

## Between ‘Postfeminism(s)’: Announcing the Arrival of Fourth Wave

As suggested in the introduction to this study, feminism has been undergoing something of a revival in the past few years, at least in terms of a heightened visibility in media and popular culture. Numerous high profile campaigns such as Laura Bates’ *Everyday Sexism*, which encourages women to catalogue instances of sexism or discrimination they face in everyday life, and has well over 230,000 followers on Twitter alone; Caroline Criado-Perez’s successful initiative to insist that women continued to be represented on Bank of England bank notes; and Femen’s perhaps less successful, but equally high-profile, protests have ensured a strong feminist presence in both print media and online. Music megastars have also climbed aboard the feminist bandwagon, raising feminism’s profile, and their own. Both Beyoncé and Taylor Swift, previously perhaps better known for their expression of postfeminist attitudes and disavowal of the need for or importance of feminism, now publically embrace the label ‘feminist.’ Each have gone from expressing their concerns over what being a ‘feminist’ entails, whilst simultaneously extolling the virtues of ‘girl power’ or women’s economic success and independence and thus aligning themselves with a distinctly postfeminist sentiment, to publicly embracing and promoting, if not entirely unproblematically, a feminist cause. Politicians have likewise attempted to align themselves with the feminist zeitgeist, with varying degrees of success. Ed. Miliband, Nick Clegg, and Harriet Harman, for example, have each being pictured in The Fawcett Society t-shirts bearing the slogan ‘this is what a feminist looks like’ whilst campaigning and presumably seeking to

broaden their appeal. Barack Obama has similarly professed his commitment to feminism, writing in an article published in *Glamour* magazine:

one thing that makes me optimistic [...] is that this is an extraordinary time to be a woman. The progress we've made in the past 100 years, 50 years, and, yes, even the past eight years has made life significantly better for my daughters than it was for my grandmothers. And I say that not just as President but also as a feminist. (Obama 2016)

Despite the potentially postfeminist tone of Obama's declared allegiance with feminism in emphasizing feminist gains, he is quick to qualify that there is still much to be done to improve the lives and prospects of women and girls.

However, this renewed interest in feminism, or more accurately, feminism(s), and the heightened status of feminism(s) in the public and political consciousness, have (re)exposed fractures, inconsistencies and deep inequalities within these debates. Furthermore, the way in which feminist rhetoric is employed, particularly in debates surrounding national and cultural identity, is both contentious and problematic. Additionally, the current feminist zeitgeist has highlighted a continued resistance to, or backlash against, contemporary feminism. Criado-Perez's campaign, as just one example, gained far more publicity for the online abuse, rape, and death threats she received after starting it, than positive media write-ups advancing her cause. Furthermore, a glance below the line at readers' comments on Laura Bates's frequent articles addressing various examples of what she terms 'everyday sexism' also finds as many vocal naysayers as those wishing to shout their support for the latest feminist revival. Nonetheless, feminism is certainly enjoying—or perhaps enduring—heightened levels of interest in public consciousness, popular culture, and increased column inches in the press, leading to columnists in national newspapers either lamenting or celebrating the arrival of the 'fourth wave.'

Writing in *The Guardian* in 2013, Kira Cochrane welcomes her readers 'to the fourth wave of feminism' (Cochrane 2013). She suggests that though the 'campaign for women's liberation never went away, [...] this year a new swell built up and broke through' (Cochrane 2013). But what has brought about this resurgence? In a media more commonly saturated with the notion of postfeminism (Faludi 1992; McRobbie 2004, 2007, 2009a, b, 2011; Gill 2007, 2016; Gill and Scharff 2013;

Gill and Donaghue 2013), this shift in perspective marks a significant change. So how does the fourth wave differ from what's come before, if indeed it does, and why has this apparent 'swell' of feminist activism broken through now? In order to address these questions and begin to look forward to the possibilities afforded by the fourth wave of feminism, a return to well-worn and established feminist debates must take place, unpicking the complex relationship between feminist movements or waves and the slippage between differing forms of postfeminism(s).

### BETWEEN POSTFEMINISM(S)

Central to discussions of contemporary feminism is the idea of postfeminism(s). As Gill asserts 'postfeminism has become one of the most important and contested terms in the lexicon of feminist cultural analysis' (Gill 2007, p. 147). Although I don't wish to dwell too long on the various differences that mark the conflicted use of the term—with regard to the fourth wave, my interest lies more in the slippage between these forms, or what McRobbie has referred to as the 'double entanglement' (McRobbie 2004)—it would be remiss not to delve briefly into these debates. It is important to note, however, that what is traced here relies on a distinctly Western reading of the history of these debates, and as such, feeds into what Claire Hemmings (2011) has identified as stories of loss, progress, and return. As Hemmings has skillfully demonstrated, notions of loss, progress, and return, far from being distinct or separate from one another in fact rely on an agreed vision of feminist history, even whilst advocating for a seemingly different reading of 'established' events (Hemmings 2011). Thus it is crucial to acknowledge that, in terms of exploring past debates, what is presented here not only represents a necessarily partial view of the history of such discussions, but also reinscribes their place in the canon of feminist theory. Furthermore, as this certainly does not offer an exhaustive history of feminist thought, those ideas, arguments, or theorists that are not addressed or discussed should not be seen as discounted, but rather this suggests the necessary limits of this project.

The relationship between postmodernism and feminism has been a source of vigorous and healthy debate, and the subject of numerous books, chapters, and articles. Postmodernism's problematizing of grand narratives and essentialism has offered feminism multiple benefits, as well as posing certain problems for practice. The development

of postfeminism as a distinct ideology, separate from an understanding of postfeminism as associated with a backlash, can be linked to the early 1990s. Ann Brooks suggests that:

postfeminism is framed within the feminist academic community, particularly those drawing on postmodernism, poststructuralism and post-colonialism to inform their understanding of feminism in the 1990s. Postfeminism as understood from this perspective is about the conceptual shift within feminism from debates around equality to a focus on debates around difference. (Brooks 1997, p. 4)

This situates postfeminism within the third wave, broadly fitting with the assertion that a primary objective for third-wave feminists was to disrupt a white, heteronormative, middle-class view (Shugart et al. 2001). However, evidence of feminist academics and activists seeking to challenge the tendency for feminist theory to prioritize a singular, white perspective, is apparent long before the 1990s, and particularly, before the popularization of postmodernism within academia.

In fact, the importance of problematizing the ‘grand narrative’ of white, Western feminism was stressed as early as 1851, in a discussion of civil rights and women’s liberation, when Sojourner Truth famously asked ‘ain’t I a woman too?’ In 1982, bell hooks repeated this question in her book, *Ain’t I a Woman: Black Women and Feminism*. Challenging what she saw as the racism endemic in the US women’s movement, hooks argues:

[w]hile it is in no way racist for any author to write a book exclusively about white women, it is fundamentally racist for books to be published that focus solely on the American white woman’s experience in which that experience is assumed to be *the* American woman’s experience. (hooks 1982, p. 137)

Following this, in 1984, in an approach that can broadly be considered intersectional, hooks stressed the need for feminists to take into account factors other than gender, such as race and class when theorizing women’s experiences. She argued that ‘[r]ace and class identity create differences in quality of life, social status and lifestyle that take precedence over the common experience women share [...]’ (hooks (1984) 2000, p. 4). Angela Davis was raising similar concerns over the white,

ethnocentrism apparent in mainstream Western feminism, as well as highlighting the importance of considering class in feminist analysis in *Women, Race and Class*, published in 1981. Also taking what could be deemed an intersectional approach, in her essay, 'White Woman Listen! Black feminism and the boundaries of sisterhood,' first published in 1982, Hazel Carby wrote of Black feminists, '[w]e can point to no single source for our oppression. When white feminists emphasize patriarchy alone, we want to redefine the term and make it a more complex concept' (Carby (1982) 1997, p. 46). Carby's essay sought to disrupt not only the singular view of 'white feminism,' but also the notion that for feminism to be effective, it must be simple. However, the need for the overly simplistic rendering of feminist debates, as well as the tendency for a singular white middle-class perspective to remain dominant, is something that has stubbornly persisted within contemporary discussions of feminism, particularly those taking place outside of academia, within mainstream media and popular culture.

In 'Towards a Black Feminist Criticism,' first published in 1977, Barbara Smith highlighted the invisibility of black lesbian women's experiences from dominant discussions of feminism. Again pointing to the complex intersections between being a woman, black, and a lesbian, Smith suggested that each combined to produce an understanding and experience of oppression that differed greatly from that of middle-class white women. Smith argued that:

Black women's existence, experience, and culture and the brutally complex systems of oppression which shape these are in the 'real world' of white and/or male consciousness beneath consideration, invisible, unknown. (Smith 1986, p. 168)

Within her analysis Smith also cites Alice Walker as an author who is calling attention to 'how the political, economic, and social restrictions of slavery and racism have stunted the creative lives of Black women' (p. 169), promoting an intersectional analysis of women's experiences and oppression. Key to Smith's critique was not just the importance of acknowledging the impact of race or class on feminist analysis, but also the need to challenge the heteronormative stance of much feminist criticism. Smith implies the revolutionary possibilities of adopting, or at least recognizing, a Black lesbian perspective, suggesting that there was 'something dangerous' in the act of 'writing about Black women writers

from a feminist perspective and about Black lesbian writers from any perspective at all' (p. 168). She claims that this danger is particularly relevant for black Lesbian critics, where '[h]eterosexual privilege is usually the only privilege that Black women have' (p. 182). That black women may have heterosexual privilege also serves to highlight that black should not be mistaken for a homogenous category that is simply presented as in binary opposition with White, but rather that individuals within both groups may experience varying and different forms of oppression and/or privilege.

Adrienne Rich similarly sought to challenge what she saw as 'compulsory heterosexuality,' and what she described as 'heterosexuality as a political institution which disempowers women' (Rich 1987, p. 23). Rich comments on the erasure of lesbians of color from academic feminist writing, suggesting that this is influenced by the 'double bias of racism and homophobia' (p. 25). She also suggests that compulsory heterosexuality forces women to adopt what she describes as 'doublethink,' reminiscent of W.E.B. DuBois's notion of 'double consciousness' (DuBois (1903) 2003). Rich describes 'doublethink' as something 'from which no woman is permanently and utterly free' (Rich 1987, p. 48). She argues:

[h]owever woman-to-woman relationships, female support networks, a female and feminist value system are relied on and cherished, indoctrination in male credibility and status can still create synapse in thought, denials of feeling, wishful thinking, a profound sexual and intellectual confusion. (p. 48)

Rich also links this 'indoctrination in male credibility' (p. 48), with white women's racism. A similar position can be found in Marilyn Frye's work on 'arrogant perception,' who, writing in 1983, suggested that white women may 'cling to the hope of true membership in the dominant and powerful group' (Frye 1983, p. 121), leading them to view black and minority ethnic women through the lens of arrogant perception. Such an attitude can clearly be seen in relation to the contemporary feminist activist group, Femen, discussed at length in a later chapter of this research, and their paternalistic approach to communicating with Muslim women.

The questioning of a collective identity based on a biological understanding of gender, as theorized by feminists such as Judith Butler, also

provides a framework for thinking through difference in relation to race, class, and culture. Butler stresses the performativity of gender, challenging essentialist ideas of the category of 'woman.' Although abandoning the notion of a unified category called 'women' could seemingly undermine any collective movement that is seeking to challenge discrimination based on sex or gender, by calling attention to the normative value of such a category, Butler instead allows for a wider acceptance of feminism. She asserts, '[w]hen the category is understood as representing a set of values or dispositions, it becomes normative in character and, hence, exclusionary in principle' (Butler 1990a, p. 325). This has meant that a 'variety of women from various cultural positions have refused to recognize themselves as "women" in the terms articulated by feminist theory with the result that these women fall outside the category' (p. 325). Thus, far from rendering feminism unintelligible, postmodernism has in this instance in fact allowed for the movement to become more inclusive. As Butler argues:

[t]he loss of that reification of gender relations ought not to be lamented as the failure of feminist political theory, but, rather, affirmed as the promise of the possibility of complex and generative subject-positions as well as coalitional strategies that neither presuppose nor fix their constitutive subjects in their place. (p. 339)

However, Butler's concept of the performativity of gender is not simply that gender is a performance that can be picked up, or indeed suspended, at will. Instead, Butler argues against the notion of a unified or coherent self who exists outside the performance, suggesting that 'gender is always a doing, though not a doing by a subject who might be said to preexist the deed' (Butler 1990b, p. 25).

It is this idea of the 'doing without the doer' that Seyla Benhabib suggests is problematic for the relationship between feminism and postmodernism. Benhabib questions Butler's Nietzschean position, stressing that '[g]iven how fragile and tenuous women's sense of selfhood is in many cases, [...] this reduction of female agency to a "doing without the doer" at best appears to me to be making a virtue out of necessity' (Benhabib 1995, p. 22). She argues that 'feminist appropriations of Nietzsche on this question, therefore, can only lead to self-incoherence' (p. 21). Benhabib seeks to address the key questions posed by Nancy Fraser and Linda J. Nicholson, in 'Social Criticism without Philosophy: An

Encounter Between Feminism and Postmodernism' whereby Fraser and Nicholson ask, '[h]ow can we conceive a version of criticism without philosophy which is robust enough to handle the tough job of analyzing sexism in all its endless variety and monotonous similarity?' (Fraser and Nicholson 1990, p. 34). Benhabib's response is that 'we cannot, and it is this which makes me doubt that as feminists we can adopt postmodernism as a theoretical ally' (Benhabib 1995, p. 25). However, she does not dismiss the idea that postmodernism can offer anything to feminism entirely. Benhabib also notes the possibilities afforded by questioning grand narratives of history that have often overlooked or ignored minority voices or women. What she is deeply critical of is what she terms 'the strong version of the "Death of the Subject"' that, she argues, 'is not compatible with the goals of feminism' (p. 20).

Benhabib's caution over the relationship between postmodernism and feminism highlights the link between postmodern feminism and 'postfeminism.' This is not a postfeminism associated with the idea of a time after feminism, or the realization of feminist aims, but rather a 'postfeminism' (Genz and Brabon 2009) that implies feminism as having undergone a radical transformation in relation to the values that postmodernism questions, although each are intrinsically linked. Thus, despite the possibilities noted in radically transforming feminism in line with postmodern aims to disrupt grand narratives or interrupt dominant, imperialistic views of gender and inequality, postfeminism still takes on a distinctly Western and colonial slant, particularly in its foregrounding of notions of 'progress' and reliance on Western readings of agency (Mahmood 2005; Madhok et al. 2013). Claire Hemmings has also noted the problems associated with uncomplicatedly linking such notions, or as she asserts, 'stories,' of progress with a homogenized vision of Western feminism. She suggests that they are perhaps more accurately read as Anglo-American, thus allowing for the differing role that postmodernism has played in the formation of European feminism, particularly with regard to ideas of sexual difference (Hemmings 2011, p. 14).

Hemmings' analysis argues that contemporary Western feminist theory, and Western feminism's recent past, can be categorized into the dominant themes of loss, progress, and return narratives. Her explanation of 'progress' narratives suggest the foregrounding of a positive assessment of the relationship between postfeminism and postmodernism, arguing this has allowed the diversification of feminism, broadening the 'narrowness typical of Western feminism's earlier preoccupations



and subjects' (p. 4). Conversely, 'loss' narratives can be seen to lament the move away from a unified concept of 'woman' and characterize this as aligned with a postfeminist turn to individualism and the depoliticization of the feminist movement. However, as Hemmings suggests, despite the apparently marked differences between these positions of progress or loss, there are 'similarities that link these stories and that facilitate discursive movement between them without apparent contradiction' (p. 5). As such the entanglement of postfeminism(s) with the embrace of postmodernism, the promotion of feminist gains and the simultaneous disavowal of the continued importance of or viability of feminism can be seen to operate across and between these feminist narratives of loss and progress.

Perhaps, then, it is more accurate to think of postfeminism as a conceptual shift that, despite having roots in far earlier activism and feminist debates, was brought to the fore in the 1990s, a time commonly associated with the third wave. In *Destabilizing Theory: Contemporary Feminist Debates*, Michèle Barrett and Anne Phillips suggest there has been an 'almost paradigmatic shift from 1970s to 1990s feminism,' (Barrett and Phillips 1992, p. 6). However, Barrett and Phillips stress that the contrast between each period 'is not intended as a marker of feminist "progress"' (p. 2). They also argue that 'many of the issues posed in that [earlier] period return to haunt the present' (p. 2). This accounts for the move from the second to third-wave of feminism, but also suggests a more fluid approach to the notion of feminist waves, allowing for the emergence of a 'postfeminism' and third wave that has developed from within the second-wave feminist movement, rather than evolved as a wholesale rejection of it. Similarly, this is also the approach taken within this research in assessing the arrival of the fourth wave.

## POSTFEMINISM AND ITS ENTANGLEMENT WITH THE FOURTH WAVE

The concept of postfeminism as associated with a time after, or even reaction against, feminism, can in part be attributed to Susan Faludi's book, *Backlash* (1992). Faludi's analysis of discussions of feminism in the media suggested that the term 'postfeminism' was being used to discredit the notion that feminism was still a valuable or relevant political movement. As such, Ann Brooks links this understanding of postfeminism with a 'widespread "popular" conception' that is the 'result of the appropriation of the term by the media' (Brooks 1997, p. 2). In

contrast, Brooks suggests that ‘postfeminism,’ as associated with ‘the conceptual shift within feminist debates around equality to a focus on debates around difference,’ particularly as a result of feminism engaging with postmodernism, poststructuralism, and postcolonialism, is linked to ‘the feminist academic community’(p. 4). However, the idea that postfeminism can be limited to the interaction between postmodernism and feminism, confined to academia and thus distinct from a postfeminism as presented in the media, belies the links between the two, particularly evident in assertions that feminisms’ embrace of postmodernism is said to have rendered it meaningless and thus irrelevant. Furthermore, as feminist academics increasingly turn their attention to both media portrayals of women, and the impact of popular culture on women’s lives, this binary between discussions taking place inside and outside academia is being steadily eroded.

Indeed, it is these locations—popular culture, advertisements, films, music videos, and media discussions—that the slippage between postfeminism(s) and the phenomenon of postfeminism as a ‘sensibility’ (Gill 2007) can be most strikingly located and observed. Rosalind Gill suggests postfeminism can be understood as a sensibility, something that characterizes various contemporary depictions of women and femininity within popular culture. As such, postfeminism as a sensibility is not fixed or reliant on a singular understanding of the term; instead it ‘emphasizes the contradictory nature of postfeminist discourses and the entanglement of both feminist and anti-feminist themes within them’ (Gill 2007, p. 149). The understanding of postfeminism as a sensibility is perhaps most suited to the analysis provided within this book, not least because of its location as a phenomenon in popular culture, but also due to the movement it allows between seemingly static interpretations of postfeminism(s). Indeed, popular culture and contemporary discussions of feminism have arguably become so saturated with this postfeminist sensibility that it is hard to tell where postfeminism ends and the fourth wave begins.

The fourth wave is already being discussed as a rejection of the third and the notion of feminism as being reassuringly in the past or even hindering women today (Aitkenhead 2014). Similarly however, the third wave was also to an extent conceived as a backlash against postfeminism, which was taken as simultaneously a celebration and rejection of the ideals and gains promoted by the feminist ‘mothers’ of the second wave (Shugart et al. 2001; McRobbie 2007, 2009, 2011; Budgeon 2011). Although the notion of feminist ‘mothers’ in this context is primarily

symbolic; the feminist mothers that third-wave feminists are thought to be rallying against are not necessarily biological mothers, but rather the mothers of the second-wave movement. However, there are examples of third-wave feminists rejecting the ideas of their own biological mothers, most notably the daughter of Alice Walker, Rebecca Walker.

In an essay for *Ms. Magazine*, published in 1992, Rebecca Walker stated, 'I am the third wave' (Walker 1992). Despite the fact that at the time of announcing herself as 'the third wave,' Rebecca Walker was not expressly renouncing her mother, they have since become estranged, something that Walker directly attributes to her rejection of her mother's specific feminist ideals. Discussing her relationship with her mother in 2008, in a *Daily Mail* article with the titillating title, 'How my mother's fanatical views tore us apart,' Rebecca Walker is quoted as stating, 'my mother's feminist principles colored every aspect of my life' and asserting that the reason she is no longer in contact with her mother is due to 'daring to question her ideology' (Walker 2008). Though less forthcoming about their relationship, Alice Walker has responded to some of the accusations leveled at her, writing on her blog, 'I learn via Wikipedia that my daughter was banished because she questioned my "ideology"!' This is clearly something Alice Walker disputes as she argues, 'I'm the kind of mother who would cheer' (Alice Walker 2013).

Helene A. Shugart, Catherine Egley Waggoner, and D. Lynn O'Brien Hallstein suggest that 'third-wave feminists define themselves first in terms of what they are not; namely, they reject the feminism of the second wave, claiming that it reflects almost exclusively the perspectives and values of white, middle-class, heterosexual women' (Shugart et al. 2001). However, Walker's rejection of her mother's values can hardly be seen as moving away from a heteronormative, white, middle-class position, a criticism commonly leveled at second-wave feminism. Rebecca Walker is quoted as commenting in a 1992 interview for *The Times*, "I hope I never have to hear the word post-feminist again," (Muir 1992), referring to the idea that feminism is no-longer relevant. However, her subsequent pronouncements on the issues she associates with her mother's politics could equally be read as a rejection of postfeminism as a distinct ideology, developed through the interactions between feminism and postcolonial, postmodern and poststructuralist theory. As suggested earlier in relation to Barbara Smith's championing of Alice Walker, much of Walker's work can be seen to problematize the notion of a singular view of feminism that promotes a white, Western view of women's liberation

as universal, thus advocating for the space that postfeminism offers in theorizing the experiences of black and minority women, within a broad feminist, or ‘womanist’ framework.

Indeed, despite Rebecca Walker’s initial proclamations declaring the third wave as a movement intent on challenging the notion of postfeminism—as signaling the end of the feminist movement, either because it’s goals had been achieved or because it’s theories had become irrelevant—much of the feminist activism and theorizing that broadly falls within the third wave can, in fact, be seen to cement the assumptions of a postfeminist society. Even at what can be considered the very start of the third wave, ideological differences surrounding how the feminist movement should progress showed that there was often no more unity amongst peers, than across generations. Although published only four years after *The Beauty Myth*, another prominent third-wave feminist’s text, *The Morning After: Sex, Fear and Feminism* (1994), written by Katie Roiphe, also the daughter of a well-known second-wave feminist, already begins to show signs of a shift from Wolf’s vision of the third wave that advocates an intergenerational approach to combat the perceived feminist backlash. Instead Roiphe appears to be advocating a postfeminist stance that positions feminism as the problem.

However, this vision was certainly not shared by everyone. Just as there were clashes between feminist waves, and disagreements between feminist mothers and daughters, there was also no real consensus amongst peers over what constitutes a feminist wave or what feminism could offer a new generation of young women. Astrid Henry describes her experience of reading Roiphe’s, *The Morning After: Sex, Fear and Feminism*, commenting, ‘I was quick to dismiss Roiphe during that initial reading in great part because, to put it bluntly, I thought she was dead wrong about the state of contemporary feminism. What she described bore little resemblance to the feminism I knew’ (Henry 2003, p. 209). Henry stresses that although both she and Roiphe ‘share a generational label’ and even ‘seemed to have read the same books, taken some of the same sort of classes, and participated in the same “feminism on campus,”’ (p. 209) each had developed considerably different impressions of feminism. Henry argues that ‘[f]or Roiphe, feminism was like a stern mother telling women how to behave. She described feeling constrained by feminism, her individuality and freedom curbed by its long list of rules and regulations’ (pp. 209–210). Roiphe’s feminism fits with the popular, and popularized, notion of the third wave as a rejection of

the second. Paradoxically, the backlash against feminism, initially identified by Wolf as part of the problem, was later presented by Roiphe as a solution to feminism's failings. Henry describes the presence of postfeminist ideology in Roiphe's text, observing, '[i]n Roiphe's description of contemporary feminism, it is no longer misogynist men, patriarchal attitudes, or sexist culture that "regulates" women's behavior. The task of regulating women's behavior has been taken over by feminists' (p. 210). Of course, it wasn't long before Wolf also shifted her perspective.

Following the publication of *The Beauty Myth* (1990), Wolf quickly renounced 'victim feminism,' (Cole 1999, p. 75) a form of feminism easily associated with her work that focused on the structural inequalities impacting on women, in favor of promoting a 'new' power feminism that stressed the importance and capabilities of the individual. Her vision of the third wave of feminism, set out in *The Beauty Myth*, described a movement that must focus on the collective and analyze how the marketplace was repressing women through a 'divide and conquer' (Wolf 1990) technique. However, by 1994, with the publication of *Fire with Fire: The New Female Power and How to Use It*, this focus was swiftly replaced with a 'feminism' whose ideals were more broadly in line with postfeminism. Women suddenly went from being a collective, oppressed or restricted by a society, and crucially, industry, that dictated how they should look and behave, forcing them into competition with one another, to individual agents, capable of 'choosing' to manipulate the 'beauty myth' to suit their own ends.

The move from the potentially off-putting idea of 'victim feminism' to the more palatable, and certainly from the position of selling books, profitable, notion of so called 'power feminism,' can be seen as a response to market forces as well as shifting ideologies. As Alison Phipps has noted in her recent work, *The Politics of the Body* (2014), feminism has not been immune to the coercive and co-opting influence of the neoliberal and capitalist ideologies dominating the Western political landscape at this time. Building on Nancy Fraser's earlier analysis of the relationship between feminism and capitalism (Fraser 2013), Phipps suggests 'it is not just liberal but postmodern, postcolonial and "third wave" forms of feminism that have been seduced by the market' (Phipps 2014, p. 4). The influence of this 'seduction' can be seen within the third wave as encouraging the placement of the individual at the center of the feminist movement, and valuing the importance of identifying and establishing individual agency over a wider structural analysis.

Postfeminism in this form presented a media friendly vision of feminism where the old dragon of patriarchy had been slain and the future was female, if women were only brave (or liberated) enough to reach out and take it. Thus, in celebrating the ‘successes’ of feminism, postfeminism not only consigned the feminist movement to the past, it also shifted the responsibility for women’s success from the collective to the individual, reinforcing the notion of Western society as predicated on the model of meritocracy and strengthening the relationship between postfeminism and neoliberalism. This in turn allowed for the easy slippage between postfeminism as a time after feminism, and postfeminism as a backlash against the movement, whereby Angela McRobbie’s theory of ‘double entanglement’ suggests ‘[t]he “taken into accountness” permits an all the more thorough dismantling of feminist politics and the discrediting of the occasionally voiced need for its renewal’ (McRobbie 2007, p. 28). With the shift from the focus on ‘victim feminism,’ that stressed women’s collective experience of patriarchy, to the promotion of individual empowerment, in part supported by the rhetoric of postmodernism that challenged the idea of any universal experience of being a ‘woman,’ there was a seemingly natural progression from third wave to postfeminism. Although Phipps rightly highlights the turn to neoliberal, capitalist ideals that took place within third-wave feminism, these principles, and questions of how they influence or co-opt feminist ideals, are not confined to the third wave, and indeed rumble on as we move into the fourth.

### BEYOND POSTFEMINISM?: ENTERING A ‘NEW’ WAVE

Despite feminist ‘movements’ often being conceptualized as ‘waves,’ what distinguishes one wave from another is, like much within feminism, a contentious issue. A range of arguments is put forth for establishing the start of a feminist ‘wave’ varying from waves being defined by generations, with each new generation establishing a new ‘wave,’ or to stressing differences and tensions between the aims and ideologies associated with each particular wave. However, feminism ebbs and flows within generations, with various issues resurfacing in a cyclical fashion. Although the temptation may be to present each wave as distinct from its predecessor, in reality the arrival of a new wave does not signal the neat conclusion of what came before.

Attempts have been made to problematize the often-simplistic portrayal of feminist waves—and indeed feminist theorists—as always

in conflict or opposition with those that came before. Attention has also been drawn to the role that popular media has played in perpetuating this idea of feminist waves as always in conflict with one another (McRobbie 2009; Beyers and Crocker 2011). As with real or imagined differences between the linear notions of the feminist 'waves' implying a form of progress or development, there are also significant ideological differences within singular 'waves,' as seen with regard to third-wave feminism. These belie the notion that feminist activity can be captured accurately or conceptualized as a single, uniform movement within the analogy of a wave. Indeed, Angela McRobbie has argued convincingly against using the wave model when describing feminist movements, suggesting:

[n]ot only does this feed into a linear narrative of generationally led progress [...] but it also stifles the writing of the kind of complex history of feminisms and of multiple feminist modernities that would challenge the often journalistic histories, those that unfailingly have beginnings and endings [...]. (McRobbie 2009, p. 126)

What is problematic to a large degree is the lack of consensus over what constitutes a 'wave,' or when one 'wave' is considered to have begun and another finished. Nonetheless, the 'wave' analogy persists, both in academic literature and in mainstream media discussions and journalism. Whether or not such a metaphor provides a useful concept for engaging with feminism as we sit on the crest of the apparent fourth wave of feminism, remains a pertinent question though, as much for asking what this analogy may erase, as for what it offers in terms of discussing and exploring feminist movements.

Despite the difficulties this presents, when taken as a dictionary definition; as 'a swell, surge, or rush, as of feeling or of a certain condition,' or in relation to making waves, to 'cause trouble' or 'create a significant impression,' the appeal of the wave analogy to the feminist movement is clear. The symbolism of a wave offers an idea of strength that is not captured by discussions of feminist ideologies as distinct and separate from one another. It also hints at a reluctance to abandon normative feminist action altogether, suggesting, at least, the desire for some form of feminist unity, however tenuous or fractured this may be. Perhaps, rather than abandoning the notion of feminist waves all together, how we envisage and describe waves is what must change. A possible

solution that allows for conveying the strength of feminist movements, yet acknowledges both where specific waves diverge and overlap, as well as the multiplicity of feminisms, is to envisage a wave as allowing for a movement that is constantly in flux, rolling back as often as it rolls forward, gaining strength from what it brings with it rather than losing momentum due to what it leaves behind. This means rejecting the imposition of a linear narrative of progression that McRobbie warns is so prevalent in media discussions of feminist histories, and instead advocating for an analysis that celebrates intergenerational exchanges and the blurring of boundaries between differing schools of feminist thought and waves.

As there is a considerable amount of disagreement over when ‘waves’ are deemed to have started or ended, or indeed which theorist can be attached or attributed to which ‘wave,’ the lack of consensus over the arrival of the ‘fourth wave’ is hardly surprising. In an attempt to provide clarity, at least within the pages of this book, the second wave of feminism is associated with taking place approximately between the 1960s and 1990s. This, of course, encapsulates the work of numerous theorists and various differing ‘feminist’ ideologies, and is by no means concrete. The ‘third wave,’ announced formally by Rebecca Walker in 1992, although already acknowledged from 1990 in Naomi Wolf’s *The Beauty Myth*, is associated with the period of the 1990s onwards. Again, this is by no means definitive. Finally, despite Corchrane’s article apparently announcing the arrival of the fourth wave in 2013 (Cochrane 2013), Jennifer Baumgardner was writing about the fourth wave of feminism in 2011 (Baumgardner 2011) and actually dates its arrival as early as 2008. Although generational and ideological differences can be seen within ‘waves’ of feminism, equally, there are clear examples of overlapping ideas and feminists whose theories, despite being originally associated with one ‘wave,’ are just as relevant and vital to another. This is particularly evident in the fourth wave with regard to the concept of ‘intersectionality,’ now considered a key feminist ‘buzzword’ (Davis 2008), but first developed by Kimberlé Crenshaw in 1989 (Crenshaw 1989, p. 140) during what could be seen as the second wave. However, a lack of attention to the complexities of feminist histories, at least in the mainstream media, presents a depiction of fourth-wave feminism as having sprung from nowhere.

An interview with prominent fourth-wave feminist, Laura Bates, founder of *Everyday Sexism*, reinforces this idea of feminism without a



history, or perhaps more pointedly, without any history worthy of attention. The article hails her as 'a leading figure in what is becoming known as the fourth wave of feminism,' (Aitkenhead 2014) yet the headline quotes Bates as almost triumphantly announcing, "Two years ago, I didn't know what feminism meant" (Aitkenhead 2014). This, we are reassured, is a common feature of fourth-wave feminism, where:

other fourth-wave feminists tend to be a lot like her, not veteran activists steeped in feminist texts and brandishing manifestoes, but newcomers who had come across gender inequality, saw it was unfair, and decided to do something about it. (Aitkenhead 2014)

In fact, Bates is presented as battling against 'feminism's achievements' in her attempts to convince people that sexism and misogyny are still relevant issues for women today. Fourth-wave feminism, as it is attributed to Bates, is thus presented as less of a wave that has gathered strength from those that have gone before it, than as a distinct and separate ideology that has emerged to deal with a specific set of circumstances, namely prevailing sexism. Of course, despite the nod to feminism(s)' past achievements, successfully reinforcing the notion that we now live in postfeminist times, little or no attention is given to the complexities of feminist histories, or how, in this apparent postfeminist utopia, we have arrived at the need for a fourth wave. As such, media depictions of fourth-wave feminism are also complexly bound up in narratives of loss, progress, and return (Hemmings 2011), simultaneously stressing the importance of 'progress' with notions of "an earlier generation" as inattentive to the complexities of contemporary social, political, and interpersonal life, as dated, as nothing to do with the present' (Hemmings 2011, p. 54), whilst also suggesting that '[w]hatever the failings of previous feminist commitments, it was better to have a feminist movement than none at all' (p. 4).

If, as McRobbie rightly suggested, the cultural space of postfeminism was generated by, at best, an attitude of ambivalence towards feminist politics and at worst a repudiation of the label 'feminist' (McRobbie 2004), then something in that cultural space has clearly shifted—if only very slightly—to make way for the fourth wave. Significantly, the political cultural sphere has altered, moving from New Labour's 'Blair's Babes,' through Conservative Cameron's 'calm down dear' comments, to, presently, Theresa May's current term as Prime Minister. Perhaps symptomatic

of this shift, *The Telegraph* has recently asked, ‘Is Theresa May Britain’s most feminist Prime Minister ever?’ (Sanghani, *The Telegraph* 2016). Assuming that New Labour’s focus on promoting the ideal of a meritocracy helped enforce a vision of feminism reliant on celebrating the successes of women as individuals (McRobbie 2007), then the cuts to welfare and the public sector made by David Cameron’s Conservative government, which have disproportionately affected women (Tasker and Negra 2014), could be seen to have refocused the need for collective action. Despite perhaps not identifying with earlier waves of feminism, Laura Bates’ *Everyday Sexism* project, could be seen as a return to the kind of collective identity politics that characterized much of the second wave. However, the fourth wave is clearly not characterized solely by a newly galvanized ‘left-wing’ intent on dismantling neoconservatism and neoliberalism. Indeed, contemporary feminisms’ relationship with neoliberal and neoconservative principles has become ever more entwined. On the global stage, the promotion of feminism’s apparent success in the Western media can in part be related to the project of (re)affirming the notion of Western superiority over cultures seen as ‘other,’ aiding governments who seek support for foreign invasions supposedly based on ensuring civilian safety or established on humanitarian grounds (Shepherd 2006; Faludi 2008). As such, a possibly unintended consequence of the co-opting of feminist and postfeminist rhetoric into highly topical and contentious issues such as immigration and foreign invasions, is an increased public and media engagement with feminism.

Much like the third wave before it, fourth-wave feminism is fractured and complex, frequently reinforcing the advancement of the individual and centering the seductive notions of ‘choice,’ ‘empowerment,’ and ‘agency.’ These ideals are present even in feminist activism that seemingly undermines or challenges the idea of women—or perhaps more accurately *some* women—as able to make their own choices outside the constraints of an overtly patriarchal society. The fourth wave activist group, Femen, for example, discussed at length in Chap. 4 of this book, embodies multiple conceptions of ‘postfeminism(s).’ Their insistence on the disruptive power of baring their breasts in protest is seemingly reliant on accepting a postfeminist sense of ‘playfulness,’ or at least a postfeminist irony whereby any notion of a feminism that critiques the sexualization of women’s bodies is firmly consigned to the past, while simultaneously seeking to ‘save’ their apparently less liberated Muslim ‘sisters.’

Furthermore, the fourth wave championing of feminism in popular culture through music megastars such as Beyoncé, Taylor Swift, and Miley Cyrus, also navigates a complicated path between postfeminism(s), relying on promoting the achievements (and frequently the lifestyle) of successful women, whilst also demanding that all women be elevated to—or more worryingly, emulate—this individualized, neoliberal, and capitalist vision of 'success.' Of course, access to this success in the male-dominated environment of the music industry is still dependent on presenting a youthful and highly sexualized image of femininity. As Tasker and Negra have stressed:

[p]ostfeminist culture's centralization of an affluent elite certainly entails an emphatic individualism, but this formulation tends to confuse self-interest with individuality and elevates consumption as a strategy for healing those dissatisfactions that might alternatively be understood in terms of social ills and discontent. (Tasker and Negra 2007, p. 2)

Thus, although successful women may now be actively embracing the label of feminist, the feminism they are selling is one of personal achievements, and in turn, personal responsibility. Contemporary feminism and feminist activism then develops a complex relationship with postfeminism(s), marked as it is by frequent examples of Gill's concept of a 'postfeminist' sensibility, and clearly displaying evidence of McRobbie's notion of a 'double-entanglement.' Those seeking to celebrate the emergence of this 'new' wave of feminism, particularly in seeing it as signaling the death knell of postfeminism or in ushering in uncomplicatedly pro-feminist times, should perhaps proceed with caution. Yet whether 'new' or not, seemingly through the postfeminist clamor, the voices arguing for an openly pro-feminist identity and a 'revival' of feminist politics have begun to be heard, culminating in a swell of activity that could be conceptualized as the arrival of the fourth wave.

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