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**The Rights of Women, Anarchy, Women's Lib, Grrrl Power, Cyberfeminism and  
more Anarchy**

Christina Delzingaro

Presented to SPHEX Club February 21, 2019

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Last week marked another setback in a movement that has been in flux since at least 1792. Just as we are seeing the largest number of women in state and federal legislatures, the Equal Rights Amendment failed to be ratified in Virginia. This failure (which might not be a failure after all, since it is still meandering the halls of the General Assembly this week and may well find its way into and out of some committee at some point), and the arguments made by Victoria Cobb and other opponents, got me thinking about feminism – and how the concept has both changed and stayed the same over the past 227 years.

A logical successor to the Nineteen Amendment, which granted women the right to vote in 1920, the Equal Rights Amendment was introduced in 1923. It would prohibit all gender-based discrimination at the federal level. It took until 1972 for the amendment to pass Congress (by overwhelming margins), and it was quickly ratified by 35 of the 38 states needed. By the late 1970s, however, after *Roe v Wade*, the Religious Right had successfully mounted opposition to the amendment based largely on opposition to abortion and women in the military. Five states rescinded their ratification, and the amendment officially died in 1982. Only to be brought back to life recently by the #MeToo movement and a new, fourth wave of feminism.

Victoria Cobb, president of the conservative Family Foundation of Virginia, argues that the ERA would result in public money funding abortions and the deterioration of the family. Other opponents, mostly middle and upper-class white women, oppose the ERA because they see no inequality in their own lives and the lives of those around them. Therefore, inequality does not exist. Therefore, there is no need for a constitutional amendment to prohibit it. Others argue that, as Petula Dvorak of the *Washington Post* recently wrote, “the unique societal, familial and legal protections currently afforded women would be undone by the ERA. These divisions in class and philosophy in the role of women have marked the women’s rights movement and feminism since the beginnings of what we now call the waves of feminism.”<sup>1</sup>

These are the same arguments that have been used against the ERA since the 1920’s, and feminism since its beginnings in the 1790s. And they are the same divisions that have existed within feminism itself. Constance Grady notes that “The history of feminism is filled with radicals and progressives and liberals and centrists. It’s filled with splinter movements and

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<sup>1</sup> Dvorak, Petula. (2019, January 31). This woman just derailed the Equal Rights Amendment yet again. *Washington Post*. Retrieved from [www.washingtonpost.com/local](http://www.washingtonpost.com/local).

reactionary counter-movements.”<sup>2</sup> There really has never been a single, united feminist movement. The primary challenge to understanding feminism may be that the ideology and philosophy informing it has shifted over time, creating separate waves of feminism. And not every wave has a distinct timeframe. As Tom Head has written, “There have been multiple feminisms representing the efforts of women to live to their full humanity in a world shaped by and for men.”<sup>3</sup> Until recently, however, feminism has tended to correspond with the goals of upper class heterosexual white women who have traditionally been given and still tend to have disproportionate power to spread their message. At times, feminists have battled amongst themselves as much as they have battled against male privilege, misogyny, repressive social norms and violence against women.

Let’s talk about “waves” of feminism. Why that metaphor? The term came to be in 1968 when Martha Weinman Lear wrote an article for the New York Times, entitled “The Second Feminist Wave.” In the article she wrote, “Feminism, which one might have supposed as dead as a Polish question, is again an issue. Proponents call it the Second Feminist Wave, the first having ebbed after the glorious victory of suffrage and disappeared, finally into the sandbar of Togetherness.”<sup>4</sup>

Constance Grady notes that the wave metaphor caught on and became a useful way of linking the women’s movement of the 1960s and 1970s to the women’s movement of the suffragettes, and to suggest that “the women’s libbers weren’t a bizarre historical aberration, as their detractors sneered, but a new chapter in a grand history of a movement fighting together for their rights.”<sup>5</sup> Over time, the wave metaphor became a way to describe and distinguish between different eras and generations of feminism.

The roots of feminism start in the late 1700’s with the Enlightenment in Europe. The Enlightenment movement focused on reason and equality for all -- eventually inspiring the American and French Revolutions. Our own Declaration of Independence holds certain truths to be self-evident. And one of those truths is that all men are created equal. The key word, of course, being “men”.

In 1792 English writer Mary Wollstonecraft wrote *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, pushing for giving women access to the same educational opportunities as men. She posited

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<sup>2</sup> Grady, Constance. (2018, March 20). The waves of feminism, and why people keep fighting over them, explained. Vox.com. Retrieved from [www.vox.com/2018/3/20](http://www.vox.com/2018/3/20).

<sup>3</sup> Head, Tom. (2018, December 22). Feminism in the United States. Thought.co. Retrieved from [www.thoughtco.com/feminism-in-the-united-states-721310](http://www.thoughtco.com/feminism-in-the-united-states-721310)

<sup>4</sup> Weiman, Martha Lear. (1968, March 10), The Second Feminist Wave. New York Times. Retrieved from [www.nytimes.com/1968/03/10/archives/the-second-feminist-wave.html](http://www.nytimes.com/1968/03/10/archives/the-second-feminist-wave.html)

<sup>5</sup> Grady, Constance. (2018, March 20). The waves of feminism, and why people keep fighting over them, explained. Vox.com. Retrieved from [www.vox.com/2018/3/20](http://www.vox.com/2018/3/20).

that women should be treated with respect and dignity as individuals, and not because they are some man's wife, daughter or mother. She takes down the idea of women being "helpless adornments" of a household. And argues that the failure to provide women with the intellectual outlet of education has created "gentle domestic brutes"<sup>6</sup> – frustrated women trapped in their posh homes whose only outlet is perpetrating emotional violence against their children and servants.

Wollstonecraft's work was widely read in Europe and the United States, and resulted in the first wave, not of feminism, but of feminist philosophy. The first wave of the feminist movement is usually tied to the Seneca Falls Convention of July 1848. The *Declaration of Sentiments*, authored by Elizabeth Cady Stanton and other abolitionists and feminist philosophers of the time, asserted 12 fundamental rights for women, including the right to vote. The first wave of feminism was about women's rights – the right to vote (women's suffrage) and the right to divorce.

Even though the idea of the Seneca Falls Convention hatched during an abolitionists' meeting, and abolitionists such as Sojourner Truth were founders of the movement, one of the key questions of first wave feminism was, according to Tom Head, whether it was acceptable to promote black civil rights over women's rights. At the time, it seemed that few considered the position of black women, whose basic rights were compromised both because they were women and because they were black.<sup>7</sup>

This demonstrated one of the first splinters in the feminist first wave – which should come first, black civil rights or women's rights? The debate over the Fifteenth Amendment, which outlined who could vote in the US, eventually led the abolitionists and suffragettes to diverge. The National American Woman Suffrage Association was founded in 1890. They did not want what they termed "inferior Black men" to "rule over" white women. This was not a small splinter group but represented the larger opinion of the suffragettes at the time. Susan B. Anthony said, "I will cut off this right arm of mine before I will ever work or demand the ballot for the Negro and not the woman."<sup>8</sup>

The white men in control at the time were only too happy to watch the abolitionists and feminists squabble in the corner, while they remained in control. The National Association of Colored Women was formed in 1896 to bring together black civil rights and feminism to secure

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<sup>6</sup> Wollstonecraft, Mary. (1792). *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*. Retrieved from [www.marxists.org/reference/archive](http://www.marxists.org/reference/archive)

<sup>7</sup> Head, Tom. (2018, December 22). *Feminism in the United States*. Thought.co. Retrieved from [www.thoughtco.com/feminism-in-the-united-states-721310](http://www.thoughtco.com/feminism-in-the-united-states-721310)

<sup>8</sup> Sherber, Victoria. (2017, December 16). *Feminism 101: What are the waves of feminism?* Fem Magazine. Retrieved from <https://femmagazine.com/feminism-101-what-are-the-waves-of-feminism/>

rights for women of color, but in the end the first wave of feminism became identified primarily as white and upper class.

One of my favorite troublemakers, Emma Goldman, did not support the first wave. But she didn't criticize the concept of female emancipation. An anarchist, Goldman had little patience for those fighting for institutional acknowledgement of worth and rights. In her essay "Woman Suffrage" she said, "In her blind devotion woman does not see what people of intellect perceived fifty years ago: that suffrage is an evil, that it has only helped to enslave people, that it has but closed their eyes that they may not see how craftily they were made to submit."<sup>9</sup> She thought that activists should be focused on radical revolutionary goals, not asking for greater privileges within an inherently unjust system. She viewed suffrage as a distraction to a higher goal.

While she didn't support the first wave, Goldman did articulate one of the key tenets of the second wave of feminism – the women's double shift – the housework (unpaid, invisible, under-recognized) that women do at home AFTER their long work day. Goldman noted that this work is assumed to be natural and specific to women and is only escaped from in the case of women who can afford it, by exploiting another woman.<sup>10</sup>

And in 1911 in "The Tragedy of the Emancipation of Women" she expressed one of the cornerstones of present-day queer anarchist thought, a subculture within the fourth feminist wave -- "the right to vote, or equal civil rights are all to the good but true emancipation begins neither at the polls or in the courts. It begins in the soul of women." She goes on to say, "Women now face the need for emancipation from emancipation, if she really wants to be free. What has our emancipation achieved? Universal suffrage in some regions. Has this cleansed our political life, as many well-meaning advocates predicted? Certainly not."<sup>11</sup>

For the next several decades, women participated in marches and protests across the country for women's suffrage. The Woman Suffrage Parade of 1913 was the most significant march for suffrage. On the day before President Woodrow Wilson's inauguration – which women were not allowed to attend – thousands of suffragettes marched down Pennsylvania Avenue in Washington DC.

The first wave of feminism really took off about 1920. During World War I, women took over many jobs traditionally held by men, who were drafted into military service. Women's renewed

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<sup>9</sup> Vee, Kelly. (2016, March 8). Emma Goldman: Woman Suffrage and Feminist Idols (Revisited). The Circle Molinari. Retrieved from <https://thecirclemolinari.com/2016/03/08/emma-goldman-woman-suffrage-and-feminist-idols-revisited/>

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Goldman, Emma. *Anarchism and Other Essays*. Second Revised Edition. New York & London: Mother Earth Publishing Association, 1911. pp. 219-231.

sense of value resulted in a resurgence of the idea of suffrage. Eventually, the first wave of feminism culminated in the ratification of the Nineteenth Amendment in 1920, securing women's right to vote. The Nineteenth Amendment was the grand achievement of the first 70 years of the gender equality movement. Although individual groups continued to work – for reproductive freedom (Margaret Sanger founded what would become Planned Parenthood in 1916), for equality in education and employment, and for real voting rights for black women – the movement began to further splinter. It no longer had a unified goal with strong cultural momentum behind it, and it would not find another until the second wave began to take off in the 1960s.

Just as World War I catapulted the first wave of feminism, World War II laid the ground work for the second wave of feminism and “women's liberation” in the 1960s and 1970s. Rosie the Riveter showed that women could work just as hard and effectively as men. The second wave was dedicated to social and economic justice. While the first wave was about political rights, the second wave was about equality in all aspects of society, including the household.

In 1961, President Kennedy's Presidential Commission on the Status of Women found that American women had far fewer rights or economic opportunities than men. They were paid less for the same jobs, sexually harassed in the workplace, and they could be fired for becoming pregnant. Domestic violence was largely unaddressed, divorce was still hard to get, and in many states women couldn't even get a credit card or own property without her husband's approval.<sup>12</sup>

In 1963, Betty Friedan wrote *The Feminine Mystique* which took on the “problem that has no name” -- what Tom Head calls “the cultural gender roles, workforce regulations, government discrimination and everyday sexism that left women subjugated at home, at church, in the workforce, in educational institutions and even in the eyes of their government.”<sup>13</sup>

*The Feminine Mystique* was a runaway best seller, selling 3 million copies in three years. It didn't contain much in the way of new thought – women in Europe and the US had been talking about sexism for years – but she was able to articulate the issue in a way that resonated, and to deliver that message to millions of (mostly) middle-class, white women. Friedan brought to the suburbs the idea of “systemic sexism that taught women that their place was in the home and that if they were unhappy as housewives, it was only because they were broken and perverse.”<sup>14</sup> Freidan argued that the fault didn't lie with women, but rather with the world that

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<sup>12</sup> Sherber, Victoria. (2017, December 16). Feminism 101: What are the waves of feminism? Fem Magazine. Retrieved from <https://femmamagazine.com/feminism-101-what-are-the-waves-of-feminism/>

<sup>13</sup> Head, Tom. (2018, December 22). Feminism in the United States. Thought.co. Retrieved from [www.thoughtco.com/feminism-in-the-united-states-721310](http://www.thoughtco.com/feminism-in-the-united-states-721310)

<sup>14</sup> Grady, Constance. (2018, March 20). The waves of feminism, and why people keep fighting over them, explained. Vox.com. Retrieved from [www.vox.com/2018/3/20](http://www.vox.com/2018/3/20)

refused to allow them to exercise their creative and intellectual faculties. Like Wollenstonecraft, Freidan believed that women were right to be unhappy. A difference, though, is that Freidan gave women permission to not just be unhappy but be angry. And, Constance Grady writes, “once those 3 million readers realized that they were angry, feminism once again had cultural momentum behind it. It had a unifying goal, too: not just political equality, which the first-wavers had fought for, but social equality.”<sup>15</sup>

Friedan and other famous feminists such as Gloria Steinem pointed out how many double standards exist in society, and they worked to eliminate them. Second wave feminism focused on civil rights, body positivity, abortion rights, and sexual freedom. The movement worked to highlight the similarities between discrimination against women and racism.

Friedan co-founded the National Organization for Women, NOW. NOW is the first and still the largest major women’s liberation organization. Tom Head points out, however, that there were early problems with NOW, most notably Friedan’s opposition to lesbian inclusion, which she referred to in 1969 as “the lavender menace.”<sup>16</sup>

Again, we see the women’s movement splitting into two groups – but rather than the dividing line being race as in the first wave, the division was between equal rights feminists and radical feminists. Equal rights feminists wanted equality in the workplace and home, while radical feminists were dedicated to a fundamental shift in patriarchal society. Equal rights feminists pushed for anti-discrimination policies at work, and the radical feminists sought to deconstruct gender roles and start a literal feminist revolution. Equal rights feminists were primarily older, white women. Radical feminists were more diverse and included more women of color.

So, did radical feminists really burn their bras? No. There was no mass burning of bras. There was, however, a protest at the 1968 Miss America pageant. Women were protesting the pageant’s demeaning, patriarchal treatment of women. As part of the protests, women threw away items that they considered to be symbols of women’s objectification, including bras, girdles, nylons, and copies of Playboy.<sup>17</sup> But no fires – that was the draft dodgers.

One of the highlights of the Women’s Liberation Movement was the candidacy of Shirley Chisholm for president in 1972. While the first woman to run for president on a major-party ticket was not Chisholm but Margaret Chase Smith in 1964, Chisholm’s candidacy went much further. Chisholm’s campaign slogan was “Unbought and Unbossed” and she pushed what

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> Head, Tom. (2018, December 22). Feminism in the United States. Thought.co. Retrieved from [www.thoughtco.com/feminism-in-the-united-states-721310](http://www.thoughtco.com/feminism-in-the-united-states-721310)

<sup>17</sup> Jones, Johnson Lewis. (2018, February 4). The myth of the bra burning feminists of the 1960s. Thought.co. Retrieved from [www.thoughtco.com/bra-burning-feminists-3529832](http://www.thoughtco.com/bra-burning-feminists-3529832)

many considered a radical vision of a more just society. As we know, Chisholm was not successful, and we did not get an African American female president in 1972.

Overall, however, the second wave was successful – leading to the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, the Equal Pay Act, the increase in divorce rights, the passage of Title IX, and changes in attitudes about the role of women in society.

The 1980s were a bad time for hair and fashion, but also for the feminist movement in the US. The Equal Rights Amendment died in 1982. The Supreme Court was not supportive of many important women’s rights issues. And, as Tom Head notes, “an aging generation of predominantly white, upper class activists largely failed to address issues impacting women of color and low-income women.”<sup>18</sup> And many in the movement were focused on a single issue that was divisive within and without the movement. Abortion.

Many in the Women’s Liberation movement pushed for reproductive rights for women as one of many rights. Reproductive rights, the right to make decisions about one’s own body, includes the right to decide for yourself whether to terminate your pregnancy. With *Roe v Wade* in 1973, social conservatives began to perceive the entire feminist movement as being concerned primarily with abortion. Abortion rights continue to be an area of philosophical difference within the feminist movement, with some firmly on the side of the right to choose, and others firmly supporting the right to life for all fetuses, which includes female fetuses.

In 1992, NOW organized the first March for Women’s Lives, in support of *Roe v Wade*. Over 750,000 people marched on Washington DC, just before the oral arguments to the Supreme Court in *Casey v Planned Parenthood*. At the time, many thought that the Supreme Court would strike down *Roe*. Which didn’t happen.

Constance Grady notes that over time, second-wave feminists became viewed by younger women as “humorless, hairy-legged shrews who are only about petty stuff like bras, instead of *real* problems, probably to distract themselves from the loneliness of their lives, since no man would even want a feminist.”<sup>19</sup> In a 1982 article by Susan Bolotin for the *New York Times* magazine, a young woman was quoted as saying “I don’t think of myself as a feminist. Not for me, but for the guy next door that would mean that I’m a lesbian and I hate men.”<sup>20</sup> Another woman was quoted as saying, “Look around and you’ll see some happy women, and then you’ll

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<sup>18</sup> Head, Tom. (2018, December 22). Feminism in the United States. Thought.co. Retrieved from [www.thoughtco.com/feminism-in-the-united-states-721310](http://www.thoughtco.com/feminism-in-the-united-states-721310)

<sup>19</sup> Grady, Constance. (2018, March 20). The waves of feminism, and why people keep fighting over them, explained. Vox.com. Retrieved from [www.vox.com/2018/3/20](http://www.vox.com/2018/3/20)

<sup>20</sup> Bolotin, Susan. (1982, October 17.) Voices from the post-feminist generation. *New York Times*. Retrieved from [www.nytimes.com/1982/10/17/magazine/voices-from-the-post-feminist-generation.html](http://www.nytimes.com/1982/10/17/magazine/voices-from-the-post-feminist-generation.html)

see all these bitter, bitter women. The unhappy women are all feminists. You'll find every few happy, enthusiastic, relaxed people who are ardent supporters of feminism."<sup>21</sup>

Constance Grady notes "That image of feminists as angry and man-hating and lonely" would be held up as true as the second wave began to lose its momentum, and it continues to color the way we talk about feminism today.<sup>22</sup> It would also become foundational to the way the third wave would position itself as it emerged.

Rebecca Walker is a feminist author – she is Southern, African-American, Jewish and bisexual. She is also Alice Walker's daughter. In 1993 she coined the phrase "third wave feminism" to describe what she saw as a new generation of young feminists, like herself, working to create a more inclusive and comprehensive feminist movement.<sup>23</sup>

Third wave feminism stopped trying to normalize gender constructs, sexuality, and identity policies. Anita Hill's testimony in the Clarence Thomas Supreme Court nomination process, and the lack of any result from it, helped fuel the third wave. Third wave is Pussy Riot, punk rock as a form of feminism, and Grrrl Power. Third wave issues included environmentalism, body positivity, fat positivity, sex positivity, and LGBTQ rights (including marriage and workplace protections).<sup>24</sup>

In 1991, Anita Hill testified that Supreme Court nominee Clarence Thomas had sexually harassed her at work. Hill's testimony sparked many more sexual harassment complaints. And as Constance Grady notes, "Congress's decision to send Thomas to the Supreme Court despite Hill's testimony led to a national conversation about the overrepresentation of men in national leadership roles."<sup>25</sup> 1992 saw 24 women winning seats in the House of Representatives and three more won seats in the Senate.

For young women watching Anita Hill on television, it would become an awakening. "I am not a post feminism feminist," said Rebecca Walker after watching Thomas get sworn into the Supreme Court. "I am the Third Wave."<sup>26</sup>

Third wave feminism aimed to be intersectional. Intersectionality examines the interconnected structure of society that includes race, class, gender, sexual orientation, and other defining

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> Grady, Constance. (2018, March 20). The waves of feminism, and why people keep fighting over them, explained. Vox.com. Retrieved from [www.vox.com/2018/3/20](http://www.vox.com/2018/3/20)

<sup>23</sup> Head, Tom. (2018, December 22). Feminism in the United States. Thought.co. Retrieved from [www.thoughtco.com/feminism-in-the-united-states-721310](http://www.thoughtco.com/feminism-in-the-united-states-721310)

<sup>24</sup> Fortman, Jules. (undated). A timeline of the feminist movement. Viva.media. Retrieved February 1, 2019 from <https://viva.media/a-timeline-of-the-feminist-movement>

<sup>25</sup> Grady, Constance. (2018, March 20). The waves of feminism, and why people keep fighting over them, explained. Vox.com. Retrieved from [www.vox.com/2018/3/20](http://www.vox.com/2018/3/20)

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

characteristics. It critiques the different experiences of intersecting identities like being a Black woman versus being a white woman, acknowledging that Black women face a more complicated form of oppression than white women.<sup>27</sup> Intersectional feminism the key to the third wave because it acknowledges the limited world views of previous, white, middle class and heteronormative feminist waves. Transgender rights were included in the big tent of third wave feminism.

The third wave also included “Grrrl feminism”, empowering women to define their own beauty rather than be objects of men’s desire. There is a certain “in your faceness” around the third wave – highlighting that women can be domineering and powerful rather than shy and passive. Third wave feminism paved the way for the vagina cakes, vagina dresses and all things vagina that we see today (for better or worse).

Bikini Kill lead singer Kathleen Hanna wrote in *The Riot Grrrl Manifesto* in 1991, “Because doing/reading/seeing/hearing cool things that validate and challenge us can help us gain the strength and sense of community that we need in order to figure out how BS like racism, able-bodieism, ageism, speciesism, classism, thinism, sexism, anti-Semitism and heterosexism figures in our own lives. Because we are angry at a society that tells us Girl = Dumb, Girl = Bad, Girl = Weak.”<sup>28</sup>

The second March for Women’s Lives was organized in 2004. As the first major demonstration in the era of third wave feminism, it was led by a broader coalition that included LGBT rights groups, groups focusing on the needs of immigrant women, and women of color. Over 1.4 million people participated in the second March for Women’s Lives, demonstrating what was hoped would be the power of a new, more comprehensive women’s movement.

But third-wave feminism never gained the momentum of the first and second waves. There is no single piece of legislation of major social change that is attributed to the third wave. No Nineteen Amendment like the first wave. No Equal Pay Act like the second wave. Third-wave feminism had a different way of talking and thinking than the second wave, and according to Constance Grady, “it also lacked the strong cultural momentum that was behind the grand achievements of the second wave.” Even the Year of Women that brought so many women Congress, “turned out to be a blip, as the number of women entering national politics plateaued rapidly after 1992.”<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Sherber, Victoria. (2017, December 16). Feminism 101: What are the waves of feminism? Fem Magazine. Retrieved from <https://femmagazine.com/feminism-101-what-are-the-waves-of-feminism/>

<sup>28</sup> Hanna, Kathleen. *The Riot Grrrl Manifesto*. 1991. Bikini Kill fanzine issue #2. Retrieved from [https://dangerousminds.net/comments/kathleen\\_hanna\\_the\\_riot\\_grrrl\\_manifesto](https://dangerousminds.net/comments/kathleen_hanna_the_riot_grrrl_manifesto)

<sup>29</sup> Grady, Constance. (2018, March 20). The waves of feminism, and why people keep fighting over them, explained. Vox.com. Retrieved from [www.vox.com/2018/3/20](http://www.vox.com/2018/3/20)

The third wave was criticized for being too academic and too angry. And no one likes an angry academic. While the ebbing of the second wave was due to younger women feeling that second-wavers were angry, hairy, lesbians, the ebbing of the third wave was due to younger women feeling that third-wavers were angry, academics cut off from the reality of typical women. A study cited in the Guardian in 2003 found that the women's movement was "associated with militants and bra-burning."<sup>30</sup>

Older women, like myself, found little in common with Grrrl power and Doc Martens. Having struggled to be called *women* rather than *grrrls* (and finding it hard to even say *grrrls* without smirking), many of my generation felt distanced from the third wave.

Those who did not find the movement strident, saw it as passé. As Facebook CEO Sheryl Sandberg wrote in 2013 in *Leaning In* "I headed into college believing that the feminists of the 60s and 70s had done the hard work of achieving equality for my generation... My friends and I truly, if naively, believed that the world did not need feminists anymore."<sup>31</sup>

And then came Donald Trump. Some see the Woman's March in 2017 as the starting point of the newest wave of feminism, the fourth wave. Held on the day after the inauguration of President Donald Trump, women marched to demand equal rights and an end to sexual violence. The Women's March was organized in reaction to what many perceived to be the hyper-masculinity of Trump's election campaign, in which he boasted of being able to shoot someone and get away with it, may have threatened to jail women (or was it their doctors?) who had abortions, and was caught on tape talking about grabbing women's private parts.

The fourth wave shares many similarities with the third wave, and some claim that it is not a new wave at all – just a further refinement of the third wave. Fourth wave is fueled by social media, with members of the movement sometimes referred to as "cyber-feminists." It pushes feminist critique in public discourse through public spaces and social media. Sexual assault awareness marches and slutwalks are examples of how the fourth wave moves feminism into the public spotlight through the hands of non-academics.<sup>32</sup>

The fourth wave utilizes the internet and social media, creating a "call out culture" where feminists concentrate on "micropolitics" expressed through Twitter, blogs, etc. An example of this is the #MeToo campaign, which uses internet activism to spread awareness of a key feminist issue – violence against women. Although some criticize the fourth wave for being

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<sup>30</sup> Abrahams, Jessica. (2017, August 14). Everything you wanted to know about fourth wave feminism – but were afraid to ask. Prospect Magazine. Retrieved from [www.prospectmagazine.co.uk/magazine/everything-wanted-know-fourth-wave-feminism](http://www.prospectmagazine.co.uk/magazine/everything-wanted-know-fourth-wave-feminism)

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> Sherber, Victoria. (2017, December 16). Feminism 101: What are the waves of feminism? Fem Magazine. Retrieved from <https://femmamagazine.com/feminism-101-what-are-the-waves-of-feminism/>

cliquish and name calling, and some of its leaders for being Mean Girls, one of the tenets of the movement is to call out individuals and society for implicit bias – a very subtle concept. Implicit bias is the idea that residual but unconscious stereotypes about women affect how they are perceived and treated, making it all but impossible for them to compete on a level playing field with men. Suggesting to people that they are discriminating against women without realizing it (and suggesting to women that they may be discriminated against without knowing it) can be difficult to build a movement around.

In 2014, Laura Bates published *Everyday Sexism*, compiling the entries she received as part of her graduate work, in which she established a website and asked women to submit individual instances of sexism that they had experienced. Bates says, “I had hoped to gather 100 women’s stories, if I was lucky. Instead it spread like wildfire. A video-shop cashier, a midwife and a marketing consultant suffered indistinguishable experiences of sexual assault by senior male colleagues. A schoolgirl and a widow reported being pressured and pestered for sex. A reverend in the Church of England was repeatedly asked if there was a man available to perform the wedding or funeral service... A DJ explained how constant harassment and groping had made her dread the job she once loved.”<sup>33</sup> The amount of sexual aggression experienced by women and girls on a daily basis was also revealed, as thousands of reports came in about being groped and assaulted on public transportation, on the streets, at work and at home – leading some feminists to point to an endemic “rape culture”.

Striving to undo the reputation of Women’s Liberation as being only for and about white, upper-class, heterosexual females – the fourth wave goes out of its way to be inclusive. (Which can be read by non-feminists as provocative). Anti-slut shaming, body positive, sex positive, the fourth wave seeks to improve interactions between all individuals, not just the dyad of male/female, and elevate all persons. As Jennifer Simpkins has written it holds up the belief that “slut-shaming is wrong, that we need to learn about people who identify as women and accept them, and the need to educate any future children I might have about sexual consent and therefore help towards ending rape culture.”<sup>34</sup>

While previous waves focused on changing laws, the fourth wave aims to address the social, cultural and psychological issues that result in repression of women. The same issues that Emma Goldman promoted in the 1910s. Fourth wave feminists believe that women should be free to do whatever they want, without judgement and without facing additional obstacles than

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<sup>33</sup> Abrahams, Jessica. (2017, August 14). Everything you wanted to know about fourth wave feminism – but were afraid to ask. Prospect Magazine. Retrieved from [www.prospectmagazine.co.uk/magazine/everything-wanted-know-fourth-wave-feminism](http://www.prospectmagazine.co.uk/magazine/everything-wanted-know-fourth-wave-feminism)

<sup>34</sup> Simpkins, Jennifer. (undated). You can’t sit with us! How fourth wave feminism became “Mean Girls”. Retrieved from [www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/jennifer-simpkins/feminism-fourth-wave-became-mean-girls](http://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/jennifer-simpkins/feminism-fourth-wave-became-mean-girls)

men do. As Jessica Adams notes, “Their aim is not to challenge liberal-capitalist values but to fight for an equal share of the opportunities and wealth they offer.”<sup>35</sup>

The organizers of the Women’s March in 2017 said they were “campaigning for those who believe in a world that is equitable, tolerant, just and safe for all, one in which the human rights and dignity of each person is protected.”<sup>36</sup> But as with the other waves, there are differences of opinion about what that world might look like. Sandberg is singled out for her “unwokeness”. According to bell hooks, by offering women advice on how to reach the top of the corporate ladder, Sandberg relies “on the tropes of traditional femininity to package her message. Her white, corporate feminism fails to imagine a different kind of world or to build on collective action. Getting more women in the boardroom does little to help the single mother employed to clean the office building at night.”<sup>37</sup> Again, feminism continues to be dominated by an elite class of women, and rights more freely enjoyed by more educated women are made possible by the outsourcing of domestic labor to poorer, often immigrant women. Sandberg fails to address the underlying structural issues and power imbalances, and instead works to promote women within the confines of a man’s world. Jessa Crispin, author of *Why I am Not a Feminist: A Feminist Manifesto*, says “I cannot associate myself with a feminism that focuses dementedly on self-empowerment, whose goals include not the full destruction of corporate culture but merely a high percentage of female CEOs and military officers; a feminism that requires no thought, no discomfort, and no real change.”<sup>38</sup>

Using waves to describe stages of feminism is imperfect. Feminist historian Linda Nicholson said, “The wave metaphor tends to have built into it an important metaphorical implication that is historically misleading and not helpful politically. That implication is that underlying certain historical differences, there is one phenomenon, feminism, that unites gender activism in the history of the United States, and that like a wave, peaks at certain time and recedes at others. In sum, the wave metaphor suggests the idea that gender activism in the history of the United States has been for the most part unified around one set of ideas, and that set of ideas can be called feminism.”<sup>39</sup>

As Constance Grady wrote, “The wave metaphor can be reductive. It can suggest that each wave of feminism is a monolith with a single unified agenda, when in fact the history of feminism is a history of different ideas in wild conflict. It can reduce each wave to a stereotype and suggest that there’s a sharp division between generations of feminism, when in fact there’s

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<sup>35</sup> Sherber, Victoria. (2017, December 16). Feminism 101: What are the waves of feminism? Fem Magazine. Retrieved from <https://femmagazine.com/feminism-101-what-are-the-waves-of-feminism/>

<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

<sup>38</sup> Crispin, Jessa. *Why I am Not a Feminist: A Feminist Manifesto*. Melville House. 2017.

<sup>39</sup> Grady, Constance. (2018, March 20). The waves of feminism, and why people keep fighting over them, explained. Vox.com. Retrieved from [www.vox.com/2018/3/20](http://www.vox.com/2018/3/20)

a strong continuity between each wave – and since no wave is a monolith, the theories that are fashionable in one wave are often grounded in the work that someone was doing on the sidelines of a previous wave. And the wave metaphor can suggest that mainstream feminism is the only kind of feminism there is, when feminism is full of splinter movements.”<sup>40</sup>

Since 1792, whatever wave we want to call a time, there was been one constant: passionate disagreement between different schools of thought, which history will later smooth out into a single overarching “wave” of discourse. I think that Emma Goldman would find today’s fourth wave of feminism a refreshing return to anarchy. As the #MeToo movement barrels forward, as record numbers of women seek and fill political office, and as men are held accountable for their behavior, feminism is reaching a level of cultural relevance it hasn’t enjoyed since the second wave.

Now, if we can only get the Equal Rights amendment passed.

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<sup>40</sup> Ibid.