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Three Waves of Feminism

From Suffragettes to Grrls

We now ask our readers to join us in an exploration of the history of feminism or, rather, feminisms: How have they evolved in time and space? How have they framed feminist communication scholarship in terms of what we see as a significant interplay between theory and politics? And how have they raised questions of gender, power, and communication?

We shall focus our journey on the modern feminist waves from the 19th to the 21st century and underscore continuities as well as disruptions. Our starting point is what most feminist scholars consider the “first wave.” First-wave feminism arose in the context of industrial society and liberal politics but is connected to both the liberal women’s rights movement and early socialist feminism in the late 19th and early 20th century in the United States and Europe. Concerned with access and equal opportunities for women, the first wave continued to influence feminism in both Western and Eastern societies throughout the 20th century. We then move on to the second wave of feminism, which emerged in the 1960s to 1970s in postwar Western welfare societies, when other “oppressed” groups such as Blacks and homosexuals were being defined and the New Left was on the rise. Second-wave feminism is closely linked to the radical voices of women’s empowerment and differential rights and, during the 1980s to 1990s, also to a crucial differentiation of second-wave feminism itself, initiated by women of color and third-world women. We end our discussion with the third feminist wave, from the mid-1990s onward, springing from the

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emergence of a new postcolonial and postsocialist world order, in the context of information society and neoliberal, global politics. Third-wave feminism manifests itself in “grrl” rhetoric, which seeks to overcome the theoretical question of equity or difference and the political question of evolution or revolution, while it challenges the notion of “universal womanhood” and embraces ambiguity, diversity, and multiplicity in transversal theory and politics.

We could start much earlier. In fact, we could go as far back as antiquity and the renowned *hetaera* of Athens, or we could go even further back to prehistoric times in Mesopotamia and the Mediterranean regions and discuss goddess religions and matriarchy. Or we could examine the European Middle Ages and the mystical rhetoric of holy women like Hildegard von Bingen (1098–1179). We could also highlight the Renaissance tradition of learned women such as Leonora d’Este (1474–1539) or Enlightenment *beaux esprits* such as Madame de Rambouillet (1588–1665) or Germaine de Staël (1766–1817). Another obvious start would be the struggles of bourgeois European women for education and civic rights in the wake of the French Revolution. These were eloquently phrased by Olympe de Gouges (1748–1793), who drafted a *Declaration of the Rights of Women* (1791) analogous to *The Declaration of the Rights of Man* (1789).

The First Feminist Wave: Votes for Women

Germany has established “Equal, universal, secret direct franchise,” the senate has denied equal universal suffrage to America. Which is more of a Democracy, Germany or America?

— Banner carried during picketing of the White House, October 23, 1918

Imagine: During World War I, members of the National Women’s Party (NWP) protest outside the White House with confrontational banners accusing the government of undemocratic practices. Germany had already granted women suffrage, but the United States—the proponent of freedom and democracy for all—had yet to enfranchise half of its citizens. The banner created an outrage, the police received orders to arrest the picketers, and onlookers destroyed the banner (Campbell, 1989). Comparing Germany to the United States was treachery. However, the picketers did receive some sympathy—after all, well-dressed, well-educated, White, middle-class women were going to jail. This was no way to treat ladies!

The demonstrators knew what they were doing: Dressed in their Sunday best, they offered no resistance to the police and thus both appalled and appealed to the public. They personified White, middle-class femininity, while engaging in very unfeminine and less-than-bourgeois practices. The action was inspired by radical agitator Alice Paul (1885–1977), who introduced militant tactics to the NWP: parades, marches, picketing (mainly the White House) as well as watch fires to burn President Wilson’s speeches (Campbell, 1989). Alice Paul’s tactics were confrontational but also clever, and they were a thorn in the side of President Wilson, who much preferred the less radical tactics of the National American Women’s Suffrage Association (NAWSA).

Parliaments have stopped laughing at woman suffrage, and politicians have begun to dodge! It is the inevitable premonition of coming victory.

— Carrie Chapman Catt (1859–1947)

The first wave of feminism in the United States was characterized by diverse forms of intervention that have continued to inspire later feminist movements. But despite the activist talents of Alice Paul, the organizational skills of Carrie Chapman Catt (1859–1947), president of NAWSA, and the splendid oratory of Anna Howard Shaw (1847–1919), also a former president of NAWSA, it was a long struggle before women won the vote in 1920 (Campbell, 1989). The struggle went as far back as the Seneca Falls Convention in New York in 1848, during which more than 300 men and women assembled for the nation’s first women’s rights convention. The Seneca Falls Declaration was outlined by Elizabeth Cady Stanton (1815–1902), claiming the natural equity of women and outlining the political strategy of equal access and opportunity. This declaration gave rise to the suffrage movement (see Stanton, 1948).

I always feel the movement is a sort of mosaic. Each of us puts in one little stone, and then you get a great mosaic at the end.

— Alice Paul (1885–1977)

In the early stages, the first wave of feminism in the United States was interwoven with other reform movements, such as abolition and temperance, and initially closely involved women of the working classes. However,

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it was also supported by Black women abolitionists, such as Maria Stewart (1803–1879), Sojourner Truth (1797–1883), and Frances E. W. Harper (1825–1911), who agitated for the rights of women of color. Elizabeth Cady Stanton and several others from the more radical parts of the women’s rights movement appeared as delegates to the National Labor Union Convention as early as 1868, before any successful attempts to organize female labor (Firestone, 1968).

Dat man ober dar say dat women needs to be helped into carriages and lifted ober ditches, and to hab de best place everywhar. Nobody eber helps me into carriages, or ober mud-puddles, or gibbs me any best place! And ain’t I a woman! Look at me! Look at my arm! I have ploughed, and planted and gathered into barns, and no man could head me! And ain’t I a woman? I have borne thirteen children, and seem ‘em mos’ all sold into slavery, and when I cried out my mother’s grief, none but Jesus heard me! And ain’t I a woman?

— Sojourner Truth (1797–1883)

When women’s rights activists gradually realized that disenfranchisement severely hampered reformatory efforts, they became determined to rectify this obvious injustice. Still, for women to gain the vote was a highly controversial issue. Even well-meaning skeptics feared that it would mean a setback for men of color, who were also at that time campaigning for enfranchisement, not to mention southerners’ fears that the thousands of illiterate women of color would also claim their rights. Thus, although women of color continued to participate and representatives such as Ida B. Wells (1862–1931) and Mary Church Terrell (1868–1954) also strove to show how the linkage of sexism and racism functioned as the main means of White male dominance, the first wave of feminism consisted largely of White, middle-class, well-educated women (Campbell, 1989). This tendency was only reinforced by the counterstrikes of both the abolitionist movement and the working unions to also keep women involved in these movements. Furthermore, the Civil War in the United States and, later on, both World War I and World War II meant a severe backlash for women’s rights, as the focus then became demands of national unity and patriotism.

Resolved, that the women of this nation in 1876, have greater cause for discontent, rebellion, and revolution than the men of 1776.

— Susan B. Anthony (1820–1906)

Suffragists confronted stereotypes of women and, in particular, claims of proper female behavior and talk. First, they engaged in public persuasion, which in those days was considered most unwomanly. Campbell (1989) put it this way: “No ‘true woman’ could be a public persuader” (pp. 9–10). Second, their very activity challenged the “cult of domesticity,” which in those days dictated that a true woman’s place was in the home, meeting the needs of husband and children. Women were further required to be modest and to wield only indirect influence, and certainly not engage in public activities. So, when a woman spoke in public, she was, by definition, displaying masculine behaviors. She was even ignoring her biological weaknesses—a smaller brain and a more fragile physique—which she was supposed to protect in order to ensure her reproductive abilities. Such claims led some women’s rights activists to argue that women should indeed gain the right to vote from an argument of expediency (Campbell, 1999). This argument was based on the claim that women and men are, in fact, fundamentally different and that women have a natural disposition toward maternity and domesticity. However, the argument ran that it would therefore be advantageous to society to enfranchise women, so they would then enrich politics with their “innately” female concerns. Furthermore, if women had the vote, the argument ran, they would perform their roles as mothers and housewives even better. On the other hand, we find another well-used argument: justice (Campbell, 1989). Following this argument, women and men are, at least in legal terms, equal in all respects; therefore, to deny women the vote was to deny them full citizenship (Campbell, 1989, p. 14).

I would have girls regard themselves not as adjectives but as nouns.

— Elizabeth Cady Stanton (1815–1902)

Some first-wave feminists pursued the argument of women’s innate moral superiority, thus embracing what might be called “difference first-wave feminism.” This argument was part of a sophisticated rhetoric of equity, developed simultaneously in Europe and in the United States, which shared the modern, Western political framework of enlightenment and liberalism, anchored in universalism. From this point of view, patriarchy was understood as a fiasco that was both nonrational and nonprofitable and thereby illegitimate, but nevertheless reinforced women’s marginal societal status and domination and made women a cultural emblem of deficiency. Politically, this view led to the claim that women and men should be treated as equals and that women should not only be given access to the same resources and positions as men but also be

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acknowledged for their contributions and competencies. This concept is often called “equal-opportunities feminism” or “equity feminism,” and it is characterized by the lack of distinction between sex and gender. Even though biological differences were understood to form the basis of social gender roles, they were not considered a threat to the ideal of human equity, and biological differences were therefore not accepted as theoretically or politically valid reasons for discrimination.

No race can afford to neglect the enlightenment of its mothers.

— Frances E. W. Harper (1825–1911)

One of the earliest manifestations of liberal first-wave feminism in Europe, Mary Wollstonecraft’s *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792), was written in the wake of the French Revolution and is still read as a seminal text. Virginia Woolf’s *A Room of One’s Own* (1929) and Simone de Beauvoir’s *The Second Sex* (1949) are central to the canon as well, even though both authors were also laying the groundwork for radical second-wave feminism. Woolf introduced the notion of female bisexuality and a unique woman’s voice and writing, Beauvoir the notion of women’s radical otherness or, rather, the cognitive and social process of “othering” women as the second sex in patriarchal societies. We would say that Beauvoir thereby produced an authoritative definition of patriarchy.

The woman who strengthens her body and exercises her mind will, by managing her family and practising various virtues, become the friend, and not the humble dependent of her husband.

— Mary Wollstonecraft (1759–1797)

Parallel to this strand of liberal first-wave feminism, a distinct socialist/Marxist feminism developed in workers’ unions in the United States, in reformist social-democratic parties in Europe, and during the rise of communism in the former Soviet Union. It was initiated by, among others, Rosa Luxemburg (1870–1919) in Germany, Alexandra Kollontai (1873–1952) in Russia, and anarchist Emma Goldman (1869–1940) in the United States. Liberal and socialist/Marxist feminism shared a basic belief in equity and equal opportunities for women and men, but the latter focused particularly on working-class women and their involvement in class struggle and socialist

revolution. Socialist feminists such as Rosa Luxemburg and, in particular, Alexandra Kollontai and Emma Goldman, paved the way for second-wave feminism, fighting both politically and in their own private lives for women's right to abortion, divorce, and nonlegislative partnership—and against sexism both in bourgeois society and within the socialist movements.

We will be victorious if we have not forgotten how to learn.

— Rosa Luxemburg (1871–1919)

Both liberal and socialist/Marxist feminism continued to develop and maintain strong voices in 20th-century feminism, though they were soon challenged by other types of feminism, as we are going to see below. The concept of equal opportunity framed a particular type of equity research, which arose outside the academy in the first half of the 20th century, and gradually provided the basis for a growing field of research in “the women issue.” Following the scientific paradigm of structuralism as a set of ways and means of knowing, equity research initially took the basic format of muted group theory (see Chapter 2). In Chapter 3, we further relate this particular body of work to the methodology of conversation analysis, and in Chapter 4, we explore its manifestation as the dominance and deficit approach in terms of communication and present you with an example of conversation analytic communication work.

As a woman, I have no country. As a woman, I want no country. As a woman, my country is my world.

— Virginia Woolf (1882–1941)

The Second Feminist Wave: “The Personal Is Political”

The revlon lady tells her to put on a mask. “be a whole new person” and “get a whole new life.”

— Protest sign carried during the 1969 Miss America Pageant

The term *second-wave feminism* refers mostly to the radical feminism of the women's liberation movement of the late 1960s and early 1970s. We start our presentation of second-wave feminism with the first harbinger of a new

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feminism and the most publicized event in the United States: the protests associated with the Miss America Pageants in 1968 and 1969 (Freeman, 1975). Inspired by the tactics of the more activist parts of liberal feminism, radical second-wave feminists also used performance (e.g., underground or guerilla theater) to shed light on what was now termed “women’s oppression.”

There are very few jobs that actually require a penis or vagina. All other jobs should be open to everybody.

— Florynce Kennedy (1916–2000)

The Redstockings, the New York Radical Feminists, and other significant feminist groups joined the 1969 protest to show how women in pageant competitions were paraded like cattle, highlighting the underlying assumption that the way women look is more important than what they do, what they think, or even whether they think at all (Freeman, 1975). Marching down the Atlantic City boardwalk and close to the event itself, feminists staged several types of theatrical activism: crowning a sheep Miss America and throwing “oppressive” gender artifacts, such as bras, girdles, false eyelashes, high heels, and makeup, into a trash can in front of reporters (Freeman, 1975). Carrying posters reading, “Cattle Parades Are Degrading to Human Beings,” “Boring Job: Woman Wanted,” and “Low Pay: Woman Wanted,” feminists made their message loud and clear: Women were victims of a patriarchal, commercialized, oppressive beauty culture (Freeman, 1975). It was a perfectly staged media event. A small group of women bought tickets to the pageant show and smuggled in a banner that read “WOMEN’S LIBERATION,” while shouting “Freedom for Women” and “No More Miss America,” hereby exposing the public to an early second-wave feminist agenda (Freeman, 1969).

A woman reading Playboy feels a little like a Jew reading a Nazi manual.

— Gloria Steinem (1934–)

Radical second-wave feminism cannot, however, be discussed separately from other movements of the 1960s and 1970s. In fact, it grew out of leftist movements in postwar Western societies, among them the student protests, the anti-Vietnam War movement, the lesbian and gay movements, and, in the United States, the civil rights and Black power movements. These movements criticized “capitalism” and “imperialism” and focused on the notion

and interests of “oppressed” groups: the working classes, Blacks, and in principle, also women and homosexuals. In the New Left, however, women found themselves reduced to servicing the revolution, cut off from real influence and thus, once again, exposed to sexism. This was now understood as a separate oppression experienced by women in addition to racism, “classicism,” and was later renamed “heterosexism.” As a consequence, they formed women-only “rap” groups or consciousness-raising groups, through which they sought to empower women both collectively and individually using techniques of sharing and contesting, explained in “The BITCH Manifesto” (Freeman, 1968) and the first second-wave publication, *Sisterhood is Powerful*, edited by Robin Morgan in 1970. This type of activity and rhetoric was typical to the second-wave movement and in particular to the Redstockings, who created their name by combining *bluestockings*, a pejorative term for educated and otherwise strong-minded women in the 18th and 19th centuries, with *red*, for social revolution. The Redstockings was one of the influential but short-lived radical feminist groups of the 1960 to 1970s and produced many of the expressions that have become household words in the United States: “Sisterhood is powerful,” “consciousness raising,” “The personal is political,” “the politics of housework,” the “pro-woman line,” and so on. Key to this branch of feminism was a strong belief that women could collectively empower one other.

Women are not inherently passive or peaceful. We're not inherently anything but human.

— Robin Morgan (1941–)

Radical second-wave feminism was theoretically based on a combination of neo-Marxism and psychoanalysis, outlined by feminist scholars such as Juliet Mitchell in *The Subjection of Women* (1970) and Shulamith Firestone in *The Dialectic of Sex: The Case for Feminist Revolution* (1970). They claimed that patriarchy is inherent to bourgeois society and that sexual difference is more fundamental than class and race differences. They even claimed that women—due to their primary social attachment to the family and reproduction—constitute a class and economy of their own, based on the unpaid work in the home, the productivity of motherhood, and their function as a workforce reserve. The Freudian theory of women’s “natural” dependency and sexual frigidity was at first denounced, then later rearticulated as a mimicry of the unholy alliance between capitalism and patriarchy that designates sexism as the particular character of women’s oppression

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(Mitchell, 1970). At the core of this new movement was another significant book, *Sexual Politics*, by Kate Millett (1969), in which she insisted on women's right to their own bodies and a sexuality of their "own"—a sexuality that is disconnected from the obligations of marriage and motherhood. Yet other radical feminists, such as the lesbian author Adrienne Rich and the African American lesbian author Audre Lorde (1934–1992), used poetry, speeches, and writing to link heterosexuality and women's oppression. Both great rhetoricians, they claimed that heterosexuality is a compulsory institution designed to perpetuate the social power of men across class and race. In works such as *On Lies, Secrets, and Silence* (Rich, 1980) and *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches* (Lorde, 1984), they explored how sexism, racism, and classicism work together by means of the heterosexual imperative. Thus, in the early phase, radical second-wave feminisms were characterized by a claim for sisterhood and solidarity, despite differences among women and a simultaneous investment in the slogans "Woman's struggle is class struggle" and "The personal is political," directing the feminist agenda to attempt to combine social, sexual, and personal struggles and to see them as inextricably linked.

Life on the planet is born of woman.

— Adrienne Rich (1929–)

Womanist is to feminist as purple is to lavender.

— Alice Walker (1944–)

Women's liberation grew out of the New Left and provided alliances with socialist/Marxist feminisms in areas such as the criticism of the dual workload for women working outside as well as inside the home, the demand of equal pay for equal work, and a breakdown of the gendered division of the educational system and the labor market. Sheila Rowbotham explored these issues in her influential book *Women, Resistance, and Revolution* (1972), and Angela Y. Davis expanded on the intersections of gender, race, and class in *Women, Race, and Class* (1981). In addressing what they saw as "the woman question," they concluded that the emancipation of women would occur only with the destruction of capitalism and the rise of socialism, when women would be freed from dependency on men and the family and be involved in "productive" labor. In areas such as the criticism of "sex roles" and "the beauty myth," however, women's liberation was closer to liberal feminism, which still had a strong hold.

Men will often admit other women are oppressed but not you.

— Sheila Rowbotham (1943–)

Liberal feminists in all Western countries were inspired by Betty Friedan's landmark book, *The Feminine Mystique* (1963). Along with Rowbotham and Davis but from quite a different point of view, liberal feminists maintained that the discontent experienced by many middle-class women in post-war Western societies was due to their lack of social power and political influence. The solution they advocated was not necessarily paid work outside the home; indeed, one of their demands was payment for housewives—a kind of citizen's income—along with representation in public institutions, and so on. Zillah Eisenstein's work *The Radical Future of Liberal Feminism* (1981) can be said to anticipate the continuity of liberal feminism from first wave, during the second wave, and on to today's neoliberal feminism. Typical liberal feminist concerns during the second wave, however, were documenting sexism in private as well as public life and delivering a criticism of gendered patterns of socialization. In the United States, for example, the National Organization for Women (NOW) documented sexism in children's books, and parents' different responses to girls and boys were seen as examples of how deeply sexism is embedded in conventional thought and practice.

The feminine mystique has succeeded in burying millions of American women alive.

— Betty Friedan (1921–)

Whereas both liberal and socialist/Marxist feminists worked to access and influence the institutions of society, radical feminists were critical of these institutions and skeptical of, if not outright opposed to, the inclusion of more women in what they considered profit-driven, patriarchal institutions. The spiritual and ecofeminist parts of the movement, represented, for instance, by Mary Daly in *Gyn/Ecology* (1978) and Starhawk in *The Spiral Dance: A Rebirth of the Ancient Religion of the Great Goddess* (1979), turned to the development of separate enterprises and eventually of woman-only corporations and zones. After a few decades on the margins of feminism, this particular feminist perspective has been revived today in numerous ways: from sustainable development and simple living to corporate feminism and separatist women-only spaces, such as “SAPPHO” on the Internet.

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We've begun to raise our daughters more like our sons . . . but few have the courage to raise our sons more like our daughters.

— Gloria Steinem (1934–)

The conflict between integration and separation signaled a basic shift from an equity approach to a difference approach. During the 1980s, this new framework grew into “difference second-wave feminism,” outlined on a theoretical level by Nancy Hartsock (1983) in her paradigmatic article “The Feminist Standpoint” and a range of subsequent works. “Standpoint feminism” articulated a specifically feminist theory and practice that expanded the criticism of capitalism and patriarchy with a more complex analysis of post-war welfare societies and their consequences for women on different levels and in different situations, as we shall return to in Chapters 2 and 5. Nancy Chodorow and Carol Gilligan turned to a more woman-friendly psychoanalytic theory in order to highlight women’s productive capacities in terms of motherhood and caretaking, in works such as *The Reproduction of Mothering* (Chodorow, 1978) and *In a Different Voice* (Gilligan, 1982). These competencies, neglected by both liberal and socialist feminists and derided by early radical feminists, were now reevaluated and understood as sources of knowledge, know-how, and empowerment. This particular version of difference feminism again led to the thesis of the dual spheres, gender as culture, and communication and the “genderlects” (see Chapter 5).

Courage is the key to the revelatory power of the feminist revolution.

— Mary Daly (1928–)

The need to address the differences among women simultaneously promoted the theory of different standpoints and the divergences between them. As a consequence, difference feminism gradually grew into what is now often referred to as “identity politics.” Identity second-wave feminism was marked by a growing criticism from Black, working-class, and lesbian feminists, outlined by, among others, bell hooks in *Ain't I A Woman? Black Woman and Feminism* (1981) and Trinh T. Minh-ha in *Woman, Native, Other: Writing Postcoloniality and Feminism* (1989). In the context of the complex power relations of a postcolonial but still imperial and capitalist world, they questioned what they saw as a predominantly White, middle-class, and heterosexual feminist agenda and raised the issue of a differentiated-identity politics,

based on the contingent and diversified but no less decisive intersections of gender, class, race/ethnicity, and sexuality. Identity feminism, in turn, inspired a new interest in women's lives and voices, which was at once more empirical and historical, and more mythical and spiritual. This has been known as "gyno-criticism," a method first developed by Elaine Showalter in *A Literature of Their Own* (1977), or as "womanism," in an African American context introduced by the author Alice Walker *In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens: Womanist Prose* (1983). The method signaled, on one hand, a search for authenticity and continuity in women's cultures and, on the other, an interest in understanding differences among women as constitutive. The method was further developed by Patricia Hill Collins, who argued in *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment* (1990) that it is necessary to expand the analysis from merely describing the similarities and differences that distinguish the different systems of oppression according to gender, class, and race—to focusing on how they are interlocked. Assuming that each system needs the others in order to function, this discussion stimulated a distinct theoretical stance, which we shall return to in Chapters 2 and 5.

Black women have not historically stood in the pulpit, but that doesn't undermine the fact that they built the churches and maintain the pulpits.

— Maya Angelou (1928–)

In the United States, Black feminists voiced their concerns in organizations such as Black Women Organized for Action (BWOA) and the National Black Feminist Organization (NBFO), which both worked to bring gender and race into the national consciousness and addressed issues of poverty, health, and welfare as described by Valerie Smith in *Not Just Race, Not Just Gender: Black Feminist Readings* (1998). However, Black feminism also tended to diversify into different standpoints and identities. Women of color and third-world women, like Trinh T. Minh-ha, now spoke of themselves as the "other Others" and "inappropriated others." Gayatri Spivak's *In Other Worlds: Essays in Cultural Politics* (1987) further criticized Western feminism for speaking naively on behalf of third-world women. She elaborated on the notion of "strategic essentialism" and raised the question of the difficulty associated with translation between different groups of women, their vocabulary, and voice.

In the European context, identity feminism took an apparently different direction with what is now known as *l'écriture féminine*, articulated by

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authors Hélène Cixous, Luce Irigaray, and Julia Kristeva and introduced to the United States by editors Elaine Marks and Isabelle de Courtivron in *New French Feminisms* (1981). French feminists explored Western universalism and its paradoxical articulation through dualisms such as mind/body, man/woman, and White/Black and their hierarchical ordering, in which one element is not only *different from* but also *less than* the other. Developing a thesis of the “phallogocentrism” of Western thinking, they argued that it constitutes the very foundation of (Western) language(s) through a binary logic that makes the phallus the master sign and the father the origin of symbolic law. Consequently, French feminists pled for a deconstructive feminine writing and pursued the idea of the revolutionary potential of women’s bodies as the productive site of multiple desires, a plenitude of *jouissance*, and thereby another semiotic logic. In her dissertation *Spéculum de l’autre femme* (1974/1985a), Irigaray took the criticism of phallogocentrism a step further and maintained that Western thinking in fact posits “man” as the “one and only” (both mind and body/matter) and “woman” not as the opposite and negative (body/matter), but rather entirely outside of civilization/language. Her point was therefore that the project for women/feminists is not and cannot be to identify with difference (such as body/matter), and she warned against the tendency to highlight an alternate desire/logic.

Irigaray’s line of thought provides us with the intellectual tools necessary to grasp the dilemmas of difference feminism and identity politics. With Irigaray, we can claim that difference feminism perpetuates the dilemmas of Western universalism and its paradoxical attributions to “particularism” in terms of the implied other, which guarantees the “one and only.” Gay rights activists, for example, paradoxically perpetuate the notion of heterosexuality as the norm when they attempt to secure more rights for homosexuals. Radically stated, identity politics unintentionally supports a hegemonic concept of woman (as Western, White, heterosexual, etc.). The dilemma is exacerbated, moreover, because difference feminism claims that sexual difference is universal, though in its particular manifestation as gender also historical and social and therefore both contextual and changeable. The distinction between sex and gender, emphasized by second-wave feminists, provides a sociological or cultural explanation, which at first seems to solve the dilemma between sameness and difference but does not entirely answer questions related to the sexed body, as well as differences among women. The difference argument has also tended to oscillate between positive difference as inherent in women (be it biological or sociological) and negative difference as relative (be it biological or sociological) to subordination. This line of the argument crisscrosses the sex-gender distinction and is obviously neither intellectually nor politically valid. Irigaray helps us open a door to a different

kind of thought and action, in which a continued process of diversification and multiplication takes over from the frozen pairing of equity (sameness) and difference.

Second-wave feminism is not one, but many. As expressed by feminist communication scholar Julia Wood (1994), the question may not be whether you are a feminist, but which kind of feminist you are (p. 106). This question is multiplied by the emergence of third-wave feminism. But before we turn to emergent feminisms, let us conclude that second-wave feminisms have been highly theoretical and consequently have had strong affiliations with the academy. Starting in the 1970s, second-wave feminisms have generated an explosion of research and teaching on women's issues, which has now grown into a diverse disciplinary field of women's, gender, or feminist studies. While first- and second-wave academic feminisms are embedded in structuralism (Chapter 2), the concept of difference and identity feminism is rooted in standpoint theory (Chapter 2) and the methodology of critical discourse analysis (Chapter 3). Difference and identity feminism has influenced communication scholarship through the concepts of cultural feminism and gendered communication styles or "genderlects," which are explored further in Chapter 5.

The Third Feminist Wave: Transversal Politics

Cyber Grrls Get On-Line!

— "Internet Tour," by Karen McNaughton (1997)

Lipstick feminism, girlie feminism, riot grrl feminism, cybergrrl feminism, transfeminism, or just grrl feminism—feminism is alive and kicking. Born with the privileges that first- and second-wave feminists fought for, third-wave feminists generally see themselves as capable, strong, and assertive social agents: "The Third Wave is buoyed by the confidence of having more opportunities and less sexism" (Baumgardner & Richards, 2000, p. 83). Young feminists now reclaim the term "girl" in a bid to attract another generation, while engaging in a new, more self-assertive—even aggressive—but also more playful and less pompous kind of feminism. They declare, in the words of Karen McNaughton (1997), "And yes that's G.r.r.l.s which is, in our case, cyber-lingo for Great-Girls. Grrl is also a young at heart thing and not limited to the under 18s."

Karen McNaughton is only one of many who have been empowered by the new grrl rhetoric, which originated among girls-only punk bands such as

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Bikini Kill and Brat Mobile in the United States in the early 1990s. In their manifesto-like recording "Revolution Girl-Style Now" (1990), Bikini Kill celebrated the self-reliance and acting out of prepubescent girls and mixed the feminist strategy of empowerment with the avant-garde or punk strategy of D.I.Y.: "Do It Yourself." This message was soon absorbed by a growing number of "riot grrl" groups all over the United States and Europe and further spread by "fanzines" and net-based "e-zines." Some riot grrls made the new information technologies the primary point of departure for their activism and as cybergrrls or Netgrrls introduced them to other girls and women in books such as *The Cyberpunk Handbook* (1995), *Friendly Grrls Guide to the Internet-Introduction* (1996), and *Cybergrrl! A Woman's Guide to the World Wide Web* (1998). The movement has simultaneously criticized sexist language, appropriated derogatory terms for girls and women, and invented new self-celebrating words and forms of communication. As such, third-wave feminists have followed in the footprints of groups like Queer Nation and Niggers With Attitude by deploying a kind of linguistic jiu-jitsu against their enemies. Instead of condemning the stereotypes used against them, they exaggerate them, beginning with the very word *girl* (Chideya, Rossi, & Hannah, 1992).

For girls to pick up guitars and scream their heads off in a totally oppressive, fucked up, male dominated culture is to seize power . . . we recognize this as a political act.

— Tobi Vail, Bikini Kill

Third-wave feminists are motivated by the need to develop a feminist theory and politics that honor contradictory experiences and deconstruct categorical thinking. In *To Be Real: Telling the Truth and Changing the Face of Feminism* (1995), editor Rebecca Walker described the difficulty that younger feminists experience when forced to think in categories, which divide people into "Us" and "Them," or when forced to inhabit particular identities as women or feminists (p. xxxiii). Walker claimed that this is not because they lack knowledge of feminist history or because of the media's horrific one-sided portrayal of feminism. Quite to the contrary, younger feminists honor the work of earlier feminists while criticizing earlier feminisms, and they strive to bridge contradictions that they experience in their own lives. They embrace ambiguity rather than certainty, engage in multiple positions, and practice a strategy of inclusion and exploration (p. xxxiii). Meanwhile, they propose a different politics, one that challenges notions

of universal womanhood and articulates ways in which groups of women confront complex intersections of gender, sexuality, race, class, and age-related concerns. One of the many contributors in *To Be Real*, Eisa Davis, has called for “organic laughter” and “organized confusion” that will turn all the old “isms” into sitcoms, reminding us how far feminism has come (Walker, 1995, p. 138).

I am not a pretty girl, that's not what I do.

— Ani DiFranco, musician

Third-wave feminism is also inspired by and bound to a generation of the new global world order characterized by the fall of communism, new threats of religious and ethnic fundamentalism, and the dual risks and promises of new info- and biotechnologies. A common American term for third-wave feminism is “grrl feminism,” and in Europe it is known as “new feminism.” This new “new” feminism is characterized by local, national, and transnational activism, in areas such as violence against women, trafficking, body surgery, self-mutilation, and the overall “pornofication” of the media. While concerned with new threats to women’s rights in the wake of the new global world order, it criticizes earlier feminist waves for presenting universal answers or definitions of womanhood and for developing their particular interests into somewhat static identity politics.

I live by my own standards. I am my own judge and jury. I refuse to look/do/say whatever it is I'm supposed to. I may burn bridges, but I don't want to go back there anyway.

— Bilyana Vujick, DIY Feminism

In itself diverse and chaotic, third-wave feminism is consequently not one, but many. The common denominator is the will to redefine feminism by bringing together an interest in traditional and even stereotypically feminine issues, while remaining critical of both narratives of true femaleness, of victimization and liberation. They flaunt their femininity and seek to reclaim formerly derogatory labels such as “slut” and “bitch,” while stubbornly venturing into male-dominated spaces with third-wave confidence to claim positions of power: We—the new feminists—embrace power, said new feminist Natasha Walter in *The New Feminism* (1998). Third-wave feminists want to

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avoid stepping into mutually oppressive static categories, and they call for acceptance of a chaotic world, while simultaneously embracing ambiguity and forming new alliances. Thus, third-wave feminisms are defined not by common theoretical and political standpoint(s), but rather by the use of performance, mimicry, and subversion as rhetorical strategies.

I won't stop talking. I'm a grrrl you have no control over. There is not a gag big enough to handle this mouth.

— Kathleen Hannah, *Bikini Kill*

Gender theorist Judith Butler signaled this paradigmatic feminist shift in her books *Gender Trouble* (1990) and *Bodies That Matter* (1993). She fueled new emergent movements such as queer and transgender politics, which take an interest in the intersections of gender and sexuality and helped articulate “performance third-wave feminism” as a theoretical framework of the politics of transgression. Central to this perspective is the understanding of gender as a discursive practice that is both a hegemonic, social matrix and a “performative gesture” with the power to disturb the chain of social repetition and open up new realities. Focus rests on the sustained tension between structure and agency, spelled out as a tension between performance and performativity, in order to overcome the split between society and subject and to situate the possibilities and means of agency and change. The possibilities for change are found in the “fissures” of deferral and displacement that destabilize claims not only of identity but also of truth and “the real” (Butler, 1990). Of immense importance to feminism, however, is that the approach further destabilizes the distinction between the social and the material, discourse and body, and, not least, sex and gender. These conceptual pairs are now seen as inextricably linked discursive practices, anchored in the heterosexual matrix, which is now being challenged (Butler, 1993; to be developed in Chapters 2 and 6).

Another significant perspective that has contributed to third-wave feminism is Donna Haraway’s (1987/1991) “cyborg,” which has also inspired the development of cyberfeminism. What makes this perspective unique is Haraway’s appropriation of technology and her posthuman acknowledgment of the interaction between humans and nonhumans, which blurs the distinctions between humans, animals, and machines. Moreover, like Butler, Haraway does not operate with an essential division between society and subject, structure and agency, materiality and sociality, or flesh and soul.

In keeping with poststructuralist thought (Chapter 2), she has underscored the arbitrariness of such classifications and the continuous flow between supposedly “natural” categories, locations, and positions. The potential for feminism, in Haraway’s thinking, is great and is still being explored by a range of feminist thinkers, to whom we shall return to in Chapters 2 and 6.

Yr a big grrrl now; you’ve got NO REASON NOT TO FIGHT!!!

— Bikini Kill

Third-wave feminism is tied up with the effects of globalization and the complex redistribution of power, which challenge feminist theory and politics. It also mirrors the diversification of women’s interests and perspectives and the breakdown of master stories of oppression and liberation. For example, postcolonial, third-wave feminism is concerned with establishing a new critical global perspective and creating alliances between Black, diasporic, and subaltern feminisms, whereas queer theory and politics create a platform for what has now split into the lesbian, gay, bi-, and transsexual and transgender movements. Queer and transgender feminists attack what they see as the crux of the problem: heteronormativity. They call for recognition of queers: not only gays and lesbians but also drag queens, drag kings, transsexuals, masculine women, and feminine men (Halberstam, 1998). Emi Koyama (2003) summarized some of these concerns in “The Transfeminist Manifesto.” Here, the primary principles of transfeminism are defined as the right (a) to define one’s own identity and to expect society to respect it and (b) to make decisions regarding one’s own body (Koyama, 2003, pp. 245–247). Transfeminists believe that individuals should be given the freedom to construct their own gender identities as they see fit and that neither the medical establishment nor cultural institutions at large should intervene. Finally, they resist essentialist notions of identity in particular.

Do women have to be naked to get into the Met. Museum? Less than 5% of the artists in the Modern Art sections are women, but 85% of the nudes are female.

— Guerrilla Girls

According to the postsocialist scholar Nancy Fraser (1997), the challenges to third-wave feminism are great. She has argued that in order to avoid the

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pitfalls of identity politics, it is necessary to introduce a concept of justice that simultaneously acknowledges and counters the claims of difference. Thus, Fraser has suggested that claims of difference should be treated partly as a question of recognition within the context of civic society and partly as a matter of redistribution within the framework of the state and the public sphere. Her aim is to reframe universalism in order to promote a new combination of, on one hand, local (singular and situated) social claims, and, on the other, the will and ability to expose universalism to a “global” democracy. She thus has delivered an alternative to the “old” universalism, which sanctioned the particularism inherent in identity politics, claiming that in the new democracy, everyone must acknowledge the particularity of the position from which they speak, instead of claiming rights as absolute and given.

It's possible to have a push-up bra and a brain at the same time.

— Pinkfloor

An interesting and important contribution to third-wave feminist thinking is the notion of “transversal politics.” Nira Yuval-Davis, the author of *Gender and Nation* (1997), who is herself a British Jew, launched this notion, which is based on the possibility of dialogue between women across national, ethnic, and religious boundaries. Theoretically, her work has been inspired by Gayatri Spivak’s theory of strategic essentialism and Patricia Hill Collins’s theory of the partiality of standpoints and of situated and unfinished knowledge. Yuval-Davis has also been inspired by the politics of feminist activist groups such as the London-based Women Against Fundamentalism (WAF), which includes Christians, Jews, Muslims, Sikhs, Hindus, and others, and the Bologna feminists, who work with women from groups in conflict, such as Serbs and Croats or Palestinian and Israeli Jewish women. What defines transversal politics is not only the fact that differences in nationality, ethnicity, or religion—and hence in agenda—are recognized but also that a commitment to listen and participate in a dialogue is required. Yuval-Davis has qualified these methods as “pivotal,” because they encourage participants to participate in a process of “rooting” and “shifting” and thus to explore different positions, engage in different negotiations, and eventually join different alliances.

The idea is that each participant in the dialogue brings with her a rooting in her own membership and identity, but at the same time tries to shift in order to engage in exchange with women who have different membership and identity. (Yuval-Davis, 1997, pp. 130–131)

Participants are encouraged to position themselves as women with particular national, ethnic, or religious roots, while also shifting to other ways of thinking, being, and practicing in order to realize the partiality of their own positions and to identify possible common stands and interests.

Aligning herself with Bolognese feminists, Yuval-Davis (1997) called this form of dialogue “transversalism,” as opposed to both universalism and particularism, which are inherent in liberal and radical feminism, and also to the political naïveté of the rainbow coalitions of the 1980s or the “Million Man March” to Washington, D.C., in the 1990s. It is crucial here that the boundaries of the groupings are determined not by a notion of essential difference, which leads to a particular standpoint, but by a political reality of partiality, which provides for diverse and provisional alliances (Yuval-Davis, 1997, p. 129).

When it's being used as an insult, “bitch” is most often hurled at women who speak their minds, who have opinions and don't shy away from expressing them. If being an outspoken woman means being a bitch, we'll take that as a compliment, thanks.

— Bitch Magazine

In combination, third-wave feminism constitutes a significant move in both theory and politics toward the “performance turn” we introduced earlier. The performance turn marks a move away from thinking and acting in terms of systems, structures, fixed power relations, and thereby also “suppression”—toward highlighting the complexities, contingencies, and challenges of power and the diverse means and goals of agency. Embedded in the scientific paradigm shift from structuralism to poststructuralism, the performance turn is connected to a broader intellectual transformation. In this context, we shall introduce you to performance, cyborg, and transfeminist theory (Chapter 2), to the methodology of poststructuralist and transversal discourse analysis (Chapter 3), and to examples of performance (Chapter 6) and transversity perspectives (Chapter 7). After this description, it is time for us to sum up and present you with a model of different feminisms and our own situatedness.

Our Own Situatedness: Transversity

Each of the feminisms discussed in this chapter has played a crucial role in 20th- and 21st-century feminist theory and politics, and together they constitute a source of inspiration for future scenarios. We have described the

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basic exchange between feminism and Western philosophy that runs through these feminisms, and now we will sketch a cognitive map to be used for navigation in the chapters to come. It is both possible and useful to position them along the lines of “x,” Equity and Difference, and “y,” Universalism and Particularism.

As already stated, we do not wish to suggest that third-wave feminism returns to the first position, thus completing the circular movement around the quadrant. Rather, third-wave feminisms break the system, positioning themselves for a transversal theory and politics of diversity and multiplicity, which we simply call “transversity.” In this position, we see a potential for breaking up the “cannibalistic” reasoning of Western thought, in which

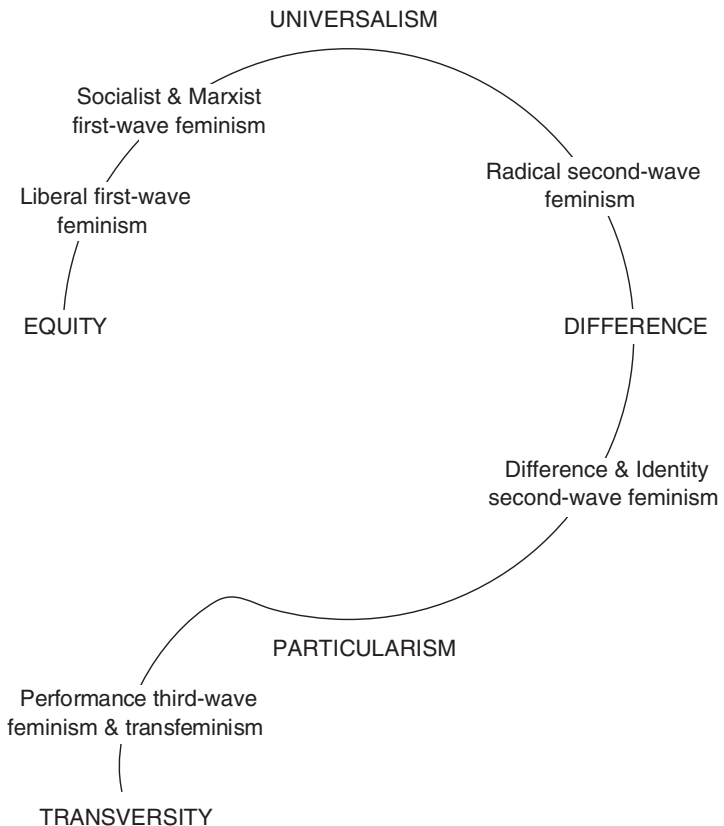


Figure 1.1 Feminist Positions: From Equity to Transversity

difference is a prerequisite of equity, particularism of universalism, and every possible stand is thus “consumed” by the “one and only.”

In continuation hereof, it would be appropriate to make our own positions clear: We are in awe of both first- and second-wave feminism. At the same time, we share an enthusiasm for the feminist concept of transversal politics that we call “transversity,” and we are inspired by third-wave feminists’ attempts to juggle complexity and ambiguity. To us, the concept of transversity presents feminists with a theoretical and practical means by which we, as differently situated women, can simultaneously acknowledge our diverse positions and work across national, ethnic, racial, and gender lines. Transversity commands respect for the diversity of both women and men, while simultaneously presenting us with a sophisticated theoretical framework within which to understand both the fragility of the ways gender is inscribed on bodies and the ways in which power is expressed, negotiated, and ever present in gendered practices. We are inspired by young women’s expressions of feminism, which, on one hand, seem to repeat gender stereotypes and, on the other, mock them through mimicry and subversion. We share the desire to reclaim laughter in order to unfold, acknowledge, and appreciate differences and remind us that we are both different and similar. We believe that there is no position outside the social or outside power from which to approach questions of gender and communication. We all continuously take part in powerful constructions of gender when we perform in social life, and we cannot avoid the pitfalls of equity and difference. This logic is often broken with contrastive arguments of equality and difference, mixing the oppositional terms of equity/difference and equality/inequality. The consequence of such circular argumentation is that if you want equality, you cannot have difference. In this way, you cannot have a valid discussion of how the double pairings relate to each other. It demands constant effort to confront the powerful discourses that force us to prioritize the aims and means of our struggle. This struggle is hampered only by invalid argumentation, such as the above-mentioned pairing of equality and difference.

Finally, we wish to emphasize the fact that we are ourselves situated in Scandinavia, at a Danish university department in the Humanities, in the field of cultural and communication studies. One of us has spent more than 10 years in the United States; the other has only occasionally visited the United States and different parts of Europe. It is our hope that although we have chosen our references and examples from an Anglo-American context, our status as outsiders can provide an English-speaking public with new perspectives on gender and communication. Thus, we will direct attention to our own situatedness only where and when it seems productive.

