premise that sexual attitudes are socially constructed.¹¹⁸ In third wave writing to date, sexuality has been viewed as "normal" only within the context of dominant normative values that have been socially, culturally, and politically created and enforced. Concerning body politics and sexuality, the initial objectives have been to challenge and dispel myths and expose the conflicts among different perceptions of sexual desire. From that point, theories can be created to bridge the gap between the 'lived messiness' of women's sexual experiences – both positive and negative – and a strong feminist position. As Mariana Valverde has noted, the acknowledgment of different desires among women and increased dialogue on desire and ethics "can be creative ones that lead us a little closer to a caring community which can both guide us and provide a context for our desire."¹¹⁹

The growth and intellectual development of younger members of the third

¹¹⁷ Crosbie, as quoted in Elizabeth Renzetti, "Wicked as We Wanna Be," *The Globe and Mail*, 25 April 1998, C1.

¹¹⁸ Lumsden, 192.

¹¹⁹ Valverde, 206.

wave has been marked by a greater overall consciousness of sex, sex identities, and sexualities, and a resurgent interest in the role that sexual identity plays in their everyday lives. The establishment of women's studies in schools, the inclusion of feminist theory in other fields of study, and ever-growing strong and vocal lesbian and gay pride movements have all contributed to their heightened awareness. Third wavers have also been privy to an expansion of cultural influences including everything from the emergence of continuous music video channels (*much music*, and *much more music* in Canada, and *MTV* in the United States), cable television, improved satellite communications, the Internet (broadcasts, newsgroups, and millions of web sites and pages), and a broad range of specialty magazines, all of which have undoubtedly affected and shaped their outlook.¹²⁰ Advertising specifically and pop culture generally have become increasingly sexualized, and the members of the third wave have acknowledged that "as women become more powerful in real life, their clothes got tighter and shorter in the make-believe-it's-real world of television."¹²¹

Third wave feminists have been conscious of the use of sexuality and, in particular, sexualized images of women in the media that have consistently

¹²⁰ Kuczynski, A14, noted that specialty magazines, even those formerly touted as "feminist" have changed their focus in recent years. For instance, *Glamour* withdrew its column on women's political activities and replaced it with astrology in January, 1990. Even articles on sexual advice, once a staple of women's magazines, have shifted from providing instruction on maximizing female or mutual pleasure, to guidance on pleasing men. The editor-in-chief of the magazine stated that the lessons of feminism have been so densely woven into the cultural fabric that readers don't need to revisit them, and that "monthly monitoring on the state of women's rights" is no longer needed or wanted.

¹²¹ Judith Timson, "Bimbo-Watch: Resistant to Feminism, She Just Won't Go Away," *Macleans* (27 November 1995) 52.

supported "and continue the prevailing sexual division of labour and orthodox conceptions of masculinity and femininity," and have actively sought to make sense of manipulative media techniques in their works.¹²² An ever-increasing number of third wave feminist scholars, writers, artists, activists, and critics of the mass media have attempted to link their connection (and attraction) to the hyper-sexualized culture of consumerism and consumption with their identities as women, sexual beings and feminists. As the editors of *BITCH: Feminist Response to Pop Culture* explain,

We are supposedly living in a new age – one that some have dubbed postfeminist. Feminism is over, they say. Just get over it. But television demonstrates that most people still think what a woman is wearing is more important than what she's thinking. Magazines that tell us, both implicitly and explicitly, that female sexual urges are deviant – while reminding us that maintaining our sex appeal is the only way to wring commitment out of a man, without which our lives will be sad and incomplete in spite of dazzling careers and intense friendships. Billboards urge us to fork over our hard-earned cash for the glittery, overpriced wares of companies that depend on our unhappiness and dissatisfaction for their profits. Hollywood continues to churn out movies where women's only lines are "Help me," "C'mere, big guy," and "Oh, honey, I missed you so much while you were off saving humanity by tracking down that vicious serial killer/diverting that asteroid/killing those scary space aliens."¹²³

The third wave objective, in many respects, has been to acknowledge the mixed messages pervading popular culture and account for the 'problem desires' that often result. A pervasive and persuasive force, the sex-positive imagery (often couched

¹²² Dominic Strinati, *An Introduction to Theories of Popular Culture*, (London: Routledge, 1995) 181; see also Sarah Denham, "Assumption: Media images, models and magazines don't affect a girl's self-esteem," in Campbell and Dhaliwal, 8-9.

¹²³ www.bitchmagazine.com/mission.html.

as feminism) presented by the media has been appealing. However, as Susan Cole has warned, "to embrace it [would be] to underestimate the extent to which sexuality is a social construct not so easily undone by female orgasms, per se."¹²⁴

Many have criticized the mainstream media's manipulation of sexuality. Although "it is easy and fashionable to blame the media," a more realistic assessment of the current circumstances would also recognize that pop culture acts as a mirror of the cultural, social and political environment in which it exists, and that such images must be thoroughly examined for both symptoms and causes.¹²⁵ Members of the third wave have conceded that, although representations of sexually confident, seemingly empowered women hold considerable allure, "a sexualized society does not guarantee sexual pleasure for individuals."¹²⁶ The realities of women's lived experiences must be acknowledged:

Consumption does not simply represent 'the power of hegemonic forces in the definition of women's role as consumer,' but rather 'is a site of negotiated meanings, of resistance and of appropriation as well as of subjection and exploitation.' To analyze gender in the context of other dimensions of power such as class and race, thereby building upon the foundations laid by socialist feminism.¹²⁷

That negotiation process, between the alluring, pre-packaged, advertised, and purchased version of female sexuality and the difficulties of translating it into a lived reality, has been paramount to third wave analyses to date. Cole recognized the contradictions as well, and stated that, "feminism is as much about empowerment as it is about facing up to women's victimization," and suggested that women

¹²⁴ Cole, 39.

¹²⁵ Nolté, 203-204.

¹²⁶ Valverde (1985) 35.

"imagine being sexual as part of cultural life" as a preliminary step.¹²⁸

That has been a difficult challenge for members of the third wave, as questions surrounding women's sexuality have always been at the core of feminist analyses. Not surprisingly, the craving for sexual empowerment has paralleled a questioning of reality, of the sexual revolution, and – necessarily – of feminism. As illustrated, postfeminist commentators attack the perceived sexual pessimism of the second wave and attempt to destroy the presumed feminist fixation on women's moral superiority. Similar claims have been supported by explorations into women's "darker" side in sexual relationships. Such research often concludes that "the feminists" have overemphasized the strength of masculine power and denied the fact that women have the capacity to be violent, aggressive and manipulative as well.¹²⁹ Valverde identified such attitudes as "sexual libertarianism" or "libertarian individualism" and suggested that similar arguments should be as extremist and historically and theoretically unfounded.¹³⁰

Members of the third wave, acutely aware of the popularity and visibility of the postfeminist perspective, have attempted a more nuanced approach to the discussion of women's sexuality. While acknowledging the need for women to explore and establish their own empowered sexuality, they have also attempted to

¹²⁷ Strinati, 218.

¹²⁸ Susan Cole, "What do We Want and Why do We Want it?" *Sex, Violence & Pornography*, Toronto: Second Story Press, 1995, 25.

¹²⁹ Fillion and LaFramboise have both utilized this line of reasoning. More recently, the results of a study conducted at Simon Fraser University in British Columbia by Donald Sharpe and Janelle K. Taylor in 1999 ("An Examination of Variables From a Social-Developmental Model to Explain Physical and Psychological Dating Violence") which concluded that "males were more likely to report receiving violence, females more likely to report inflicting violence" has received considerable publicity.

¹³⁰ Valverde, (1985) 16.

incorporate a multitude of other aspects which directly affect women's decisions, reactions and experiences regarding sexuality. Some have reassessed the value of their own sexual education:

Jo: I remember a sex therapist or a sex person coming in to talk with us and she was saying that if you French-kissed a boy that meant you gave him permission to have sex with you. These were the types of things we were taught...Looking back at it now I feel really, really angry at some of the ways I was repressed...but I've got a lot of major mental problems because of these people telling me how bad I am, how wrong I am, how dirty I am, how I'll be diseased, how...I don't know, and I'm still mad. And I think personally I have this huge vendetta against society that I want to educate girls and tell them that it's OK, that these feelings are normal, and that you shouldn't be locked up in your room and told that "you're bad" or don't talk about it.

Others have actively attempted to seek out positive representations of women's sexuality, images which depict women receiving pleasure outside of the male-centred realm of mass-produced pornography as well as informative articles focused more on pleasure and less on "perfect" body type and performance.¹³¹

While some third wavers have described themselves as vehemently against pornography, the commercial adult film and magazine industries have sparked the interest of a number of young feminists in the 1990s. The gravitation of some women towards explicit sexual imagery – and the potential political implications of such fascinations – has incited many feminist investigations over the years. Some members of the third wave are active supporters of the development and

¹³¹ During the group dialogue, Laura commented on the lack of available information on women's bodies today, and on how infrequently women happen upon informative articles. See Jennifer Johnson, "Exposed At Last: The Truth About Your Clitoris," *Herizons*, Vol. 12, no. 3, (Fall 1998) 19-20, 29. Interestingly, many of the "women-positive" items have been located outside of mainstream sources: in visual art, music, theatre productions, and independent print publications.

consumption of female-oriented sexual films and photography, often distinguished from mass-produced, male-centred porn as 'erotica.' Others have admitted an attraction to "politically incorrect porn" and articulated that "they believe they're traitors to the cause" as a result.¹³² While the pornography debates within the women's movement and elsewhere have been ongoing and complex, many women have admitted that some of the images that had been defined as "male oriented" and "inherently degrading" were also titillating.¹³³ "Pornography," as Lisa Palac confessed, "could be stupid, depressing, and incredibly arousing."¹³⁴ However, part of the third wave (following the lead of their pro-sex predecessors) feminist strategy has been to contextualize such desires:

When a woman looks at a picture of a man and woman fucking, doesn't it matter if she is straight or gay, likes cocks or thinks they're awful, was raised in a Catholic in a small town in Minnesota or was the only gypsy child in her community? Doesn't that have a deep and radical impact on what a woman considers pornographic and what she considers sexy? Or are we to believe that there is a "natural" reaction which all women have to sexually explicit images which warns us immediately if and when those images cross the line to lewd?¹³⁵

The interest of third wave feminists in pornography as a potential site for examining female sexual pleasure has emerged, in part, as result of their deconstruction of "feminist" and "unfeminist" desires. Third wave perspectives on pornography and

¹³² Dennis, 228-229.

¹³³ For an interesting perspective on the current pro-sex, pro-porn, anti-censorship arguments, see "Feminists For Free Expression" located at www.well.com/user/freedom/index.html. The site provides an extensive bibliography of current pro-sex arguments, and links to similar web sites and web pages.

¹³⁴ Lisa Palac, *On the Edge of the Bed: How Dirty Pictures Saved My Life*, (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1998, 33; See also Vogels (1995) "Porn Stars: Women Get in on the Act," 113-117.

¹³⁵ Amber Hollibaugh, "Desire for the Future: Radical Hope in Passion and Pleasure," in Vance, 404.

erotica may have been affected by legislation concerning sexual imagery in the recent past. In 1992, *R. v. Butler* presented the first constitutional challenge to Canada's obscenity laws. The Supreme Court upheld the section on obscenity, and modified its interpretation to a stronger focus upon the "undue exploitation of sex."¹³⁶ It has been noted that since 1992, "straight, mainstream pornography appears to be flourishing." However, imagery that presents (explicitly or implicitly) "alternative" sexualities have been subjected to intense scrutiny under the law and "sexual representations that challenge conventional notions of sexuality – gay and lesbian sexuality, s/m sexuality, youth sexuality – are now the focus of the censor's scorn."¹³⁷ The message to third wave feminists has been clear: while the direct social policing of women's bodies and of eroticism has changed considerably over the years, further inquiries into the legal and moral regulation of sexual identities must be conducted.

As the debates over sexuality and pornography progressed, a new variable emerged which further complicated the third wave discussion: AIDS. Perhaps more than any other issue, AIDS and AIDS prevention strategies have unquestionably informed and influenced third wave perspectives. Soon after the virus was announced to the Canadian public in 1985, reports of "the age of epidemic" ensued and the media promptly pronounced the sexual revolution dead.¹³⁸ While

¹³⁶ Kinsman, 346 noted that the Court's interpretation of "undue exploitation of sex" translated into "too much sexual explicitness for 'community standards' to tolerate," and argued that the decision failed to take into account the fact that such standards are often heterocentric in nature, and that specific terms often have "different meanings for different groups."

¹³⁷ Brenda Cossman, Shannon Bell, Lise Gotell, and Becki L. Ross, *Bad Attitude/s on Trial: Pornography, Feminism and the Butler Decision*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1997) 3-4.

¹³⁸ Dennis, 31.

contraception helped to quell the fear of pregnancy in the 1960s, AIDS facilitated a new sexual panic, one that pervaded political and cultural life. The virus "reintroduced the connection of sexuality to death," but in a unique manner, as "AIDS does not distinguish between the sexes."¹³⁹ Information on the use and care of condoms rapidly increased, and the discussions that occurred challenged and, in many cases, changed previously held notions of sexuality:

Jo: I cannot imagine life without the condom. I can't fathom the time when I actually have to deal with that sort of thing...In my experience, there's no question as to whether or not one's going to be used...when it comes time if I ever chose or make the choice to become pregnant and not use a condom, I think that would be the strangest thing!

While some have suggested that "the pill gave women the right to say yes to sex, [and] AIDS gave them the right to say no," most critiques have failed to review the social implications of the virus.¹⁴⁰ Fewer have performed in-depth critiques on how AIDS has affected women's sexuality.

While a number of articles in the mainstream press have focused on the ever-growing number of women who have contracted the virus and emphasized the need for increased AIDS awareness among heterosexual women, a number of third wave feminists have been actively engaged in more representative analyses.¹⁴¹ Stressing that HIV-positive and "high risk" women should be included in feminist analyses on sexuality, third wave writings on AIDS have attempted to address concerns in a

¹³⁹ Cossman, Bell, Gotell, and Ross, 27; Giddens, 27.

¹⁴⁰ McLaren and McLaren, 140.

¹⁴¹ Ann Silversides, "Face It: Nice Girls Do Get AIDS," *Elm Street*, (Summer 1998) 95-102.

more inclusive manner, and to dispel many of the myths that surround the virus.¹⁴²

As Zoë Whittall explains:

I've become an AIDS nerd. That's all I could write in my journal. The geeky kinky sex-pos queer bi femme and well...AIDS nerd. Did you see the movie in sixth-grade sex ed? It was about this dorky kid who thought you could catch HIV from kissing. My paranoid hypochond-ria has gotten me nowhere in life...My friends and I, we live in all those high risk boxes, categorized by identity and not behaviour. On the Red Cross bad list. Doctors see us, and say "Young? Queer? Poor? Sex workers? That means HIV by twenty-five. Did you expect to live to thirty?" I want to be a Raging Granny. I want to have kids. I know HIV isn't a death sentence and that I could be hit by a bus tomorrow, but when it comes to disease, I still can't help believing it.¹⁴³

Some third wavers have sought to remove the negative stereotypes that surround the virus and those who have been diagnosed with HIV. As Adams has noted, AIDS has provided fodder for numerous conservative campaigns against "deviant" sexual acts and lifestyles, and has served to give the illness "a political context well understood by feminists in blame-the-victim type moralizing."¹⁴⁴ Because of the backlash, many feminists have used the experiences of HIV-positive women as a foundation for further inquiries into women's health and sexuality.

AIDS awareness has facilitated a renewed interest in the medicalization of women's bodies, particularly in removing power from physicians and placing it in the hands of women in an affirming manner. There has also been a revival of interest in

¹⁴² Darien Taylor, Dionne Falconer and Linda Gardner, "Women on the Front Line: AIDS Activists in Discussion," in Linda Carty, ed., *And Still We Rise*, (Toronto: The Women's Press, 1993), 343-344.

¹⁴³ Zoë Whittall, "Kissing Her with a Cold Sore," *Fireweed*, "Revolution Girl Style." Issue 59/60, Fall/Winter 1997, 116-117.

¹⁴⁴ Mary Louise Adams, "Plagued by the New Right: Politics, Women and Aids," *Herizons*, Vol. 4, No. 6, (Sept 1986) 22.

information on women's sexual organs, gynecological and breast examinations, the rights of medical patients, and practical demonstrations on the use of speculums. Women's organizations and centres have provided information pamphlets, guidelines, and newsletters on a myriad of women's issues and concerns.¹⁴⁵ Ranging from surgical operations to enhance, sculpt, or rejuvenate the vagina, to tips on body piercing, to personal accounts of experiences with the morning after pill, all focused primarily on education, choice and the potential physical, cultural and political implications of such decisions.¹⁴⁶ Interestingly, these exact concerns were also of fundamental importance to feminism in the late 1960s and early 1970s. The third wave feminist reactions to the AIDS virus coalesce neatly with the intentions of those early discussions.

Like their early second wave predecessors, many members of the third wave have admitted that they have only a cursory knowledge of their bodies and of how sexual pleasure can be attained, despite the fact that they, as a generation, grew up in the age of feminism, a seemingly more sexually-liberated society, and sex education. That lack of self-knowledge, coupled with the AIDS virus, has led to a resurgent interest in the ways in which women's bodies have been discussed and medicalized:

Figuring out what's going on "down there" is on the minds of a lot of North American women these days. For many, it's not as simple as a tryst with an electrical appliance. Women report more sexual

¹⁴⁵ See AGENDER, Carleton University's Womyn Centre's newsletter, and Challenge the Assumptions! Both illustrate a concern articulated in the mid-1980s, expressed in Sharleen Johnson McCooey, "Help Yourself," *Horizons*, Vol. 4, No. 1 (Jan/Feb 1986) 39.

¹⁴⁶ Stephanie Goodwin, "Vaginal Rejuve...What?" *AGENDER*, (Ottawa: Carleton University Womyn's Centre Newsletter, April 1999).

problems than men do, yet less has been figured out about how their bodies get aroused, or don't...Some worry that science may be tempted to reduce the complex mystery of sexual desire – arousal and ultimately satisfaction – to mechanics, requiring nothing more than a quick tune-up at the doctor's office or an even quicker pit stop at the drug store...¹⁴⁷

Despite assertions in the popular press that the majority of women today "are knowledgeable about orgasms, G-spots, oral sex, anal sex, the morning-after pill, bondage, s&m, and whether genital piercing enhances sexuality," many women have conceded that putting such information into practice has been considerably more difficult.¹⁴⁸

Although many young women in the 1990s have been actively engaged in their pursuit of sexual pleasure through a variety of means,¹⁴⁹ many third wavers continue to struggle with an ongoing feminist dilemma: sexual orientation. The current decade has witnessed a renewed debate on "feminist heterosexuality", one that differs only in historical context from the "compulsory heterosexuality" debates of the past. One side of the discussion asserts the compatibility of feminism and heterosexuality. Proponents argue that women have secured a stronger position in society in recent times, one that has enabled them to take control of their sexual

¹⁴⁷ Krista Foss, "Finding the Joy of Sex," *The Globe and Mail*, 20 October 1998, A17-A18.

¹⁴⁸ Foss, 144.

¹⁴⁹ Katie Monagle, "all about Eve's Garden," *Ms.* (November/December 1995) 53-55; Cindy Filipenko, "A Stimulating Business Proposition," *Herizons*, Vol. 11, No. 3 (Summer 1997) 26-27; Heather Richardson, "The Joy of Sex Toys," *Herizons*, Vol. 4, No. 2 (March 1986) 39; Brigitte Sutherland, "FemErotica: A Collage of Women's Voices," *Herizons*, Vol. 1, No. 8, (Nov 1983) 27-33, have all discussed the growing number of successful feminist sex boutiques in Canada. Women-focused feminist sex stores have employed a philosophy of sexual empowerment for women, and attempt to break traditional myths surrounding sex toys and to improve women's knowledge of their own sexual options by way of advice columns, web sites, information guides and how-to booklets. Although indicative of a more direct attempt by women to pursue their sexual pleasure more directly, women's choices within society remain limited, as "there are still too few comfortable and non-exploitative venues where women can buy the books and toys with which to explore their sexuality."

relationships with men.¹⁵⁰ One woman declared that she was "tired of hearing that men are the only creatures that can have a sexual encounter, pull their pants on, say thank-you and leave," and insisted that "choice is really what it's about."¹⁵¹

Others have been more contemplative:

Courtney: It's interesting the negotiation that has to go on between heterosexuality and Women's Studies. Like (maybe I'm being a bit presumptuous) but I think that most of the women in this room have at some point thought, "am I really heterosexual? Can I really love men knowing this?" or "Can I be a good female lover and still be a feminist?" There's that constant negotiation that has to go on, and sometimes I find that it gets played out in bed. Like hmmm, "I should be dominating!" You know? Or hmmm...this is wrong! So I just wonder how we can resolve those negotiations.

As Courtney illustrated, the notion of "sleeping with the enemy" has not dissipated, and the fear (whether real or perceived) of not participating in good "feminist sex" remains. Also significant to third wave discussions regarding heterosexuality has been the emergence of "difference" as a theoretical tool to analyze sexuality and desire between men and women. Sheila Jefferys and Sallie Tisdale have both noted that the institution of heterosexuality has been founded on the ideology of difference,¹⁵² and that, although "the difference is seen as natural, it is in fact a difference of power."¹⁵³

Not surprisingly, many third wave discussions regarding heterosexual relationships have focused on the implications of sexual acts that accentuate the

¹⁵⁰ Rita Alfonso and Jo Triglio, "Surfing the Third Wave: A Dialogue Between Two Third Wave Feminists," *Hypatia*, Vol. 12, No. 3 (Summer 1997) 12.

¹⁵¹ Stephanie Grey, "The Sexual Revolution! Lust Without Commitment," *Call and Call Club Magazine*, (23 August 1998) 5.

¹⁵² Sally Tisdale, *Talk Dirty to Me: An Intimate Philosophy of Sex*, (NY: Anchor Books, 1994) 64.

¹⁵³ Sheila Jeffreys, *Anticlimax: A Feminist Perspective on the Sexual Revolution*, (New York: New York University Press, 1990) 299.

dynamics of power and control during sex. More than any other sexual act, fellatio has been the subject of numerous investigations, particularly concerning shifting sexual politics and gender roles. Wendy Dennis examined the idea of the "politically correct blowjob", and questioned whether kneeling during the act could be construed as symbolically subservient.¹⁵⁴ While dodging the political implications of the act itself, Dennis concluded that many women, "though disinclined to admit it, get their *own* erotic buzz from performing the hand-maiden role."¹⁵⁵ The results of other surveys have concurred.¹⁵⁶ Although many women have reported positive experiences of performing oral sex, others have experienced the opposite:

Courtney:...even with [my partner] who I've been with for almost 3 years now, we go through periods where I just can't have sex, it's just not a possibility. Just because of something we do in Women's Studies or something happens and I feel violated...the best example that I can think of is some guy cumming in your face when you were supposed to be giving him oral sex. That type of humiliation that just brings you to the lowest step of the ladder. And then when you put yourself in that situation again and you think it's a moment of pleasure and then it all comes back. And I think that's why I'm constantly negotiating and dreading that moment when it all comes back to you. And I imagine it's the same with rape, incest, violence.¹⁵⁷

The negotiation process described above – between the immediate desire to give or

¹⁵⁴ Dennis, 162.

¹⁵⁵ Dennis, 162.

¹⁵⁶ Anne Kingston, "Making a Big Man Small," *The National Post*, (14 December 1998) stated that attitudes towards oral sex clearly divide along generational lines. According to a 1994 study by the Social Organization of Sexuality, 21.1% of women between 25 and 29 said giving oral sex was "very appealing" while only 7.2% of women aged between 50 and 54 felt similarly. However, the study was based solely on age, and outside variables (such as past sexual experiences) were not applied.

¹⁵⁷ See also Sue Johanson, *Sex is Perfectly Natural, But Not Naturally Perfect*, (Toronto: Penguin Books, 1992)121; *Sex, Sex, and More Sex*, (Toronto: Penguin Books, 1996) 154-157. Both texts have large sections on women's questions and concerns regarding their apprehension with performing fellatio.

receive sexual pleasure of a particular kind and the political mindset at the moment (whether it be feminist theory, negative sexual experiences of the past, discomfort, or embarrassment) has been described by others as well:

Story: That's the sort of dichotomy that happens when you're with your partner is that when something is sexually stimulating and you want it, but then during the sexual act it seems good, like everything's fine, and then you think, and don't let your body react...And it gets to be very confusing for my partners as well, because it all of a sudden you get intimate, and then you say "stop, just stop." And it could be something that was said or something that was done to you and it triggers and you just want it to end. So it seems that women's sexuality is just so tied up with all of the experiences that you've had.¹⁵⁸

The third wave objective has been, to date, an attempt to directly address and work through sexual experiences and to reconcile feminist perspectives with personal fears, pleasures and desires.

Valverde has asserted that some women who have vocally embraced the notion of an "egalitarian heterosexuality that stresses choice and creativity," have often "fall[en] into traditional gender roles which they experience as 'natural' in their own lives.¹⁵⁹ Members of the third wave, when dealing with issues like monogamy, have acknowledged that contradiction in their own relationships:

Heidi: It's funny, but I don't want to give [my partner] up, I just don't want to. Not without me being upset, feeling righteous in it...

Story: I love the idea of me being so open and loving and really self-contained and able to say "I love you so much honey that you go, if the wind moves you one day and you want to have sex with somebody, and you do that, I love you so much that if it's something you need to experience then experience it." But on the other side I would be like "I would fucking kill you." And I would

¹⁵⁸ See also Vogels, 89-92 for a more light-hearted explanation of the sexual negotiation process.

¹⁵⁹ Valverde, 49.

hate him so much and be so hurt, I would play this "oh yes it's so great"/"no, no, no." And so how do you balance those out? And I actually know my reaction – you are mine, you are not to be shared, and don't you dare touch that person.

Courtney: I was that woman. Or, just this last week, I was like "great, okay"/"oh, do you think she's attractive? What does she look like? What's her name? Do I know her?" So, I don't know.¹⁶⁰

While many members of the third wave have attempted to break traditional notions of sexual relations and have acknowledged the social construction of monogamy, a thorough analysis of serial monogamy in the 1990s has yet to be performed.¹⁶¹ The recognition that women's sexual desires have largely been shaped and affected by outside sources (such as religion, education, media and even, to a certain extent, feminism) has made some third wavers particularly critical of their own adherence to certain prescribed lifestyles, attitudes and activities. Awareness of the social construction of sexuality, one of the valuable legacies of the second wave, has prompted the third wave to attempt to create new analyses which incorporate the lived contradictions of their lives into practical, inclusive, and empowering theoretical feminist frameworks for the future.

Critiques of monogamy have led not only to reexaminations of compulsory heterosexuality and the institution of marriage, but also to inquiries about the role of men in future feminist analyses. Judy Rebick has acknowledged that the inclusion of male perspectives would make a marked difference in the direction of the women's

¹⁶⁰ See also Vogels (1995) "Leggo My Ego: Serial Monogamy and Other Laws of Nature," 23-27; and Vogels (1998) "Cheat Sheet," 52-56.

¹⁶¹ See Dossie Easton and Catherine Liszt, The Ethical Slut: A Guide to Infinite Sexual Possibilities, (San Francisco: Greenery Press, 1997) for one of the only contemporary texts solely devoted to eradicating socially-prescribed rules of monogamy.

movement:

...we need to expand our horizons to include men. In the 60s and early 70s feminists talked obsessively about our relationships with men. It was *the* topic of consciousness-raising groups, and we returned again and again to those relationships then we realized that what we wanted was to stand on our own two feet. We needed to define ourselves as independent beings, not only as mothers, wives and lovers. But half of humanity is male – and if we are going to transform society into a more egalitarian, fairer place, we are going to need the help of men.¹⁶²

Amy Miller, a young feminist active in the American organization Third Wave, agrees, and commented that the third wave “has worked to continue the work of the second wave” and are now trying to “prove that ‘men can do what women can do.’”¹⁶³ For many third wave feminists, the “next level of feminist satisfaction” will be attained when both women and men eradicate traditional sex roles and begin to view gender as a broad spectrum.¹⁶⁴ That recognition has translated into an concerted effort to take the input and experiences of men into account.

Third wave feminists have also actively integrated queer theory and the experiences of historically marginalized sexual identities into their analyses as well, in an attempt to expose the multitude of myths that continue to surround homosexuality.¹⁶⁵ One of the challenges has been to exterminate the pervasive

¹⁶² Judy Rebick, “Feminism and The Future,” *Homemaker's*, (May 1998) 61-69, 68.

¹⁶³ Amy Richards, “On Third Wave Feminism,” www.feminist.com/3wave.html 13 April, 1997.

¹⁶⁴ Susan Sanford, Kim Bewick, and Michelle Lobkowitz, “Feminism Our Style,” *Ragdy Anne*, Edmonton: August 1998; Vogels, (1998) “Guys Talk,” 67-73. The work of Michael Kaufmann has also been cited by Third Wave feminists as valuable to the inclusion of men in feminism and the women’s movement.

¹⁶⁵ Whelehan, 105. A ‘postfeminist’ lesbian identity has also emerged in recent years. The image presented has depicted women rejecting “old lesbian identity” in favour of a new, sexually empowered and aggressive one. Whelehan has stated that the “new ‘post-feminist’ lesbian version is, in part at least, a revival of a romanticization of lesbian identities of the pre-feminist ‘50s and ‘60s.”

negative archetype of lesbian identity. Adhering to the third wave mandate of recognizing diversity, young feminists have also attempted to make the multiplicity of identities within lesbian culture more visible. The third wave has consistently maintained that confronting the problems of privilege that exist in all communities, "straight or gay," is paramount to a politics of inclusion, one that requires the members of the women's movement to "labour diligently against the spread of oppressive beliefs."¹⁶⁶ In essence, the goal has been to present a more realistic depiction of lesbian existence:

Women who fall in love with women experience amazing highs, amazing joys, and sometimes, as in all relationships, terrific pains. Although many know that lesbian existence is never devoid of political predicaments, few know of the bright, strong and powerful present and future of the lesbian situation; this emergent power is central to our struggle for sexual liberation – for the right to love whom we please....The common portrayal of lesbians is one of suicidal mania and manic depression. We are never portrayed as the blissfully happy gals who have just fallen in love.¹⁶⁷

The key has been to increase lesbian visibility, to improve public knowledge of lesbian existence, and to change perspectives – within the women's movement as well as outside it – in an effort to undo years of sexist and homophobic conditioning and to transform "tolerance" and tokenism of lesbians into acceptance.

Directly linked to the resolute interest of the third wave in lesbian identities and the adamant defense of lesbianism as an integral part of the struggle for women's independence has been a thoroughgoing critique of identity politics within

¹⁶⁶ Mélisse LaFrance, "Assumption: Lesbians Are Suicidal flannel-shirt-wearing Tomboys Who Couldn't Get the Guy," in Campbell, and Dhaliwal, 29-30.

¹⁶⁷ LaFrance, 29-30.

the women's movement itself. The third wave has recognized that the mainstream feminist agenda has most often been prescribed by women in privileged positions within the movement: articulate, educated, white, and heterosexual women whose perspectives have been presented as representative of the views of women in general, with significant implications:

Most crucially, it implies that the acquisition of sexual identities is only of interest within the context of difference. When lesbianism is thus treated as 'other,' the acquisition of heterosexual identities remains unquestioned, preserving the integrity of mainstream feminist theorizing and the illusion of heterosexuality as an unproblematic given.¹⁶⁸

As more information about and writings by lesbians, women of colour, and other previously-marginalized groups of women have emerged, third wave feminists have attempted to interweave the diversity of Canada's racial, ethnic, and religious traditions into their writings and activism. As well, they have demanded that the more privileged feminists relinquish space and include the perspectives of previously invisible (and thus unheard) groups.

The diversity and contradictions of third wave writings on women's sexualities and sex activism illustrate that their preliminary work has been more inclusive, complex, and thorough than postfeminism, and "goes beyond the reductive and divisive label, 'pro-sex.'"¹⁶⁹ The myriad of problems, issues and concerns facing women in the 1990s also indicates that the third wave's "sexual project is just

¹⁶⁸ Gillian A. Dunne, Lesbian Lifestyles: Women's Work and the Politics of Sexuality, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1997) 226.

¹⁶⁹ Drake, 105.

beginning."¹⁷⁰ As Lynn Crosbie attests, "its liberating potential is infinite and incalculable."¹⁷¹ Literature written by members of both the second and third waves of feminism has illustrated that thorough and inclusive examinations and analyses women's sexuality have always been arduous. However, the third wave has also emphasized that the creation of "socially legitimate public language in which women...can directly and explicitly express anger at the 'mundane kinds of sexism'" is both necessary and urgent.¹⁷²

In response to the diverse, often contradictory conditions surrounding women's sexual lives in the 1990s, third wave feminists have sought to combine radical perspectives on sexual theory with the everyday occurrences of women's lived experiences. That has translated, to date, into a complex reinterpretation of both personal and collective identities, an interrogation of the women's movement of the past and of the current period, as well as optimistic visions for the future.¹⁷³ Mariana Valverde has noted that there have traditionally been two genres used by women to talk about sex: the intellectual application of a number of abstract theoretical frameworks to women's sexual experiences and desires, and "the confessional."¹⁷⁴ Members of the third wave value both, and have been actively attempting to combine the two strategies in a concerted effort to work through the 'lived messiness' of women's lives.

¹⁷⁰ Crosbie, xli.

¹⁷¹ Crosbie, xli.

¹⁷² Willis, 46.

¹⁷³ Giddens, 30; Strinati, 238.

¹⁷⁴ Valverde, 19-20.

Key to the third wave goal of expanding the feminist lexicon to account for and include "problem desires" and previously unheard perspectives on women's sexuality has been a focus on dialogue. Although "straightforward talk about sex that generates shiny 'truths' based on one's 'experience'"¹⁷⁵ is an impossibility, many members of the third wave have emphasized the import of communication in a feminist arena where a multitude of voices can be heard, free from moral reprimand. The lines of communication between and among the waves must deepen and expand to encourage more women to identify and act in their own sexual self-interest:

If sex can be regarded as a kind of theatre where subjective negotiations between men and women are played out, then the choreography of sexual encounters – what counts as active and passive, whose boundaries are breached, who gives and who takes pleasure – tells us something about these negotiations...while the rituals of heterosexual sex can and often do enact the non-reciprocity of destruction that she condemns, they can also play out disturbances and secret reciprocities in this erotic economy.¹⁷⁶

Multitudes of insightful perspectives exist and have been struggling to be heard against the established occupancy and power by a privileged minority of women. Innovative texts are being produced, new ideas are being formulated, and unique strategies are being developed; now what is required is a space where they can be shared.

Third wave feminists argue that mainstream second wave works on sexuality

¹⁷⁵ Valverde, 23.

¹⁷⁶ Catherine Waldby, "Destruction: Boundary Erotics and Refigurations of the Heterosexual Male Body," In: Elizabeth Grosz and Elspeth Probyn, eds, Sexy Bodies: The Strange Carnalities of Feminism, (London: Routledge, 1995), 267.

have been incomplete, and that items in the popular press (influenced and mirrored by postfeminism) have largely dictated the current sexual debates. That has contributed to negative and inaccurate stereotypes of what constitutes a "feminist."

As Rebecca Walker has noted,

...rigid definitions of a "good feminist" entrap women as much as sexist definitions of womanhood ever did, so that for many of us it seems that to be a feminist in the way that we have seen or understood feminism is to conform to an identity and way of living that doesn't allow for individuality, complexity, or less than perfect personal histories.¹⁷⁷

The examination of the public debates and internal discussions on women's sexuality as they have occurred throughout the relatively recent history of the second and third waves of the women's movement illustrate that much more work needs to be done.

The third wave has made a concerted effort to reconnect issues of women's sexuality to more comprehensive political analyses. They have done so, in part, to undermine the promulgation of the feminist backlash perpetuated by postfeminism and right wing neo-conservatism, and "to move feminism beyond the simplistic name-calling and dichotomies characteristic of the current debate."¹⁷⁸ While members of the women's movement have never agreed on appropriate theories on sexual ethics, the third wave has displayed a strong desire to reconnect "the personal" with "the political" in terms of women's sexuality and sexual pleasure. However, they cannot do so alone. Reshaping the social, cultural and political forces

¹⁷⁷ Rebecca Walker, *To Be Real: Telling the Truth and Changing the Face of Feminism* (New York: Doubleday, 1995) xxxiii.

¹⁷⁸ Maglin and Perry, xvi.

that have influenced public debates on sexuality – including the tendency to reduce feminist perspectives to a lone stereotype – will require the dedicated commitment of all women actively engaged in the women's movement.

Conclusion

Cacophonous discord is sometimes more exhilarating than stagnant silence, and the clamor of individuals stuttering more euphonious than the symphony of a master narrative.¹

In the spring of 1999, Germaine Greer, one of Western feminism's most noted spokespersons, published The Whole Woman, the book she had said she would never write: a sequel to her groundbreaking feminist text of the 1970s, The Female Eunuch. Presenting a harsh critique of the current state of the women's movement, Greer thrashed contemporary feminists and feminisms:

The future is female, we are told. Feminism has served its purpose and should now eff off. Feminism was long hair, dungarees and dangling earrings; postfeminism was business suits, big hair and lipstick; post-post-feminism was ostentatious sluttishness and disorderly behaviour. We all agree that women should have equal pay for equal work, be equal before the law, do no more housework than men do, spend no more time with children than men do – or do we? If the future is men and women dwelling as images of each other in a world unchanged, it is a nightmare.²

Greer devoted a small portion of her text to young women's misguided (non)participation in the women's movement. In less than 10 pages, the feminist icon added her perception of the latest generation of young women to a list of what she called "false starts and blind alleys" in feminism's history.³ Greer erroneously correlated Riot Grrrl activism in the 1990s and the 'girlpower' of the Spice Girls, and discarded them as mediocre facsimiles (corrupted by corporate media) of 1970s-style

¹ Siegel, 74.

² Germaine Greer, The Whole Woman, (London: Bantam-Dell-Doubleday, 1999) 4.

³ Greer, 310.

rockers Vivienne Westwood and Chrissie Hynde.⁴ Pro-feminist, independent 'zines were mentioned with nostalgia, and Greer stated that the "fossilized remains of the feminist fanzines" can only be found buried deep (or in an appropriated, commercial form) in the pages of glossy fashion magazines and on television.⁵ Young women's activity on the World Wide Web was limited to one site: Australia's "Geekgirl."⁶ Essentially, Greer negated the struggles of the third wave with her own mainstream feminist privilege; the power to dictate feminist membership, the control over deciphering "good" feminism and "bad" feminism, and the ability to captivate a popular audience. Consequently, young feminist attempts at activism were dismissed as a "cultural phenomenon" amounting to little more than the recycled work of "kinderwhores."⁷

Similar sentiments have been found in Canada. Prominent feminist journalist and social commentator Michele Landsberg, in a column for *The Toronto Star* wrote "A Teenager for a Generation to Look Up To," in October of 1999. The article was an interesting and innocuous item on a progressive young woman, Tanya Roberts-Davis, who was earnestly involved in the eradication of child labour in Nepal. While describing this young woman, however, Landsberg was also guilty of dictating what constitutes legitimate feminism and "proper" feminist activism. The writer characterized Roberts-Davis and her colleagues as "liv[ing] outside the anxious clatter of consumer culture," and contrasted them with youths who more often capture the

⁴ Ibid., 310.

⁵ Greer, 315.

⁶ Ibid., 314.

attention of the mainstream media: those who party at "all-night raves", those with "tongue-piercing," and users of "illicit drugs."⁸ With a sweeping generalization of an entire generation in her opening line, Landsberg discounted third wave feminist activists who have been vigorously engaged in complex critiques of popular culture and consumerism. Because they do not fit the description of "clear-eyed, bright activist youths like Tanya Roberts-Davis," women who work outside the realm of a prescribed definition of "activism" remain invisible.⁹

Both Greer and Landsberg expressed (explicitly and implicitly) their frustration with the seemingly unsympathetic and apolitical generation of women following in their wake. The "parent generation," which Greer labels herself and her contemporaries, has not recognized that a younger, activist, and unmistakably feminist generation of women has emerged in recent years. For Greer and her colleagues, the third wave does not exist. Greer asserted that women at the millennium are in crisis, and expressed her distress over the prevalence of apathy in contemporary feminism. Greer declares that "it's time to get angry again."¹⁰ But third wave feminists *are* angry. And vocal. And active. The problem, as Boa D'Ruelle suggests, is that no one has been listening:

But we do not talk.

Oh. No. I think this is an adult lie. We talk, in our communities, dialects, patois, rhythms, languages, music, spoken words, steps, hip-hop, signs, zines, rants and ways.

⁷ Ibid., 310.

⁸ Michele Landsberg, "A Teenager for a Generation to Look Up To," *The Toronto Star*, column. (17 October 1999) A2.

⁹ Landsberg, A2.

¹⁰ Greer, 3.

We talk, we yell...we even bite.¹¹

Few have recognized the feminist activism of the younger generation. Even fewer have acknowledged the existence of the third wave as a legitimate part of the women's movement. While not arising out of an easily-identifiable, mass-based, social activist movement, this new generation of women has been striving to redefine, reform and change the very nature of feminism itself and to articulate their own strategies for change.

The challenge of visibility – to be recognized and perceived as an integral part of the women's movement by their feminist predecessors – has been only one of the generation's many concerns. Third wave feminists grew up in an environment strikingly different from their predecessors. In many ways, they *are* "the daughters of feminism": they were the first generation of women able to benefit directly from the accomplishments of the women's movement, many of which were achieved before they were born. With feminism as their birthright, the members of the third wave grew up with a sense of entitlement. Accessible and reliable birth control, legalized abortions, and sex education were rights taken for granted, not battles to be fought. However, their realities have also been shaped by a multitude of new concerns: neo-conservatism, individualist ideology, AIDS, date rape drugs, technological advancements, increased commercialism, postfeminism, and the spread

¹¹ Boa d'Ruelle, "The Longest Days The Most Ignored The Cupboards Too High The Adults Too Narrow," *Fireweed*, "Revolution Girl Style," Issue 59/60 (Fall/Winter 1997) 120-122.

of pop culture influences.¹² The world has changed immensely in the last quarter-century, and the third wave has inherited a complex social environment, an increasingly complicated women's movement, and an unfinished sexual revolution.

Acknowledging that the accomplishments of the women's movement in the past thirty years have been astounding, the third wave has affirmed that many of the concerns facing women in the 1990s mirror those of the past. Reliable, accessible information on women's bodies remains unavailable and "the good girl/bad girl distinction still applies to some degree, as does the ethic of male conquest."¹³ Over the years, new rules have replaced the old, but myths surrounding women's bodies remain, homophobia persists, the intricate aspects of women's sexuality remain unanalyzed, and language has not sufficiently expanded to name and articulate the complexities of women's experiences. Perhaps the third wave's ardent interest in body politics has contributed to their invisibility. Charges by the second wave that younger women are "reinventing the wheel" have been rampant, and have led many to believe that there is "nothing new" about third wave approaches.¹⁴

The strategies adopted, attempted, and/or theorized by the third wave have not been naïve. One of the distinguishing features of feminism has been the synergy of the personal and the political, the connection between women's personal experience and the political context within which it is organized.¹⁵ In its early days, members of the women's liberation movement took great pride in "listening to each

¹² Foss, 142-148.

¹³ Giddens, 9-10.

¹⁴ Greer, 312.

woman's experience and respecting her decisions."¹⁶ Members of the third wave have recognized that, as Imelda Whelehan has suggested, "the legacy of radical feminist politics provides, perhaps, the strongest potential for both defense and counter-attack."¹⁷ Third wave feminists have asserted that a return to the tradition, of thoroughly blending personal experience with the political has become necessary again. Discussions of this sort have already been taking place in small groups,¹⁸ but there is both a need and a desire among feminists to thoroughly discuss concepts of oppression, power, and privilege both in society and within the movement itself.

Effective dialogue between and among feminism's diverse groups of women has never been a simple task. Intergenerational dialogue has proven to be an even tougher challenge. Successful discussions between feminism's generations must begin with an acceptance of discordant experiences and opinions, and must be based on mutual respect. Consequently, members of the second wave must recognize their privileged positions within the movement, and relinquish both space and power to their successors. Accordingly, third wave feminists need to transform the defiance of their foremothers into potent resistance to women's oppression in society. Power structures within the women's movement must be addressed, and women of all ages must learn how to effectively listen to and learn from each other's experiences and perspectives. Intergenerational dialogues must be conducted with a strong, shared objective. Threats to contemporary feminism have been aggressive

¹⁵ Geraldine Finn, *Limited Edition*, Introduction, (Halifax: Fernwood Publishing, 1993) 12.

¹⁶ Joanna Dean, "Mothers Are Women," in Finn (1993), 31.

¹⁷ Whelehan, 241.

and insidious. The public demonstration of a strong women's movement, one which supports the interests of women of all sexual orientations, ages, colours, ethnicities, abilities, education, and economic backgrounds, has become an important and immediate endeavor.

Janet Ellerby and Barbara Waxman have discussed the effectiveness of dialogue in terms of theoretical collaborations among feminist academics. Their insights are applicable to a variety of feminist conversations, and are particularly relevant to discussions between the waves. They argue that:

We need the more daring products of pioneering feminist teams. Collaborative feminism leads to new truths that can fire our collective imaginations and prepare us for a social arena where the communal values of feminism are in jeopardy and need our earnest defense.¹⁹

The ongoing feminist challenges to the status quo, which has oppressed and constrained women's identities and voices in recent years (particularly neo-conservatism and postfeminist ideology), have created the necessity for more radical, grassroots approaches. Dialogue stands as one such strategy. Many members of the third wave agree, and actively promote discussions between the waves, stating that the warnings, reflections, and experiences of "those who have already suffered with the dilemmas we face" will not only improve solidarity among feminists, but may also provide solid guidelines for the movement to follow in the future.²⁰

¹⁸ Rachel Lehmann-Haupt, "In Women's Groups, Back to 'Girl Talk,'" *New York Times* (11 April 1999).

¹⁹ Janet Ellerby and Barbara Waxman, "Collaboration + Feminism = New Voices, New Truths, New Discourses," *Women's Studies: An Interdisciplinary Journal*, Vol. 26, No. 2 (1997), 220.

²⁰ Drake, 101.

The decade preceding the millennium has experienced persistent calls for a re-evaluation of the last thirty years of feminism. At present, as Coppock, Haydon and Richter have noted, "feminism is learning to reconstitute itself as a social force that takes account of women's differences rooted in experiential identities."²¹ The time has come, strategically, for feminists to re-examine both the accomplishments and setbacks that have occurred over time. That will require in-depth investigations of the challenges facing contemporary feminism: those of privilege, participation and control. Stronger bonds of communication between and among feminism's waves will not only increase feminist solidarity, but may also assist in the eradication of feminist archetypes, dispel myths of the women's movement's demise, and create new strategies that will advance the promotion of women's rights into the twenty-first century.

²¹ Coppock, Haydon and Richter, 185.

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