

# Similarities and differences among second and third wave feminism



This Paper is centered on the discussion of similarities and/or differences between second wave and third wave feminists on the issues of gender relations and social issues. First wave feminism focused on the fact that there are various rights, which manifest inequality between men and women. First wave feminism focused more on political rights, which is why it was during the first wave when women's right to vote was furthered. First wave feminists crusaded against what was roughly quoted as the de jure inequalities, or inequalities imposed by the law on men and women.

Second wave feminism focused on the realization that there are various aspects other than the law, in which men and women are unequal - in which women are but subordinates to men. This is why feminists furthered the monolithic women experience, which manifested the difference of women from men, such experience also sought to further and promote women's needs. In the second wave feminism, feminists addressed the de facto inequalities. These de facto inequalities are those imposed by society on men and women. Third wave feminism deconstructed so to speak this monolithic women experience.

Third wave feminism instilled the point that women are not just their sexes or their genders - that among women, there are multiple facets of the women experience. As the second wave feminism focused on gender essentialism, such that it reduced all women to just one experience - the experience of the white women (Jhappan, 1996), third wave feminism reigned on post-gender essentialism. Third wave feminism asserts that while all women are women, there is no such single experience of all women.

Women have different experiences based on their race, culture, etc.

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Gender. Gender Relations - Inter-Gender and Intra-Gender Relations? Both second wave and third wave feminism regard genders as something that is different from sexuality, while the two are used interchangeably. Sexuality is something biological while gender is " a matter of power relations, a system that categorizes people as distinct groups, male and female" (MacKinnon, K. , 2003). Gender, ultimately is how society shapes an individual - gender already entails, the interplay of different factors and players in ones society and ones community.

Gender involves the shaping of a man or a woman into different societal roles while sexuality stops at just biological make-up. For second wave feminists, it is apparent that they give more weight to intra-gender relations as inter-gender relations entailed thriving or interacting with men in a society which designates men as superior and women as inferior. Thus, Chunn & Lacombe, quoting MacKinnon, C. : ...radical feminists assume that society is premised on relations of (male) domination and female subordination.

Likewise, they assume that the public/private distinction has been created by men in their own interests, especially that the male ideology of privacy serves to maintain men's dominance (p. 5). In addition, Chunn & Lacombe also stated that "[s]tate, law and other societal institutions are weapons wielded by men to maintain relations of dominance and subordination, they cannot be the keys to women liberation" (p. 6). Through these examples it can be said that because inter-gender relations further the societal imposed inequality between men and women, second wave feminists regarded the same as unimportant.

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On the other hand, it can also be argued that as second wave feminists are too pre-occupied in threshing out these issues of inequalities among men, they failed to realize the nature and complexity of intra-gender relations among women. Second wave feminists focused on an essentialist notion of gender or a monolithic women experience, when there really is not such thing as a monolithic gender experience. This gave rise to a form of oppression within the intra-gender relations of women. With the second wave, other women became the oppressors.

According to most critics, this was an inevitable consequence of setting equality with males as the primary goal of feminism (Jhappan, 1996, p. 25). Jhappan expounds: [i]n reality, the positions of power and privileges enjoyed by white men have only been made possible by racism and sexism, they require hierarchy, skewed power relations, inequality and the subjugation of the majority (white women and people of colour). It seems to me that white women's "equality" with white men would only be possible if the race hierarchy were kept substantially intact since the privileges that white men enjoy depend upon a racially satisfied social system (p. 5).

Simply, this means that with the goal of equality with men, women aimed for an equally oppressing position, where they are now the oppressors. In sum, second-wave feminism, while it gave more attention and importance to intra-gender relations, ironically, such attention and importance gave rise to oppression within the gender and among the gender. This is not the case in third wave feminism. In third wave feminism, women wanted to break out of the shell of a gender essentialist classification, which is why while they gave

importance to intra-gender relations, women made it sure that the multi-faceted experience of women are recognized.

The common oppression among women, always negates the lived experiences of actual women (Valenti, 2007, p. 228)” Thus, it has been said that: Certainly, there are very real differences between us of race, age, and sex. But it is not those differences between us that are separating us. It is rather our refusal to recognize those differences, and to examine the distortions which result from our misnaming them and giving them and their effects upon human behavior and expectation (Valenti, 2007, p. 228).

Within the intra-gender relations of women, there were other forms of oppression on account of race, culture, classism, homophobia, homosexuality, color which became evident. However, despite this, Valenti is quick to point out that there is no double oppression, there are just intersection of oppressions (p. 233). In addition to this, inter-gender relations were also given recognition with the realization that while women were subjected to stereotypes, men were also subjected to stereotypes; hence, in a way, men were also oppressed because they were almost always expected to be superior.

Valenti tells us: [t]he same social mores that tell young women that they should be good little girls are telling guys to be tough, to quash their feelings, and even to be violent... Men aren't born to rape and commit violence. Men aren't naturally "tougher" emotionally. These gendered expectations hurt men like they hurt us (p. 183). In support of this, Valenti citing Hugo Schwyzer: [w]e owe it to them to make it clear that we have

grown up with the same pernicious cultural influence that have taught us to objectify women.

They need to know what tools we ourselves have to change our behavior, and they need to know - in detail - how we live out egalitarian principles in our relationships with women. We can't preach gender justice; we have to live it out in our actions and we have to be willing to do so publicly, as role models (Valenti, 2007, p. 193). What Valenti tells us is that while women are constricted into certain stereotypes that they should be "chaste, married and popping out babies" (Valenti, 2007, p. 193), men are also constricted into stereotypes such that "they have to be strong, be 'soldiers'" (Valenti, 2007, p. 93).

This is why male children are raised in all aspects to be very masculine, in order that they will not become homos. Dobson was even quoted saying: God designed boys to be more aggressive, excitable and wild in their behavior. Despite the claims made by a generation ago, boys are different... To help a boy develop a healthy gender identity, make sure he receives appropriate affection, attention, and approval from his father (or, in the father's absence, a trustworthy male role model (Valenti, 2007, p. 194).

Valenti, in her book, opens our eyes to the reality that while women have been damaged by societal constrictions of sexuality, so were men: [m]en's lives are being damaged by sexism - we can't separate it out from how sexism affects women. Because everytime someone calls a guy a "pussy" or a "mangina," everytime someone tells a little boy not to "throw like a girl," the not-so-subtle message is that there is something inherently wrong with

being a woman. And that's a message I think we could all live without (Valenti, 2007, p. 96).

Given all of these, the conclusion is that third wave feminism accorded importance to both intra-gender and inter-gender relations. Has Gender Been Equality Achieved? MacKinnon will answer this question with the fact that as "[e]quality question is a question of the distribution of power. Gender is also a question of power, specifically male supremacy and female subordination" (MacKinnon, C. , 1987, p. 40). Difference between men and women is no longer a sexual equality issue as incidents happen exclusively to women. it is implicitly treated as a difference, the sex difference, when in fact it is the socially situated subjection of women.

The whole point of women's social relegation to inferiority as a gender is that for the most part these things aren't done to men. Men are not paid half of what women are paid for doing the same work on the basis of their equal difference. Everything they touch does not turn valueless because they touched it. (MacKinnon, C. , 1987, p. 41). Thus, for MacKinnon, gender equality has not really been achieved as women are the only ones who experience the most incidents of oppression and of inequality.

In effect, there is still inequality. On the notion of rape, Smart quotes the following individuals on marital rape trials, which exhibit the fact that there is still inequality between the genders: Quoting Judge Sutcliffe, it is well-known that women in particular and small boys are liable to be untruthful and invent stories (p. 35). Quoting Judge Wild, women who say no do not always

mean no. It is not just a question of saying no, it is a question of how she says it, how she shows and makes it clear.

If she doesn't want it she only has to keep her legs shut and she would not get it without force and there would be marks of force being used (p. 35). Quoting Judge Bertrand Richards, it is the height of imprudence for any girl to hitch-hike at night. That is plain, it isn't really worth stating, She is in the true sense asking for it (p. 35). Human experience has shown that girls and women do sometimes tell an entirely false story which is very easy to fabricate but extremely difficult to refute.

Such stories are fabricated for all sorts of reasons, which I need not now enumerate, and sometimes for no reason at all (p. 35). Thus, insofar as second-wave feminists are concerned, gender equality has not really been achieved yet; thus, feminism has not yet lost its useful life. On the assumption however that gender inequality is taboo, the fact that certain de jure and de facto differences between men and women were hurdled does not equate to the conclusion that feminism has exceeded its useful life.

It must be pointed out that the development of the feminist movement came in waves, this is just evident of the fact that for each and every wave and instance, feminism has put forth something useful for women. For each and every wave and instance, feminism has attempted to better the situation of women, and for the third wave, also the situation of men. In this wise, both second wave and third wave feminism are similar in the sense that over and above gender inequality, feminism achieved something greater.



While second wave feminism, attempted to equalize the differences between men and women as to the de facto classifications, the inequality within the gender that the second wave feminism brought forth gave birth to the third wave feminism. Simply put, without first wave feminism, second wave feminism would not have flourished; consequently, without second wave feminism, there would not be a third wave feminism; thus, breathing life into the adage, that we can only see as far as we are standing on the shoulder of giants.

On a deeper analysis, to say that feminism has lost its useful life because there is already gender equality is to say that feminism only moves within the confines of inter-gender equality. This is true for the second wave feminism; however, third wave feminism moved forward and further. Third wave feminism endeavored to achieve intra-gender recognition, not just equality, and inter-gender recognition of the plight of men as against the stereotypes imposed by society. In this wise, third wave feminism differs from second wave feminism in that third wave feminism no longer dwells on the fact of gender inequality.

Third wave feminism has moved over and above gender inequality, such that assuming that gender equality is achieved, feminism still is useful. There has been an observation that the law is sexist and male (Smart, 1995). However, through feminism, this transitioned to the fact that law is gendered - this means that we can "analyze law as a process of producing fixed gender identities rather than simply as the application of law to previously gendered subjects" (Smart, 1995, p. 191). Thus gender interacted with the law and not just accepted the law imposed on gender.

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Thus, just for this instance, feminism beyond gender equality still was put to good use. Strategies for Inter-Gender and Intra-Gender Relations. For second wave feminists, the strategy is merely to reconceptualize the law. Thus, “[s]ocialists and other feminists concerned with uneven effects of the law have concentrated primarily on how women in different social classes may experience law and legal institutions/structures very differently” (Chunn & Lacombe, 2000, p. 11). Second wave feminists do this by lobbying for legislative changes.

Third wave feminists addresses such strategies by recognizing the fact that legislation by others is not enough, or lobbying is not enough. Valenti tells us “ [w]omen are always ranting bout the fact that there are anti-women legislations, and yet women “ are not running for office and... voting at abysmal rates (Valenti, 2007, p. 213). Women have to be pro-active in asserting their rights - not only should they assert these rights but they should also try and do something about having these rights heard and recognized.

In Sweden, as there are more women in political office, the country has “ amazing policies for women: Because of employment laws, women’s salaries, are on average, 90 percent of men’s and the country has an amazing public childcare system” (Valenti, 2007, p. 225). Thus, “[e]lectoral politics is something we must be involved in” (Valenti, 2007, p. 226). Thus, third wave feminists move for change through participating in the legislation process not just lobbying for change.