

## The Five Waves of Feminism

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The metaphor of waves rising and subsiding was widely used in 2021, when Mary Bennett asked me to take part in a women's gathering at UCV. However, people were thinking more about waves of Covid-19 than about waves of feminism. I enthusiastically agreed to join the group by Zoom, which the CUC and its committees had been using for many years before the pandemic and which has connected Mary and me for many illuminating conversations. That day, I gave short talks on each of the four later waves and created questions for small group / breakout room discussions. The next month, our Canadian U\*U Feminist Book Club started monthly discussions with similar talks and discussions. Finally, I led the International Women's Day service at the UF Fredericton and summarized my ideas. This document borrows from suggestions from avid feminist readers, research in various fields of women's studies, Wikipedia, discussions in small and larger groups, and observations of changes.

Waves are not a completely adequate metaphor to identify tendencies in feminism, nor are generational divisions. Both are convenient, however, and help us to describe and categorize different concerns that arise in social history.

Margie Delao, "A Brief Look at the Four Waves of Feminism" (2021) in *The Humanist*  
<https://thehumanist.com/commentary/a-brief-look-at-the-four-waves-of-feminism/>

## First Wave

First-Wave feminism was a period of feminist activity and thought that occurred during the 19th and early 20th century. It focused on winning women's right to vote and was influenced by the Enlightenment philosophers and scientific discoveries. For instance Rousseau's ideal of a society in which democracy, individual rights, and equality of women and men represented the best hope for reason and moral progress had a major impact on Mary Wollstonecraft. The term First-Wave feminism itself was coined by journalist Martha Lear in a *New York Times Magazine* article in March 1968 entitled "The Second Feminist Wave: What do these women want?" First Wave feminism is characterized as focusing on the fight for women's right to vote to the exclusion of other rights and needs, such as reproductive rights, workplace equity, gender roles and so on. However, as well as suffrage, First Wave feminists were involved in efforts to improve educational opportunities of women and abolition of slavery. Some of the early abolitionists and suffragists include Sojourner Truth, Elizabeth Blackwell, Jane Addams, and Dorothy Day. Most were middle-class, educated white women, with the exception of Sojourner Truth. She was born into slavery but escaped with her infant daughter in 1826. In 1828 she won a court case to recover her son and was the First Black woman to win such a case against a white man.

Some dates of First-Wave achievements around the world follow. Important dates in what is now called Canada are in **bold**.

1810

Sweden: The informal right of an unmarried woman to be declared of legal majority by royal dispensation was officially confirmed by parliament.

### **1834: Slavery Abolition Act**

**With the abolition of slavery throughout the British colonies, Black people legally became British citizens and were therefore entitled to the franchise. Racial discrimination did sometimes impede the exercise of this right, and Black women faced voting restrictions due to their sex.**

1844

US, Maine: Maine was the First U.S. state that passed a law to allow married women to own separate property in their own name. This is called "separate economy," defined as the ability to earn their own income and retain it for her own use,

independent of her husband. (Note, however, that marital property and parental laws can greatly limit this right.)

US, Massachusetts: Married women were granted separate economy.

1848

US, State of New York: A women's rights convention called the Seneca Falls Convention was held in July. It was the First American women's rights convention.

**1851**

**Canada, New Brunswick : Married women were granted separate economy.**

**1859**

**Canada West: Married women were granted separate economy.**

1861

South Australia: South Australia granted property-owning women the right to vote in local elections.

1862

Sweden: Restricted local suffrage was granted to women in Sweden. In 1919 suffrage was granted with restrictions, and in 1921 all restrictions were lifted.

1863

Finland: In 1863, taxpaying women were granted municipal suffrage in the countryside, and in 1872, the same reform was given to the cities.

1869

United Kingdom: The UK granted women the right to vote in local elections.

US, Wyoming: the Wyoming territories grant women the right to vote, the First part of the US to do so.

1870

United Kingdom: The Married Women's Property Act was passed in 1870 and expanded in 1874 and 1882, giving women control over their own earnings and property.

1871

Denmark: In 1871 the world's very first Women's Rights organization was founded by Mathilde Bajer and her husband Frederik Bajer, called Danish Women's Society. It still exists to this day.

**1884**

**Canada: Widows and spinsters were the first women granted the right to vote within municipalities in Ontario, with the other provinces following throughout the 1890s.**

**1885**

**Status Indians Enfranchised in Nova Scotia. Federal legislation put forward by Sir John A. Macdonald extended voting rights to Status Indians in eastern Canada who met existing property requirements. The federal legislation was repealed in 1898, but, unlike other provinces, Nova Scotia did not subsequently enact laws disqualifying Status Indians from voting provincially.**

1893

New Zealand: New Zealand became the first self-governing country in the world in which all women had the right to vote in parliamentary elections.

1896

Argentina: A group of anarcho-feminist women, headed by Virginia Bolten, published *La Voz de la Mujer*, one of the first feminist newspapers of Latin America.

1900

Belgium: Legal majority was granted to unmarried women.

1902

El Salvador: Married women were granted separate economy and legal majority.

United Kingdom: A delegation of women textile workers from Northern England presented a petition to Parliament with 37,000 signatures demanding votes for women.

1904

Nicaragua: Married women were granted separate economy and legal majority.

1906

Finland granted women the right vote. It was the First country in Europe to do so.

Honduras: Married women were granted separate economy and legal majority.

1907

Norway: Women were granted the right to stand for election, although this was subject to restrictions until 1913.

Finland: The First female members of parliament in world history were elected in Finland in 1907.

1910

Argentina: Elvira Rawson de Dellepiane founded the Feminist Center (Spanish: Centro Feminista) in Buenos Aires, joined by a group of prestigious women.

United Kingdom: November 18 was "Black Friday", when the suffragettes and police clashed violently outside Parliament after the failure of the First Conciliation Bill. Ellen Pitfield, one of the suffragettes, later died from her injuries.

Denmark: The Socialist International, meeting in Copenhagen, established a Women's Day, international in character, to honor the movement for women's rights and to assist in achieving universal suffrage for women.

1911

Austria, Denmark, Germany and Switzerland: International Women's Day was marked for the First time in Austria, Denmark, Germany and Switzerland on the 19th of March. More than one million women and men attended IWD rallies campaigning for women's rights to work, vote, be trained, hold public office and be free from discrimination.

1912

United Kingdom: Sylvia Pankhurst established her East London Federation of Suffragettes.

1913

Norway: Norway granted women the right to vote.

1915

Denmark and Iceland granted women the right to vote, subject to conditions and restrictions.

**1916**

**Canada: Alberta, Manitoba and Saskatchewan granted women the right to vote.**

**1917**

Cuba: Married women were granted separate economy and legal majority.

Netherlands: Women were granted the right to stand for election.

Mexico: Legal majority for married women.

**Canada: War widows, women serving overseas, and women with family serving overseas were allowed to vote.**

**1918**

Russia: The First Constitution of the new Soviet State (the Russian Socialist Federative Soviet Republic) declared that "women have equal rights to men."

Austria: Austria granted women the right to vote.

**Canada: Many Canadian women are granted the right to vote in federal elections. The last province to enact women's suffrage was Quebec in 1940. Suffrage was limited to women over 21, "not alien-born", and meeting provincially determined property qualifications. First Nations women can only vote if they give up their status and treaty rights.**

United Kingdom: The Representation of the People Act was passed which allowed women over the age of 30 who met a property qualification to vote. Although 8.5 million women met this criterion, it only represented 40 per cent of the total population of women in the UK. The same act extended the vote to all men over the age of 21.

United Kingdom: The Parliament (Qualification of Women) Act 1918 was passed allowing women to stand as members of parliament.

Czechoslovakia: Czechoslovakia granted women the right to vote.

1919

Germany: Germany granted women the right to vote.

Azerbaijan: Azerbaijan granted women the right to vote.

Luxembourg: Luxembourg granted women the right to vote.

**Canada: Women were granted the right to be candidates in federal elections.**

Netherlands: The Netherlands granted women the right to vote. The right to stand in election was granted in 1917.

New Zealand: New Zealand allowed women to stand for election into parliament.

United Kingdom: Nancy Astor became the First woman to take her seat in the House of Commons.

1920

US: The 19th Amendment was signed into law, granting all American women the right to vote.

**Canada: The Dominion Elections Act enfranchised many of those who had been disenfranchised during the First World War, such as those originating from countries with which Canada had been at war. However, the Act stated that anyone who was disenfranchised by provincial legislation because of race would remain disenfranchised from the federal vote. This included persons of Chinese origin in Saskatchewan, and those of Indigenous, Chinese, Japanese, and South Asian origins in British Columbia.**

**Canada: The Indian Act is amended to allow for the forced enfranchisement of First Nations whom the government thought should be removed from band lists. Enfranchisement was the most common of the legal processes by which First Nations peoples lost their Indian Status under the Indian Act.**

1928

United Kingdom: The right to vote was granted to all UK women equally with men in 1928.

**1944**

**Canada: During the Second World War, the federal government extended the right to vote to Status Indians who served in the war and their spouses.**

**1947**

**Canada: The Citizenship Act extended the right to vote federally and provincially to Chinese Canadian and South Asian Canadian men and women. However, it ignored Indigenous peoples and Japanese Canadians.**

**1948**

**Canada: Changes to Elections Act Regarding Race**

**The federal Elections Act was changed so that race was no longer grounds for exclusion from voting in federal elections. While Japanese Canadians were enfranchised, First Nations peoples would not gain that right until 1960.**

### **Books about the First Wave**

*Invisible Influence: Claiming Canadian Unitarian Universalist Women's History*, edited by Jean Pfleiderer, Heather Fraser Fawcett, Kathy Sage

*Not for Ourselves Alone*. Video on PBS, discusses Susan B Anthony and others.

*Criminals, Idiots, Women, and Minors: Is the Classification Sound? A Discussion on the Laws Concerning the Property of Married Women*, by Power Cobbe (1868)

*Woman in the Nineteenth Century*, by Margaret Fuller

*The Odd Women*, by George Gissing

*Women, Church and State*, by Matilda Joslyn Gage. Edited by Sally Roesch Wagner, emerita director of the Matilda Joslyn Gage home (in Fayetteville)  
[www.MatildaJoslynGage.org](http://www.MatildaJoslynGage.org)

*In Times Like These*, by Nellie McClung. One of the Famous Five. Book available on Gutenberg: <https://www.gutenberg.org/files/29861/29861-h/29861-h.htm> McClung was also an early Canadian fiction writer.

*The Women's Bible*, Elizabeth Cady Stanton and the Revising Committee, as well as earlier articles

*Ain't I a Woman?* Sojourner Truth (1851)

*We, the Undersigned*, by Elspeth Tulloch



*Sisters in Spirit*, by Sally Roesch Wagner. (Haudenosaunee (Iroquois) Influence on Early American Feminists, focused on the three women along the Erie Canal: Elizabeth Cady Stanton (Seneca Falls), Lucretia Mott (Syracuse), and Susan B Anthony (Rochester) See also <https://indigenousvalues.org/>

*A Vindication of the Rights of Women* and *A Vindication of the Rights of Men*, by Mary Wollstonecraft

*A Room of One's Own*, Virginia Woolf (1929)

**Reflection and Discussion Questions:**

1. What legacy did the First Wave leave for successive generations?
2. How have its accomplishments affected your life?
3. What inspires you and what concerns you about women's ideas and actions during this period?

## Second Wave

The 1960s and '70s brought about the Second Wave of feminism, which focused on grassroots activism and reproductive and economic rights. This Wave of feminism, which was marked by significant struggles against domestic violence, for equality and then equity in employment, the victories of Roe vs Wade in the US and access to the pill and abortion in Canada. Women's lib or the women's movement developed in parallel to both civil rights (and in Canada language rights and multiculturalism) and the sexual revolution. The Second Wave lasted until the 1990s. Like the First Wave of feminism, many of its goals were achieved through legislation and important court decisions. That said, while the Second Wave movement made some attempts to encompass racial justice, race and class were not at the forefront of the movement. The disparities between white women and white men narrowed, but the inequity between women of colour and white men or even between women of u and white women largely remained the same.

Although we often think of the leaders of the women's lib movement as being young activists, women writers who represented the Second Wave belonged to earlier generational groups: the lost generation, 1890 to 1915 (Simone de Beauvoir, born 1908) the greatest generation 1910 to 1924 (Betty Friedan born in 1921), the silent generation, 1925 to 1945 (Adrienne Rich, 1929, Gloria Steinem, 1934, and Germaine Greer, 1939). Most of their books were published in the late 60s and 70s, when women of the silent generation were in their 30s and baby boomers were in their 20s. Women who were born during the baby boom, such as Eve Ensler or V, who was born in 1953 and whose *Vagina Monologues* were First produced in 1996, and Judith Butler, born in 1956, have more in common with the Third Wave.

The Unitarian Universalist Women's Federation was founded during the Second Wave. "Inheritor of a proud tradition, UUWF was formed in 1963 through consolidation of the Association of Universalist Women (founded in 1869 and believed to be the First organization of lay church women in the United States) and the Alliance of Unitarian Women (1890)." Also in 1963, UU Women and Religion (publishers of goddess curricula *Cakes for the Queen of Heaven* and *Rise Up & Call Her Name*, came into being. The Western Canada Women's Gatherings, which led to the CUUWA (founded in 2016) began in 1987.

UU Resolutions on women's issues raised during this period were passed only towards the end of the Second Wave or during the Third Wave: Abortion and Reproductive Rights (1968-1986) and Sexual Orientation (1978-1984).

## **Women Writers and Social Justice Figures in the Second Wave**

Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex* (1949)

Susan Brownmiller, *Against Our Will: Men, Women, and Rape* (1975)

Betty Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique* (1963)

Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar, *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination* (1979)

Lotta Hitschmanova (1909-1990) Humanitarian, Founder of the Unitarian Service Committee of Canada

bell hooks, *Ain't I a Woman? Black Women and Feminism* (1981)

Dorothy Livesay (1909-1996) Canadian and UU poet, professor, and journalist

Margaret Laurence (1926-1987) Canadian author of *The Stone Angel* and *The Diviners*

Audre Lorde, *Sister Outsider* (1984)

Sylvia Plath (1932-1963) Poet, author, *The Bell Jar*

*In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens: Womanist Prose*, Alice Walker (1983) Many of the books by Black and Indigenous women only became well known in the Third Wave; more are listed there.

### **Reflection and Discussion Questions:**

1. Talk about how you were involved in or influenced by the women's movement in the 60s or 70s.
2. What part did feminism play in the work of Second Wave women writers and artists you are familiar with?
3. How has the sexual revolution evolved since the 60s? Could it be described as feminist then or now?

## Third Wave

The Third Wave of feminism in America was more concerned with issues of identity and intersectionality than previous waves and generations. This Wave emerged in the 80s and became more prominent in the 1990s and early 2000s, when the women of generation x (the baby bust, born between 1965 and 1979) were in their 20s and early 30s. A landmark was the appointment of Ruth Bader Ginsburg to the Supreme court. American law professor and Black feminist activist Kimberlé Crenshaw introduced the term intersectionality “to describe how race, class, gender, and other individual characteristics ‘intersect’ with one another and overlap.” The term was first used in 1989, in Crenshaw’s article “Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics.” She wrote that “Neither Black liberationist politics nor feminist theory can ignore the intersectional experiences of those whom the movements claim as their respective constituents.” According to Crenshaw, “various forms of inequality often operate together and exacerbate each other... Intersectional feminism centers the voices of those experiencing overlapping, concurrent forms of oppression.

In its critical reflection piece, CRIAW listed several underlying themes of Intersectional Feminist Frameworks, including “Acknowledging that power relations shape feminist and social justice politics and research” and “Understanding that varying groups of women experience diverse histories that position them differently in hierarchical social relations of power.”

Feminist intersectionality originally examined the interconnections and relationships between race and gender (binary gender); it now encompasses all forms of discrimination or privilege: age, class, income, physical or mental ability, gender identity or sexual orientation, religion, skin color, language, education, ethnicity.

Although Black Feminists or Womanists had raised concerns about white feminism decades before, intersectionality was not commonly addressed (at least under that term) by Canadian feminist scholars until after the millennium. It seemed to be a natural focus for the growing field of interdisciplinary women’s / feminist / gender studies, and research into post-colonialism or postmodernism. In the Third Wave, there was a divide between academic and grassroots feminism, with another divide between what I label American and French feminism. American feminism sought equality and fought for women’s rights in all areas through awareness, activism, and legislation. French writers were more likely to focus on difference, integrate psychoanalysis and biology into their

discourse, and affirm the female body in their writing. Both tendencies informed Canadian feminism; the lesbian identity emerged as a common focal point between efforts to legalize same-sex marriage and innovative literary experiments with the mother tongue. Writing the body became a collective creation project led by Québec feminists such as Nicole Brossard and her translators and collaborators.

Intersectionality requires that we acknowledge our own privilege at the same time as we work to mitigate the oppressions of others in the community. Third Wavers seek to redefine femininity and sought to celebrate differences across race, class, and sexual orientations. They also question female heteronormativity, rejecting the stereotypes of the feminine ideal. Many Third Wavers rejected the word “feminism” or declared it irrelevant to their goals. This has led to tensions between Second and Third Wave feminists, as Second Wavers have considered young women “not feminist enough,” not dedicated enough to the cause. We have to remember that leaders of the Second Wave are largely white cis baby boomers, and as such hold a lot of privilege and a sense of entitlement. Third Wave feminism in Québec integrated independence politics and francophone voices, and artistic and literary projects by Indigenous writers on Turtle Island became more prominent. However, some identities continued to be marginalized, particularly those of trans women and women with disabilities including mental illness.

Our organization and our international sister organization were established during this period:

2009 International Convocation of UU Women

2016 Canadian UU Women’s Association

### **The Third Wave and Intersectional Feminism**

Beth Brant, *Food and Spirits* (1991)

Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble* (1991) Concept of gender performativity

Kimberlé Crenshaw, “Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics” (1989)

Eve Ensler, *The Vagina Monologues*

Amitav Ghosh, *The Nutmeg’s Curse: Parables for a Planet in Crisis* (2021) In this ambitious successor to *The Great Derangement*, acclaimed writer Amitav Ghosh finds the origins of our contemporary climate crisis in Western colonialism’s violent

exploitation of human life and the natural environment.

<https://press.uchicago.edu/ucp/books/book/chicago/N/bo125517349.html>

Joyce Green, editor, *Making Space for Indigenous Feminism* (2017) Written by Indigenous feminists and allies

Naomi Klein, *No Logo* and *This Changes Everything*

The Mud Flower Collective (Katie Cannon, Bev Harrison, Carter Heyward, etc), *God's Fierce Whimsy*.

Lee Maracle, *I Am Woman* (2003)

Alice Walker, *In Search of Our Mothers Gardens* (2004) and *The Colour Purple* (1982)

Rebecca Walker, "Becoming the Third Wave" (1992) in *Ms Magazine*. This article, discussing the Anita Hill hearing, introduced the term of Third Wave as contrasted to post-feminism

Betsy Warland, Lee Maracle, and Daphne Marlatt, *Telling It: Women and Language Across Cultures* (1990) Press Gang Publishers, and co-creators Nicole Brossard, Gail Scott, others

Naomi Wolf, *The Beauty Myth* (1991)

### **Reflection and Discussion Questions:**

1. Name an area in which you have privilege and an area in which you experience disadvantages or oppression. (Areas might include age, class, income, physical or mental ability, gender identity, sexual orientation, religion, race or skin color, language, education, ethnicity...)
2. What are some of the events or experiences that have made you aware of privilege or discrimination?
3. What books have you read to learn more about oppressions you don't experience yourself?

## Fourth Wave

The Fourth Wave began a few years into the new millennium. Its focus is on gender identity, sexual harassment, body shaming, and rape culture. An important distinguishing factor is the use of social media to highlight and address these concerns around the world. A key example of online activism, such as the #MeToo movement, which began in 2006. Then, In December 2012, a young woman was brutally raped in India and subsequently died, sparking local protests and international outrage. Two years later came the Gamergate campaign, a manifestation of the “men’s rights movement” or backlash. Gamergate claimed to promote ethics (freedom of speech) in video-game journalism, but actually condoned and allowed harassment and hate speech against activist women who objected to female stereotypes and violence against women in video games. Around the same time, in August 2014, Beyoncé used the word “Feminist” as the backdrop at a major award event, and street protests in Ferguson, MO, gave rise to the “Black Lives Matter” movement. Young women’s activism in the last decade and still now revolves around both political and legal change and representation, calling for wider representation of all genders, colours, and religions and easy accessibility to people of all classes. Second Wave feminists recognize their more visible activism. At the same time, they/we are often dismissive of what we see as idolizing pop stars, using vulgar language, and turning back to appearances or performative femininity.

The American elections in 2016 ignited the Fourth Wave and mobilized women of earlier waves. Inflammatory remarks and the hyper-sexualization of women, including the campaign against Hilary Clinton, led 60-year-old Teresa Shook, a retired lawyer and grandmother in Hawaii to write on Facebook: "I think we should march." It was a call to forty of her friends in Washington, and was answered by 4.6 million people across the U.S. The Women’s March grew to include demonstrations across the United States and around the world on January 21, 2017, the day after the inauguration of he who shall not be named. The Women’s March may have been the largest single-day demonstration in that country’s history.

Fourth Wave feminism is characterized by action-based awareness campaigns, protests, and movements like #MeToo advancing from the fringes of society into the headlines of our everyday news. The Fourth Wave has also been characterized as “queer, sex-positive, trans-inclusive, body-positive, and digitally driven.” It seeks to further deconstruct gender norms. The problem these feminists confront is systemic white male supremacy. Fourth Wavers believe there is no feminism without an understanding of

comprehensive justice that deconstructs systems of power and includes emphasis on racial justice as well as examinations of class, disability, and other issues.

Another characteristic of Fourth Wave feminism, a rise of new popular culture and citizen journalism, was sometimes considered anti-academic, anti-capitalist, and trivial. The internet has democratized cultural and artistic production, making indie music, films, zines, self-publishing, and other forms of art-making feasible and easy to distribute. TV has been reinvented through streaming channels. People can put their individual projects out into the world more easily and find groups that shared their passions for them. One writer makes a distinction between “Gen X’s penchant for cynical grownup approaches to culture” and “the millennial mood of creative collaboration.” <https://arcade.stanford.edu/blogs/Fourth-and-fifth-waves>

### **Prominent Feminist Actions and Work of the Fourth Wave**

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, *We Should All Be Feminists* (2014)

Everyday Sexism. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/jan/24/laura-bates-interview-everyday-sexism>

Susan Faludi, *Backlash: The Undeclared War Against American Women* (1991)

Roxane Gay, *Bad Feminist* (2014)

Sarah Henstra, *The Red Word* (2018, takes place in the 90s)

bell hooks, *Feminism is for Everybody: Passionate Politics* (2000)

Ariel Levy, *Female Chauvinist Pigs: Women and the Rise of Raunch Culture* (2005)

#MeToo. The phrase “Me Too” was first used on MySpace in 2006 by survivor and activist Tarana Burke. The purpose of the movement was to empower sexually assaulted people by demonstrating the large number of women, girls, and gender minorities who have had to deal with sexual harassment and assault, especially in the workplace and the entertainment industry. It became a viral hashtag in 2017, with accusations against Harvey Weinstein.

Alison Phipps, *The Politics of the Body* (2014)

Riot Grrrl. Although written earlier (in 1991) the manifesto can be read as belonging to the Fourth or Fifth Wave. “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 bullshit like racism, able-bodicism, ageism, speciesism,



classism, thinism, sexism, anti-semitism and heterosexism figures in our own lives...”  
<https://www.instagram.com/p/COGFLKjH1VO/>

Jessica Valenti, *The Purity Myth* (2009) In her blog feministing. Valenti summarized the movement by writing “maybe the Fourth Wave is online.” See  
[https://www.nytimes.com/2009/11/15/magazine/15fob-q4-t.html?\\_r=0](https://www.nytimes.com/2009/11/15/magazine/15fob-q4-t.html?_r=0)

What is Fourth Wave Feminism? <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=H3E5XUFrng8&t=4s>

Tegan Zimmerman #Intersectionality: The Fourth Wave Feminist Twitter Community. *Atlantis: Critical Studies in Gender, Culture & Social Justice*, 38(1), pp.54-70 (2017).

### **Reflection and Discussion Questions:**

1. What impact does the internet or social media play in your life? Does it help you to connect to feminist friends, groups, and activities?
2. How has the role of technology in society changed since you were a child? What new concerns has it raised that you did not have to deal with?
3. How did you react to the revelations of the #MeToo movement? What incidents of harassment or rape did it make you more aware of? What positive changes has it brought about? Did it cause harm to you or to people you know?
4. Do you agree, disagree, or have mixed feelings with the description of society in the new millennium as “rape culture”?

## **Fifth Wave**

The Fifth Wave differs from previous iterations of mainstream feminism in important ways. While Second and Third Wave feminists fought hard for women to be included in the workplace, many Fifth Wave feminists today embrace an anti-work framework, believing that people should not have to perform difficult or undignified labour to be able to afford housing, food, education, health care, or other social services and essential goods. What is called an “anti-work” ideology is actually anti-capitalist and anti-colonialist in its refusal to uphold the exploitation of marginalized workers, punitive working conditions, unliveable salaries, notions of productivity, definitions of self-worth based on class and employment, and the destructive and dehumanizing influences of multinational corporations. Fifth Wave feminists may not believe any job, even one that is considered powerful, meaningful, or empowering, can bring about personal wellbeing, let alone collective liberation. Fifth Wave feminism is invested in anti-capitalist and anti-fascist frameworks, such as defunding the police and prison abolition. Ideas lifted up by Fifth Wave feminists have been practiced in feminist and activist spaces for centuries, introduced by radical queer Black feminists such as Angela Davis, Assata Shakur, and Audre Lorde, but were historically and maybe are still today relegated to the margins by the general public. In the past few years, however, worsening conditions, anti-Black and anti-Indigenous racism, rape culture, and awareness of trauma have made it clear that patriarchy, capitalism, white supremacy, and colonization are closely connected and are harming vast numbers of people. While the First four waves of feminism in the West attempted to work within the system to bring about political and social change, Fifth Wave feminism aims to tear down our current systems and build a new world that prioritizes the needs of all marginalized people.

Black feminist scholar Ayesha Khan defines white feminism broadly as a “white supremacist ideology in disguise” that “tackles sexism and patriarchy while failing to address structural racism.” We could add that white feminism has still not effectively dealt with the primary concerns of people marginalized by class, gender identity, disability (particularly mental health), appearance or many other types of discrimination. Second Wave feminism was most successful in improving access to education and employment among white women. Fifth Wave feminists view previous waves of participating in capitalist projects that suggest that making and spending money leads to empowerment, simply shifting the production and ownership of goods from white men to white women in the same class. Pre-Fifth-Wave, pro-capitalist feminism is linked to positive merchandise and advertising campaigns, such as “notorious RBG” mugs or shirts that read “girls just want to have fun-damental rights.”

Pro-capitalist white feminism relies on institutions supported by the “free market”; an example is feminists who are involved in the justice system and thereby advocate for feminism which, according to Khan#, “relies on policing, prosecution, and imprisonment to resolve gendered or sexual violence” regardless of the pervasive racism and colonialism of the prison system. Political feminism is also pro-colonial or pro-patriarchal; the belief that putting women in positions of political power or policy change is sufficient to change the lives of other women has been disproven as often as it has been confirmed.

A major focus in the First three waves of feminism and partly in the Fourth Wave has been the power white women seek among white men. White cis women seek to obtain the same political, professional, and reproductive rights and freedoms as straight cis white men have. In the Fifth Wave, feminists of all genders, orientations, and identities are called on to redefine power and dismantle the structures that uphold power imbalances of all kinds. They are naming their identities in ways that make some people uncomfortable and other people brave, stating their pronouns and reclaiming “mad,” “fat,” “crip,” “femme” and other words just as people in previous generations reclaimed “queer,” “gay,” “Deaf,” “autistic,” and “witch” (all of which contradicted the mainstream “people First” guidelines).

To be transformative today, feminism needs to be bold and take risks, to decolonize language by avoiding tone-policing and expectations for people to be calm, polite, and articulate. Not only do feminists need to loudly and bravely support trans people, people of colour, non-gender-conforming folk, people with disabilities and mental illness, and all the other marginalized groups we have neglected in the past. The movement of the 21<sup>st</sup> century needs to be led by young women, queer, and trans folk in marginalized groups, and centre our / their voices. It is time for older, cis, white settler women to step back, and have the backs of the activists at the centre.

### **Resources on the Fifth Wave**

*The CUC: 60 Years of Change* (discusses the evolution of our movement)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hf2CQSoQ1BY>

“Characteristics of White Supremacy Culture”

<https://www.whitesupremacyculture.info/characteristics.html>

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<https://twitter.com/doncorleann/status/1457980453223374849>

Ani Phoebe Hao, "Decolonizing Feminism: A Brazilian Perspective" (2016) on the Association for Women's Rights in Development website <https://www.awid.org/news-and-analysis/decolonizing-feminism-brazilian-perspective>

Meenadchi, *Decolonizing Non-Violent Communication*. Workbook, classes, resources <https://www.meenadchi.com/dnvc>

Shannon Mulvey, *How is Western-Influenced Contemporary Performance Practice in Dialogue with Fifth Wave Feminism?* Master of Arts by Research thesis, University of Kent (2018)

Mary Retta, "The Fifth Wave: On White Feminism & Electoral Politics." Critical of the Fifth Wave"e. <https://maryretta.substack.com/p/the-fifth-wave>

Sony Salzman, "From the start, Black Lives Matter has been about LGBTQ lives" (2020) ABC News <https://abcnews.go.com/US/start-black-lives-matter-lgbtq-lives/story?id=71320450> "From the start, the founders of Black Lives Matter have always put LGBTQ voices at the center of the conversation. The movement was founded by three Black women, Alicia Garza, Patrisse Cullors and Opal Tometi, two of whom identify as queer... By design, the movement they started in 2013 has remained organic, grassroots and diffuse."

*Sowing Gender Justice to Dismantle Patriarchy*. Anti-capitalist and grassroots feminist education and action manual <https://www.foei.org/publication/sowing-gender-justice-to-dismantle-patriarchy-feminist-popular-education-manual/>

Jessica Yee, editor, *Feminism for Real: Deconstructing the Academic Industrial Complex of Feminism* (2011)

See also Intersectional Feminism and Fourth Wave

**Reflection and Discussion Questions:**

1. Do you prefer social change to be evolutionary or revolutionary? In what ways are we evolving as a society and/or are we in the midst of a revolution?
2. Give an example of a problem that has been caused by the interplay of colonialism, capitalism, white supremacy, and patriarchy?
3. How do you feel when you hear someone describe themselves as “mad” or “fat”?
4. What would you like to dismantle or destroy so you can plant seeds for a better world?