
“I’m Not a Feminist, But...” A Comparative Analysis of the Women’s Movement in the United States and France

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Ce qu'il faut retenir

Fondés sur des échanges constants d'ouvrages et de correspondance, les idées et les mouvements féministes ont dès l'origine évolué en parallèle des deux côtés de l'Atlantique. Ainsi, des Lumières aux mouvements radicaux des années 1970 en passant par les suffragettes, les États-Unis comme la France ont vu s'imposer le droit à l'éducation, le droit au divorce et à l'héritage, le droit de vote, puis un ensemble de droits liés à la reproduction.

C'est avec la période contemporaine que s'installe un certain malentendu – dû entre autre à des représentations académiques trompeuses relayées par les médias. D'un côté, les Français voient le féminisme américain comme un mouvement anti-mâle hystérique et d'inspiration puritaine ; de l'autre, les Américains voient le féminisme français comme un mouvement d'intellectuel(le)s qui aliène les femmes sur l'autel d'une soi-disant « féminité à la française ».

Or, s'il est vrai que des deux côtés de l'Atlantique, le label « féministe » a aujourd'hui mauvaise presse (au propre comme au figuré), de nombreux combats féministes restent bel et bien en cours en France comme aux États-Unis. Ils choisissent de porter sur des thèmes limités et précis tels que l'égalité salariale et professionnelle, l'inclusion des femmes des cités ou le droit à l'avortement.

Il reste toutefois à débattre de questions inhérentes à la condition féminine, telles que l'altérité fondamentale ou non du féminin par rapport au masculin, notamment au travers de la maternité ; la priorité à donner ou non aux revendications féministes sur les revendications sociales ; et enfin les raisons pour lesquelles, depuis 20 ans, la qualification de féministe est refusée par les principales intéressées.

C'est au bénéfice de tous qu'un dialogue franco-américain pourrait redémarrer sur ces thèmes. Le recours croissant à des échanges sans intermédiaire sur la Toile pourrait en renouveler le contexte loin des représentations médiatiques.

Executive Summary

From the pre-revolutionary era through the 1970s, French and American feminists engaged in a nearly constant exchange of correspondence and theory. French and American feminist movements thus converged on a number of issues, such as education, divorce and inheritance rights, the fight for suffrage, and reproductive rights.

By the early 1980s, however, a rift developed between French and American feminists caused by misleading academic analyses and misrepresentations in media coverage. American feminists became widely associated in French intellectual circles with a radical, man-hating attitude. Conversely, American circles began to correlate French feminism with a primarily differentialist intellectual movement lacking an activist arm. These limited understandings led many to discount the richness and diversity of feminist movements in France and the United States.

Feminism remains very much alive today, however, and organizes around a number of issues such as equality in the workplace, rights for immigrant women, and stopping violence against women.

Still, a number of deep-reaching issues remain to be solved: whether or not there are essential differences between men and women, due for instance to motherhood, is one such debate; activists also meet with a longstanding tension between social fights and the feminist struggle – what should be their priority?; last but not least, with many young women refusing to be called feminists, yet supporting feminist causes, the notion itself may need to be overhauled.

The advent of new media provides a backdrop against which feminists may represent themselves and renew important debates far from misrepresentations. Indeed, a new French-American dialogue on these issues and on the misunderstandings of the past twenty years may prove beneficial to feminists and the struggle for equal rights everywhere.

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Introduction

A recent survey conducted by the Pew Institute found that 99 percent of French people supported equal rights between men and women, while 75 percent reported that men still have better lives. In the United States, though 97 percent of survey-takers said that women should have equal rights with men, 64 percent said that more change is still needed.¹ As strikingly high numbers of people report their dissatisfaction with the position of women in society, one may want to ask where that leaves feminism today. Are the aging radicals of the 1960s retreating in shame over feminism's alleged failures? Do they have no successors today?

The constantly evolving nature of feminist movements in both France and the United States has led many to claim that feminism is dead and that both societies are now "post-feminist." However, much evidence supports the idea that feminisms are far from moribund or abandoned; but rather, the landscape of feminism has shifted away from recognizing the hegemony of a single mainstream Feminism of the dominant, middle-class, towards feminist theories of multiple classes, ethnicities, issues, and backgrounds.

An investigation of this kind has its limitations, however. The discrimination and hardship that women in the United States and France face today are real, but pale in comparison with the fate of women in those countries and regions of the world that continue in their systematic and wide-sweeping oppression of women.

Nonetheless, comparative scholarship of feminist movements in France and in the United States is not only timely, given perpetual concerns over gender equality in both nations, but it is instrumental to fostering a more global understanding of the issues facing women's movements and potentially facilitating a more global response. The comparison between France and the United States is an important one to build because of their relationship with one another, with the world, and with feminist understanding.

The relationship between the United States and France seems to mimic that of rival siblings, which, in front of an ever-present backdrop of support, alternates between frustration, admiration,

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¹ Pew Global Attitudes Project. "Gender Equality Universally Embraced, but Inequalities Acknowledged." Pew Research Center Publications. Web. 1 July 2010.

competition, shared triumphs, and misunderstandings. Despite the fact that both nations are considered “Western,” and have long shared ideas, theorists and attitudes, France and the United States are regularly set in opposition to each other in academia and in the political sphere. In the United States, this occurs through the isolation of all French theorists into a file folder of “French Theory,” no matter how disparate their philosophies may be. In France, the French Self is differentiated from the American “Other” by referring to that which is French versus that which is “Anglo-Saxon” and consequently alien. Politically, anti-French sentiment in the U.S. rears its head for the sake of flexing nationalistic muscle (the “Freedom Fries” brouhaha of 2003, for example) and anti-American sentiment does as well in France (political support for José Bové and his dismantling of McDonald’s/American imperialism). In that respect, the histories of the feminist movements of both countries, which are interwoven into many points of convergence and some of divergence, also constitute a rich and fascinating case study of the American-French relationship.

In order to provide a full understanding both of modern feminisms and of the impact of French and American feminists on each other, we will develop a historical narrative. Outlining the parallel histories of U.S. and French feminisms provides a context for at least three phenomena alive in both nations today: the curious concept of “post-feminism”, the “I’m not a feminist, but...” attitude, and issue-driven feminism. Owing to the genealogy of ideas, the movements that are given an approximate duration are not constrained by that time frame; the ideas and thinkers that espouse them both precede and extend beyond temporal constraints with roots deeply entangled in historical development. This is especially true of “First Wave” feminism of the 19th century. Though the activities of “First Wavers” in France and the United States were concentrated in the 19th century, the First Wave continued until the extension of suffrage well into the 20th century.

Further, it must be noted that organizations as well as individuals have long been operative agents of change in both nations’ gradual development of gender equality and policies. Though major events and individuals may be left out of this brief contextualization of feminism, it is not for lack of importance but rather due to a less notable (or less documented) transatlantic consciousness of feminist actions.

Definitions and Methods

It is important to describe what is meant in this paper by “feminism.” The supposedly monolithic movement of primarily middle-class women of the 1960s and 70s (that is so often declared to be “dead”), and the First Wave canon of events and actors shall be delineated as Feminism. The designation of this term as a proper noun does not denote its greater importance, but rather represents its position as

“The Feminism” that most media institutions and public discourse erroneously focus upon, to the detriment of other feminisms. Further, “feminism” and “feminisms” shall denote the new understanding of historical moments or movements and the recognition that there are multiple feminist theories, actors, motivations and discourses.

In its lowercase form, “feminism” itself is a challenging term to define. For this reason, I will adopt Allwood and Wadia’s broad definition of feminism, which is the “theory and practice which aim to change power relations between men and women’ but also ‘attempts to achieve equality between men and women, to improve the status of women, and to fight against their systematic oppression by men.’² This definition necessarily glosses over what “equality” is, but indeed that very issue remains a longstanding rift between feminists today.

Finally, historians of feminism commonly refer to periods of feminism in “waves” (“First Wave”, “Second Wave”, and more recently, the “Third Wave”). This paper shall employ the wave language for the purpose of easy reference and continuity with previous and future scholarship. Nonetheless, the wave remains a problematic concept. Scholars use it to refer to the rise and fall of an era’s Feminism, which makes it seem like the fight for women’s rights as a whole ebbs and flows as if it were beholden to the lunar cycle. The wave concept disguises the fact that multiple feminisms operate in society, which exist independently of media representations of the rise and fall of a single, mainstream Feminism.

² Gill Allwood and Khursheed Wadia. “French Feminism: National and International Perspectives.” *Modern & Contemporary France* 10.2 (2002): 214. Web. 9 July 2010.

A Quick History of French and American Feminisms

1700-1800: Enlightenment Rhetoric and the Revolutions, Republican Motherhood and the early Republics

The Enlightenment

Just as the body of Enlightenment thought influenced the French and American revolutions, its valuation of science and reason inspired early French and American feminism. Enlightenment-era intellectual feminists communicated across oceans and national boundaries, with the works of French and British theorists reaching American shores and vice versa. Owing to the way that Enlightenment ideals were shared so widely across Europe and the United States, each Enlightenment thinker had multiple international influences and multiples theorists that (s)he in turn influenced. As such, a rather complex web emerges that is challenging to disentangle. Nonetheless, early feminist theory in France and the United States clearly converged. For example, the eminent French philosopher Condorcet, who was influenced by the writings of Enlightenment era figures in England, such as David Hume, Adam Smith, and Catherine Macaulay, wrote in support of women's' suffrage as early as 1787 in his *Lettres d'un bourgeois de New Haven à un citoyen de Virginie* and in his 1790 paper *Sur l'admission des Femmes au Droit de Cité*.³ Historians assert that through his close friendships with Thomas Jefferson and Benjamin Franklin, Condorcet influenced the shaping of the United States of America.⁴ Indeed, founding father James Madison had transcripts of Condorcet's work.⁵ Just how the founding fathers reacted to Condorcet's belief in equal rights is unclear, if not, at the very least, illustrated by their general failure to support them in the formation of the United States.

³ Karen Offen. "Women and the Question of "Universal" Suffrage in 1848: A Transatlantic Comparison of Suffragist Rhetoric." *NWSA Journal* 11.1 (1999): 153. Web. 2 Jul 2010.

⁴ Norman Schofield. "The intellectual contribution of Condorcet to the founding of the US Republic 1785-1800." *Soc Choice Welfare* 25.2 (2005). Web. 12 September 2010.

⁵ *Ibid.*

Mary Wollstonecraft, an English feminist, found her influences in French, Scottish, and German philosophy. Reflecting such international influences and impulses, Wollstonecraft's seminal treatise, *A Vindication of the Rights of Women* was promptly translated back into German and French. *A Vindication* was published widely in the United States in 1792 with a large readership.⁶ Though "feminism" was not a term applied to the women's movement until the organized 19th and 20th century movements, early Enlightenment thinkers arguably provided a point of emergence for the various French and American feminisms extant today.⁷ In fact, Wollstonecraft's work carried continued feminist significance during the American Revolutionary War and even continued to be cited by feminists through the 20th century.

Ironically, the rhetoric of the Enlightenment that so invigorated and inspired early feminist theorists galvanized some thinkers (for example, Rousseau and Kant) to argue against the extension of legal rights for women. Though *Sapere Aude!* (Dare to Know!) may have been the motto of the Enlightenment, these highly influential philosophers argued that women who dared to reason and learn were dangerous, deviant, or unnatural.⁸ Indeed, the United States Declaration of Independence (1776) and the French Assembly's *Déclaration des droits de l'homme et du citoyen* (1789) emanate a certain misogyny in withholding all political rights from women.

Meanwhile, the works that inspired these Declarations⁹, and the Declarations themselves, are the very same foundations that inspired early feminist manifestoes, such as Olympe de Gouges' *Déclaration des droits de la femme et de la citoyenne* (1791)¹⁰ and the *Declarations of Rights and Sentiments* (1848) drafted by Elizabeth Cady Stanton and a group of Quaker Women at the Seneca Falls Convention in the United States.¹¹ The discord between Enlightenment-influenced feminism and Enlightenment-influenced political and social theory more generally emerged from this early struggle.

⁶ Barbara Taylor. "Feminism and the Enlightenment. 1650-1850." *History Workshop Journal* 47. Spring (1999): 263. Web. 1 July 2010.

⁷ *Ibid*, 264.

⁸ *Ibid*, 264.

⁹ William Uzgalis. "The Influence of John Locke's Works." *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. Stanford University, 2007. Web. 20 Jul 2010.

¹⁰ "The Declaration of the Rights of Man and the Citizen." *France Diplomatie*. Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2008. Web. 20 Jul 2010.

Naomi Schor. "The Crisis of French Universalism." *Yale French Studies* 100. (2001): 47. Web. 20 Jul 2010.

¹¹ Paul Halsall. "The Declaration of Sentiments, Seneca Falls Conference, 1848." *Modern History Sourcebook*. Fordham University, 1998. Web. 20 Jul 2010.

The American and French Revolutions

During and just after the Revolutions of the late 18th century, activists in the United States and in France exalted the virtues of “Republican Motherhood.” In the United States, the work of Wollstonecraft and American Judith Sargent Murray advocated for the importance of women in the Revolution and in society at large as mothers. Murray, armed with French missionary Antoine Thomas’ *Essai sur le caractère, les mœurs et l’esprit des femmes*, argued that women had different natures than men as maternal and nurturing, but were just as capable as men given proper education.¹² She, along with Susannah Rowson and Benjamin Rush, did not go so far as to argue for equality, but for education so that the Republican Mother might be self-reliant, independent and capable of raising a flourishing family of patriots.¹³

France saw a similar kind of argument in advocates such as baronne d’Aelders. By espousing the model of Republican Motherhood, this group of activists supported women’s rights on the basis that women would be responsible for raising and nurturing the generation of new citizens of each of the republics.¹⁴ However, the rhetoric of Republican Motherhood aside, radical feminists played a much more active role, even militant at times, in the French Revolution than in the American Revolution. Along with the highly visible activities of women who petitioned the convention, marched on Versailles, took up arms, stormed the Bastille and joined political clubs, there were feminist theorists who demanded equal rights on the basis of natural law and others who pointed to their political involvement in the revolution as evidence that they too were political citizens. De Gouges, for example, in her *Déclaration des droits de la femme et de la citoyenne*, said nothing of motherhood and wrote, “All women are born free and remain equal to men in rights.”¹⁵ Many male revolutionary leaders, however, wanted little to do with feminist ideas. On October 29, 1793, French women were banned from political clubs, and in 1795 they lost their right to peaceful assembly and attendance at the Convention.¹⁶

The early Republics

After the establishment of the new republics, women were accorded little legal advancement in American and French society. In the

¹² Jane Rendall. "Feminism and Republicanism: American Motherhood." *History Today* 34.12 (1984): 29. Web. 1 Jul 2010.

¹³ Linda Kerber. "The Republican Mother: Women and the Enlightenment- An American Perspective." *American Quarterly* 28.2 (1976): 202. Web. 26 July 2010.

¹⁴ Jane Rendall, 32.

¹⁵ Jane Abrey. "Feminism in the French Revolution." *The American Historical Review* 80.1 (1975): 48. Web. 23 July 2010.

¹⁶ Dorinda Outram. "Review: Revolution, Domesticity, and Feminism: Women in France after 1789." *Historical Journal* 32.4 (1989): 975. Web. 1 Jul 2010.

United States, slight tweaks to state laws provided divorce rights and allowed greater liberty to women as property owners. However, such minor changes were made inconsistently because they were made at the state and not the federal level.¹⁷ Activists continued during this period with the revolutionary project of educating women—not for their own fulfillment, but so that women could make better wives, mothers, and household managers.

In France, women also gained new inheritance and divorce rights.¹⁸ After the passage of *5 brumaire an II* (26 October 1793) and *17 nivôse an II* (6 January 1794), which changed inheritance laws to include equal divisions of property regardless of gender or birth order, female activists fought for the law's *de facto* influence on the lives of individual women in thousands of family law courts across the entirety of France in the face of regional traditions and customs.¹⁹ To garner support for women's treatment in the matters of inheritance and divorce laws, activists framed their arguments by appealing to Republican motherhood, domesticity and by combining the rhetoric of the Old Regime and the French Revolution to support the vision of an egalitarian, nuclear family.²⁰

- Enlightenment Rhetoric: Early French and American feminists had common influences in Condorcet, Wollstonecraft and the milieu of Enlightenment thinkers who were translated and carried across oceans.
- The Revolutions: French and American feminists promoted the ideal of Republican motherhood during the revolutions, whether out of true ideological conviction, or to frame women's advancement in society as patriotic and non-threatening. The revolutionary era also saw "natural rights" feminists, who were more politically active in France.
- Early Republics: The mainstream post-revolutionary feminisms of France and the United States shared a belief in Republican Motherhood. As such, their first goal was education for women, followed by divorce and inheritance rights, and political rights.

¹⁷ Rendall, 31.

¹⁸ Outram, 971-979.

¹⁹ Suzanne Desan. "'War between Brothers and Sisters': Inheritance Law and Gender Politics in Revolutionary France." *French Historical Studies* 20.4 (1997): 598, 602. Web. 2 Jul 2010.

²⁰ *Ibid*, 601.

1800-1900: The Cult of Domesticity, Utopian Movements, The First Wave, and Socialist Movements

The cult of domesticity

In the early 1800's, both nations pushed women back into the home as public receptivity of vocal, political women declined.

In the United States, activists such as Judith Sargeant Murray and Mercy Otis Warren, credited with advocating feminist ideas actively in the 1790's, lost public support by the early 1800's.²¹ Though women's rights had been recognized in certain limited spheres (such as divorce and property ownership), they were considered to be an entirely separate sphere from the rights of man. Historians tend to locate the cause of the push towards female domesticity in the market revolutions and industrialization that occurred in the early 19th century as men moved outside the home in search of waged-labor.²² Importantly, this shift is a primarily middle-class one. With the rise of industrialization, both parents of poorer families left in search of work.

Whatever the functional cause, the "cult of domesticity" often saw its justifications in religious rhetoric. Women who spoke publicly and expressed themselves politically were no longer considered activists who were challenging gender norms in the spirit of the revolution. Rather, the public considered such women to be deviants. By the early 19th century, public and political speech acts violated "the ordinance of heaven" and was considered by many to be an affront to God.²³ This religious justification, so evident in the language of middle-class, Victorian morality of 19th century America was mirrored in the second "Great Awakening", a period in the early 1800's when a new religious fervor spread in the various Protestant Sects of America. Though women had actively participated in the first Great awakening (1730-1750), some as religious leaders and many as public and opinionated speakers, they faced backlash and censure from the predominantly male church hierarchies during the second Great Awakening. Indeed, ever more frequently during this period religious periodicals, newspapers, and editorials reminded readers to "Let your women learn to keep silence in the churches."²⁴

²¹ Patricia Cline Cohen. "Women in the Early Republic." OAH Magazine of History 14.2 (2000): 9. Web. 19 Jul 2010.

²² Brekus, Catherine A. "Restoring the Divine Order of the World: Religion and the Family in the Antebellum Women's Rights Movement." Religion, Feminism, and the Family. Ed. Anne E. Carr and Mary Stewart Van Leeuwen. Louisville: Westminster Knox Press, 1996. Print.

²³ Rosemarie Zagari. "The Rights of Man and Woman in Post-Revolutionary America." William and Mary Quarterly 55.2 (1998): 219. Web. 20 Jul 2010.

²⁴ Cohen, 10.

An additional justification for pushing women into the private sphere emerged in “virtue rhetoric”. The trend of viewing women as delicate and virtuous private citizens informed the development of the cult of domesticity. While the domestic work of a 1780’s housewife was associated with productive labor, the quotidian tasks of the 1820s housewife had become a “service provided as a feminine gift.”²⁵ By pointing out women’s high moral virtue and delicate sensibilities, cult of domesticity rhetoric sought to keep women from public life, supposedly to protect them from its hardship.

American feminism during this time took a number of forms though it is challenging to identify any sort of explicit feminist movement among the women of the era for a number of reasons. Not all women who spoke publicly had overtly feminist agendas, though they were inherently challenging gender norms of the early 1800’s. At the same time, many of the developments of this era were subtle, contextual shifts such as increased women’s education, more legal protections, waged-labor that removed men from the home, and declining birth rates that would set the stage for the First Wave of activism.²⁶ Nonetheless, identifiable feminist ideology is detectable in various terrains. Specifically, some feminists continued to advocate for women’s education. Other women continued to speak out in public on various social concerns and eventually formed the backbone of the various reform movements leading up to the start of the First Wave feminism. Future First Wave leaders also gained public experience in religious movements.

France also experienced the rise of a cult of domesticity. It was in part due to the structural changes made by Napoleon Bonaparte and was justified by similar exhortations of female virtue. Divorce and inheritance rights were restricted in 1803 and rescinded totally in 1816.²⁷ Napoleon, though famously misogynistic and once quoted as saying that women were “machines to make babies,” represents a curious, though accidental, contributor to the feminist movement in France.²⁸ While simultaneously restricting women’s legal rights and attempting to force females into the home, he also reinstated the salon culture of pre-Revolutionary aristocrats to coax the elites back to Paris.

By reforming the salons, he hoped to reassimilate old-regime elites with the new post-revolutionary bourgeoisie to restore normalcy and France’s pre-revolutionary glory.²⁹ Though envisioning women as hostesses rather than the active participants and facilitators of political discussion, which they had been before the Revolution,

²⁵ Ibid, 11.

²⁶ Ibid, 8.

²⁷ Outram, 976.

²⁸ Sean M. Quinlan. “Review: Napoleon and the Woman Question: Discourses of the Other Sex in French Education, Medicine, and Medical Law, 1799-1815.” *Bulletin of the History of Medicine* 83.3 (2009): 614. Web. 20 July 2010.

²⁹ Steven D. Kale. “Women, Salons, and the State in the Aftermath of the French Revolution.” *Journal of Women’s History* 13.4 (2002): 58. Web. 21 July 2010.

Napoleon simultaneously banished women to the private sphere of the home and then moved the political sphere to join them there in the salon.

As in America, the era is characterized by individual female voices and authors who spoke publicly. Napoleon's banishment of many aristocratic women illustrates the political threat they posed. Napoleon exiled a number of women for being political dissidents, such as Madame de Staël for running a salon of eminent, liberal ideologues; Madame de Champcenetz for joining a royalist conspiracy; and Madame de Chevreuse for making fun of him in her salon.³⁰ Though this group is one of primarily upper-class Parisian women, their visibility shows that the conditions of the French cult of domesticity provided a backdrop against which women continued to behave as political subjects, contrary to social norms.

Though many historians of France have traditionally viewed the shift towards domesticity as a result of the spread of the middle-class ideal of market capitalism and industrialization - just as in the United States -, scholars have conversely argued that the French cult of domesticity differed fundamentally from its American cousin. Margaret Darrow, for example, provides two reasons why domesticity as an ideal was something taken up instantaneously and explicitly by aristocratic women, as opposed to a gradual spread from the middle-class upward. First, since many aristocrats lost estates and went into exile during the Revolution, aristocratic women had to perform household chores of necessity, having lost the support of an entire household to do such work. Second, espousing domesticity as an ideal became a method of exhibiting aristocratic power and dominance once these families were re-established in France.³¹ As such, the very public lives of aristocratic women shifted to entertaining in the home (sometimes in the form of salons) and taking a more active role in family life.

Interestingly, organized religion plays some role here as well as it did in the formation of America's cult of domesticity. Aristocratic families anxious to regain power and status often aligned themselves with the Catholic Church after the Revolution, because the church supported the monarchy which in turn supported the aristocracy. Support for the church also reinforced the cult of domesticity because of its strong prescriptions of proper family order, with the father at its head.³² Finally, Outram identifies the use of virtue rhetoric as operative here. Specifically, when revolutionaries began to argue that the virtue of the republic rested upon the virtue of republican women, some therefore concluded that women should remain protected in the home.³³

³⁰ Ibid, 63-64.

³¹ Margaret H. Darrow. "French Noblewomen and the New Domesticity, 1750-1850." *Feminist Studies* 5.1 (1979). 42. Web. 21 July 2010.

³² Ibid, 55.

³³ Outram, 973.

Utopian movements

American and French feminist histories run parallel again in the 1830s through the emergence of utopian socialist movements in both countries. The French main utopian socialist group, the Saint-Simonians, inspired modern feminism in both France and the United States in a number of ways. Though the movement originally focused on class equality and gender equality, double standards in practice and an evolution towards a ritualistic and somewhat mystical movement alienated many female Saint-Simonians. As a result, they left the group to form the *Tribune des Femmes*, a journal to which only women could contribute. There, they argued for Civil Code reform, legal rights, and educational and employment opportunities for women.³⁴ This new group of Saint-Simonian women marked the point of emergence for the modern and organized political feminism of the later 19th century.

Meanwhile, American women were involved in a number of utopian social movements as well as campaigns such as Abolition (the anti-slavery movement), anti-alcohol crusades and social communitarianism. Such organizations served to create a newly public and political female figure.³⁵ One of the largest catalysts of American feminism was, unintentionally, the abolitionist movement which, like the Saint-Simonians, alienated many of its outspoken, female activists. In 1840, for example, male abolitionists rejected all of the U.S. female delegates to the London World Anti-Slavery Convention. American abolitionists Lucretia Mott and Elizabeth Cady Stanton located their turn towards feminism in that insult.³⁶ English abolitionist and feminist Anne Knight experienced the same rejection and met Lucretia Mott and Elizabeth Cady Stanton in England in 1840. Similarly energized by this, she began sending activists and organizers to the United States and France to spread women's rights activism.³⁷

Indeed, a rich network of feminists formed out of this international context, the historical convergence of the various European revolutions of 1848 and the struggle against abolition. Extensive communication among American, British, Irish, French and German feminists demonstrates that through this network of idea and literature sharing, the feminists of these countries had begun to "share a common discourse and set of expectations" regarding women's rights.³⁸

³⁴ Claire G. Moses. "Saint-Simonian Men/Saint-Simonian Women: The Transformation of Feminist Thought in 1830s' France." *Journal of Modern History* 54.2 (1982): 265-266. Web. 2 Jul 2010.

³⁵ Owen, 155.

³⁶ Bonnie S. Anderson. "The Lid Comes Off: International Radical Feminism and the Revolutions of 1848." *NWSA Journal* 10.2 (1998): 2. Web. 26 July 2010.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 12.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 4.

1848, the First Wave

The year 1848 stands out as an important one for the French and American feminist movements and is the birth year of what came to be called the First Wave, a period characterized by organized feminist activism devoted to attaining the right to vote. After the 1848 Revolution in France, the Provisional Government of the Second Republic abolished slavery and extended suffrage to all men, regardless of property rights or birth status. A group of Parisian women began to petition the government immediately for truly universal suffrage. The *Comité des Droits de la Femme* and *Société pour l'Emancipation des Femmes* formed and began organizing around the issue of women's suffrage by petitioning the government and making public appeals.³⁹ In the newspaper *La Voix des Femmes*, activists such as Jeanne Deroin and Eugénie Niboyet argued emphatically for extending suffrage to women. But ultimately, with the formation of the National Assembly, women were excluded from suffrage, and once again prohibited from participating in political clubs. Despite this, the French feminist movement continued to lobby vocally for legal rights and social change, and historian Karen Offen calls it, "the most advanced and most experienced of all Western feminist movements" at the time.⁴⁰

In the United States, feminists were well aware of the political events in France in the late 1840s both as members of the abolitionist movement and supporters of women's rights. In fact, American activist Emma Willard even wrote a letter to the Provisional President of the new Republic Dupont de l'Eure, demanding that French women be extended the right to vote.⁴¹ On July 14th 1848 (the anniversary of the fall of the Bastille), a group of American feminists met to draft the "Declaration of Sentiments" at the Seneca Falls Convention in Seneca Falls, New York, in which they passed a number of resolutions concerning women's rights and detailed the grievances against women propagated by the carriage of law. Offen argues that not only were French and American feminists aware and supportive of each other's efforts, both groups were distinctly aware of and inspired by the feminist movement in Great Britain that had been very publicly active since 1820.⁴² Further, a book of published letters indicates that the leaders of the break-off Saint-Simonian women's group stayed in direct contact with American political organizers. For example, Pauline Roland and Jeanne Deroin wrote to Lucretia Mott and the American First Wave women's movement would frequently cite Roland's attempt to vote and Deroin's political candidacy in its own arguments for women's rights.⁴³ In addition, both groups often

³⁹ Offen, 151.

⁴⁰ Ibid, 153.

⁴¹ Ibid, 153-154.

⁴² Ibid, 155.

⁴³ Moses, 266. FN 89. Anderson, 3.

cited revolutionary ideology as a justification for suffrage. French feminists appealed to “*liberté, égalité, fraternité*” and American feminists appealed to the Declaration of Independence.⁴⁴ One major difference between the French and American First Wavers is that American feminists had dropped the rhetoric of motherhood, though it remained an element of feminist demands in France.⁴⁵

Socialist movements 1870-1930

Interestingly, another similarity between feminism in France and in the United States is the feminist critique that emerged out of the sociopolitical movements in the late 1800's and early 20th century. In Paris, the loss of the Franco-Prussian war and ultimately the formation of the Paris Commune fostered the rise of radical, feminist activism. The Commune actively involved women, some of whom had had privileged, middle-class backgrounds but many of whom were working-class. Feminisms of the Commune varied from the rhetoric of anarchism, suffrage, and legal equality of the sexes to simply demanding more legal rights and better working conditions.⁴⁶ The *Union des femmes pour la défense de Paris et les soins aux blessés* became a meeting place for many of the socialist feminists of the time and oriented discrimination against women in specifically class terms—as a mechanism by which the privileged class discriminates against the working class.⁴⁷ After the Commune's defeat, over one thousand women were brought before the council of war and questioned as to their involvement in the Commune.⁴⁸ At least 311 women took part in the *Union*.⁴⁹

Prosecution in such large numbers indicates the high degree to which women were politically involved in the Commune. In addition, notable here is the dual involvement of feminists in political and labor movements. The most famous of them, Louise Michel, was a close associate of Jules Guesde, Peter Kropotkin, Emma Goldman, and Paul Lafargue, and has become an icon of revolutionary ideology.⁵⁰ The *Union* itself was organized by Elizabeth Dmitrieff, a friend of Karl Marx, and run by Nathalie Lemel, an anarchist who also ran *La Marmite*, a restaurant and favorite meeting spot for labor activists.⁵¹

⁴⁴ Offen, 157.

⁴⁵ Ibid, 157.

⁴⁶ Eugene Schulkind. “Socialist Women during the 1871 Paris Commune.” *Past & Present* 106 (1985):136. Web. 22 July 2010.

⁴⁷ Ibid, 139.

⁴⁸ Marie Marmo Mullaney. “Sexual Politics in the Career and Legend of Louise Michel.” *Signs* 15.2 (1990): 304. Web. 22 July 2010.

⁴⁹ Schulkind, 128.

⁵⁰ Mullaney, 303.

⁵¹ Ibid, 306.

Much of what researchers know about feminist movements during the Paris Commune come from the unpublished memoirs of André Léo, a socialist and feminist who worked as a journalist and speaker to spread feminist and socialist causes.⁵² Paule Minck, a socialist and feminist, continued after the Commune as a labor organizer, anarchist, and speaker, inciting the coal miner strikes in Carmaux in the 1890's and continuing to agitate on behalf of women's labor rights.⁵³

In the U.S., the late 19th century ushered in the formation of American socialist, communist and anarchist movements, which grew out of earlier American and European utopian projects as well as the introduction of European theorists such as Marx, Engels, and Trotsky. The Haymarket Affair of 1886 fostered socialist feminism in a way that is similar to the Paris Commune. After a peaceful demonstration turned violent, resulting in the deaths of police officers and civilians alike, a court found eight protesters (six of whom were immigrants) guilty of murder and sentenced seven to the death penalty. The widely-publicized trial produced little credible evidence of their guilt and energized the labor movement in the United States.

Communism, socialism, and anarchism attracted extremely outspoken women, many of whom espoused radical "Second Wave" values, and pointed to the Haymarket Affair as the moment that inspired their ideological turns. These women made highly publicized and political arguments for women's rights beyond voting rights—sexual liberation, access to contraception, and a denial of many of the structural institutions that "enslaved" women. Emma Goldman, a famous anarchist and feminist, has become somewhat of a legend in the United States as both a political radical and a feminist who argued on behalf of free love, reproductive rights and women's rights. Her image as a radical and a feminist of the turn of the century was re-appropriated by Second Wave feminists of the 1960s and she is considered a progenitor of feminism today.⁵⁴ Interestingly, Goldman gave a lecture on Wollstonecraft's legacy for radical feminism, reflecting yet another transatlantic crossing of feminist theory.⁵⁵ Even more radical than Goldman, American immigrant anarchist Voltairine de Cleyre went further than rejecting the institution of marriage to

⁵² Schulkind, 157.

⁵³ Patricia Hildren. "Class and Gender: Conflicting Components of Women's Behavior in the Textile Mills of Lille, Roubaix, and Tourcoing, 1880-1914." *The Historical Journal* 27.2 (1984): 382. Web. 22 July 2010. See FN 82.

Leo Loubère. "Coal Miners, Strikes and Politics in the Lower Languedoc, 1880-1914." *Journal of Social History* 2.1 (1968): 29, 30. Web. 22 July 2010.

Charles Gide. "The Carmaux Strike." *The Economic Journal* 2.8 (1892): 714. Web. 22 July 2010.

⁵⁴ Oz Frankel. "Whatever Happened to 'Red Emma'? Emma Goldman, from Alien Rebel to American Icon." *The Journal of American History* 83.3 (1996): 903. Web. 22 July 2010.

⁵⁵ Alice Wexler and Emma Goldman. "Emma Goldman on Mary Wollstonecraft." *Feminist Studies* 7.1 (1981): 131. Web. 22 July 2010.

rejecting motherhood and permanent relationships between men and women at all. Though overshadowed by Goldman in the contemporary public imagination, de Cleyre's ideas stand as a precursor to the "separatism" that emerged from the Second Wave movements.⁵⁶ Ella Reeve Bloor, commonly called "Mother Bloor," was an outspoken suffragist and socialist renowned as a union organizer for the Communist Party, International Labor Defense, Friends of the Soviet Union, Trade Union Educational League, International Women's Congress Against War and Fascism, and the United Farmer's League.⁵⁷ The complexities of political identity arise in these movements, however. Commentators point out that Elizabeth Gurley Flynn, one of Bloor's famous co-organizers, and Bloor herself were known to prioritize class struggles over gender activism.⁵⁸

- **The Cult of Domesticity:** Both the United States and France saw the rise of the Cult of Domesticity in the early 1800's, based on different causes. In the United States, the Cult rose out of a new economic system, evangelical awakenings and Victorian morality. In France, the cult emerged from the Napoleonic code, the Church, and political reorganization.
- **Utopian Socialism:** Organized feminism grew in France out of a group of women who had been alienated from the social utopian group the Saint-Simonians due to gender discrimination. In the United States, organized feminism stemmed from women who had been alienated from the abolitionist movement for similar reasons. Their feminisms emerged during a time of increased communication and political upheaval across Europe, informing the way they formed feminist networks and shared similar ideas. These networks were utilized by future feminists.
- **The First Wave:** By 1850, the majority of feminist activists organized around suffrage, in a fight that came to be called the First Wave and was to last until the mid-1900's. They appealed to the rhetoric of history and republicanism on the one hand and pointed to fundamental and essential differences between men and women on the other as justification for their inclusion in the electorate.

56 Catherine Helen Palczewski. "Voltairine de Cleyre: Sexual Slavery and Sexual Pleasure in the Nineteenth Century." *NWSA Journal* 7.3 (1995):55. Web. 22 July 2010.

57 Kathleen A. Brown. "The 'Savagely Fathered and Un-Mothered World' of the Communist Party, U.S.A.: Feminism, Maternalism, and 'Mother Bloor'." *Feminist Studies* 25.3 (1999):543. Web. 22 July 2010.

58 Brown, 561.

- Labor Movements: In the late 1800's, French and American radical feminists not only communicated with each other, but shared mutual friends in various socialist theorists as well as influences in Marx, Engels, and Trotsky. Owing to their shared socialist influences and involvement in labor movements, both groups of feminists felt the tension between lobbying for women's rights versus continuing the struggle for class equality.

1960-1975: The Second Wave

The "Second Wave" of feminism erected the closest alliance between French and American feminists. In the United States, the history of this momentous period continues to be the subject of contentious debate among scholars regarding the interplay between class, race, and gender and the lack of recognition of these interactions in traditional accounts of the era. Some historians are now questioning the widely accepted narrative of Second Wave feminism as one that traditionally leaves out the leadership and contributions of women of color and women of low socioeconomic status.⁵⁹

Generally speaking, the movement is characterized as a radical feminism that emerged out of much of the social unrest of the 1960s. The Second Wave organized around a number of issues and philosophies, without one dominant hierarchy or identity. This is especially evident in the large number of issues and orientations of "Second Wavers". Among the various identities are homemakers, employed women, socialists, communists, anarchists, separatists, immigrant women, academics, women of color, straight women and lesbian women, to name a very small portion, with a large amount of overlap. As one might imagine, women with such a variety of orientations contributed to the complex architecture that was the Second Wave agenda, bringing to the table such issues as objectification of women, sexual empowerment, reproductive rights, peace activism, employment rights, and access to education. In the United States, they succeeded in the passage of the Equal Pay Act, Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, the extension of affirmative action to cover gender, greater contraceptive rights, and the formation of massive organization of national women's groups such as the National Organization for Women (NOW) and the National Abortion Rights Action League (NARAL).

Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* played an influential role in this stage of the American feminist movement. It was

⁵⁹ Becky Thompson. "Multiracial Feminism: Recasting the Chronology of Second Wave Feminism." *Feminist Studies* 28.2 (2002): 337. Web. 10 September 2010.

translated into English in 1953 and cited by Betty Friedan as a major influence of *The Feminine Mystique*. Schulamith Firestone, author of *The Dialectic of Sex: The Case for the Feminist Revolution*, dedicated *The Dialectic* to Simone de Beauvoir.⁶⁰ Kate Millet, author of *Sexual Politics*, acknowledged that “I owe a great debt to *The Second Sex*. I couldn't have written *Sexual Politics* without it.”⁶¹

In 1968, the *Mouvement de libération des femmes* marked the official beginning of the French Second Wave and has been reported in French newspapers as the “first cousin to the female movement in America” and as having been born of “the American example.”⁶² The feminist movements of the United States and of France were really a collection of many groups and individuals without one overarching hierarchy or structure. The movement brought together a wide range of women who did not necessarily share a common vision of what feminism was intended to achieve.

A good deal of evidence illustrates the cooperation of the two movements, however. On both sides of the Atlantic the women's movement restructured the arguments of feminism. Individual feminists set the women's movement up in opposition to the conservative Right, as was traditionally done. However, in many cases, they set out to redefine the feminist struggle completely by attacking Leftists feminists who were considered complacent actors in the “established liberal state.”⁶³ One of the first major demonstrations in France, the tribute to the wife of the Unknown Soldier on 26 August 1970 was coordinated so that it fell on the same day as the U.S. Women's Strike day in America, which U.S. feminists organized to commemorate the 50th anniversary of women's suffrage.⁶⁴

In addition, one-third of the articles published in *Libération des femmes: année zéro* were written by feminists from the United States.⁶⁵ French translations of Friedan's *Feminine Mystique* and Millet's *Sexual Politics* served as important tools for the women's movement in France. This, once again, represents transatlantic idea sharing between French and American feminists. French translations of U.S. feminists like the Redstockings, Carol Hanisch, Anne Koedt, Naomi Weisstein, and Margaret Bentsen also appeared in various French journals.⁶⁶

The public perception of the two women's movements was similar in that by the early 1980s, the movements were popularly

⁶⁰ Ann Curthoys. “Adventures of Feminism: Simone de Beauvoir's Autobiographies, Women's Liberation, and Self-Fashioning.” *Feminist Review* 64 (2000): 12. Web. 23 July 2010.

⁶¹ Curthoy, FN 4.

⁶² Judith Ezekiel. “Le Women's Lib: Made in France.” *European Journal of Women's Studies* 9.3 (2002): 347. Web. 6 Jul 2010.

⁶³ Claire Goldberg Moses. “Made in America: ‘French Feminism’ in Academia.” *Feminist Studies* 24.2 (1998): 243. Web. 7 Jul 2010.

⁶⁴ Ezekiel, 347.

⁶⁵ Ezekiel, 347.

⁶⁶ Moses, 244.

thought to have begun to lose steam and even lose relevancy. This turning point is the point of emergence for the modern strands of feminism thought.

- Second wave feminists in the United States and France came from a wide variety of backgrounds and cared about a wide variety of issues. The movements led to unprecedented social and legal change through activism and scholarship.
- Feminists of the United States and France worked closely together with important works being translated back and forth across the Atlantic.

Modern Strands and Misinterpretations (1980-Present)

French Feminism and Women's Lib

Perhaps most illustrative of misunderstandings between the two feminist camps are the American notion of “French feminism” and the French notion of “women’s liberation.” This misunderstanding traces precisely to the emergence of the French feminist movement *Psych et Po* and is a result of media portrayals and public understandings of French and American feminisms as monoliths.

Most American academics are quick to speak of so-called “French Feminism,” as in the psychoanalytical theories of Hélène Cixous, Julia Kristeva, and Luce Irigaray, which focus on the essential differences between men and women and decry any sort of equating of the feminine with the masculine. But, as Christine Delphy adeptly puts it, “French Feminism’ is not feminism in France,” but is rather a construction that has been promulgated with distinctly political motivations.⁶⁷

Indeed, by the early 1970s, the French feminist movement had begun to break into distinct movements, with separate journals, protests and agendas, including *Psychanalyse et politique* (a.k.a. “*Psych et Po*”), the *Féministes révolutionnaires*, the *Cercle Elizabeth-Dimitriev*, the *Gouines rouges*, the *Groupes de quartier*, the *Groupes de province*, the *Ligue du droit des femmes*, *SOS Femmes*, and the *Pétroleuses*.⁶⁸

The *Psych et Po* movement was spearheaded by Antoinette Fouque, a Lacanian psychoanalyst, who also led the charge in opposition to American feminism.⁶⁹ In fact, from the beginning, *Psych et Po* set out to “identify the originality of the European movement” by attacking the “hypocritical American ideology with which all feminism conforms.”⁷⁰ Despite the fact that there are and have always been multiple feminisms in France, the singular philosophy of *Psych et Po*

⁶⁷ Christine Delphy. “The Invention of French Feminism: An Essential Move.” *Yale French Studies* 97.2 (2000): 168. Web. 7 Jul 2010.

⁶⁸ Dorothy Kaufmann-McCall. “Politics of Difference: The Women’s Movement in France from May 1968 to Mitterrand.” *Signs* 9.2 (1983): 283. Web. 6 Jul 2010.

⁶⁹ *Ibid*, 284.

⁷⁰ Ezekiel, 348.

became falsely equated with French feminism as a whole, perhaps owing to the political and scholarly influences of the group. This is ironic in that the theorists of *Psych et Po* used “feminism” as a pejorative term and opposed the idea that women should be working to improve their rights at all within an already male-dominated power structure.⁷¹

Though originally, all French feminist movements had operated under the umbrella of the *Mouvement de libération des femmes (MLF)*, in 1979, *Psych et Po* trademarked the name and its symbol, thereby preventing any movements which were actually feminist from using, representing or publishing with that name.⁷² Thus, the academics (philosophers, writers, critics, and psychoanalysts) behind *Psych et Po* became the legal owners of the emblem of the French feminist movement, while other feminists, the materialist feminists, new Marxists, and issue-driven feminists began to be marginalized. This marginalization occurred in the French media and as a result, in the American media and academic journals.⁷³

Historian Christine Delphy argues that the falsehood of *Psych et Po*'s French feminism was even knowingly propagated at times by Anglo-American women's studies scholars and feminists for the purpose of introducing differentialist ideology (i.e. pointing to essential differences between men and women) without having to take responsibility for it, knowing that they could pass it off as “French.”⁷⁴ She also sees imperialism as a factor in propagating the *Psych et Po* false feminism. By lumping all feminists who are French in with Cixous, Kristeva, and Irigaray as well as with Freud, Lacan, and Foucault, Anglo-American scholars isolate and distance themselves from their theories by labeling them as the exotic “French theories”, no matter how disparate the works of these scholars actually are. This act has not been without consequences and to some extent, has worked against the real feminist movements in France by focusing Anglo-American media recognition singularly on *Psych et Po* and therefore implicitly taking sides.⁷⁵

The misunderstanding works both ways, however. Whereas the American mainstream media and scholarly journals have taken to portraying French feminists as a purely academic, essentializing and exotic Other, the French mainstream media have constructed their own vision of American feminism. Gender issues over time were conflated with a nationalistic agenda. Though most French and American feminist groups were initially supportive of one another, Fouque, along with *Psych et Po*, condemned not only feminism but

⁷¹ Danièle Stewart. “The Women's Movement in France.” *Signs* 6.2 (1980): 353. Web. 7 July 2010.

⁷² Moses, 251.

⁷³ *Ibid*, 254.

⁷⁴ Delphy, 168-169.

⁷⁵ *Ibid*, 191.

American influences as well.⁷⁶ During this time, there was a great deal of American opposition to feminist movements, often originating on the Right. However, in France, opposition to American feminist movements was evident in the rhetoric of Left, Right, and Center, among both men and women.⁷⁷ By combining anti-American and anti-feminist sentiments, politicians, newspapers and theorists tried to distance France from the so-called “ugly, lesbian, man-hating puritans” of the American movement as well as from American multicultural influences, which stood as a perceived threat to French universalism. Another reason for the negative portrayal of feminist movements in America is that their adaptation by French women could potentially upset the “harmonious gender relations” that have long been part of the French nation-building myth, which is a totem both in the national consciousness and in intellectual circles.⁷⁸

This attitude is especially visible in the reaction of media and intellectual circles in France to the Thomas-Hill harassment suit. In 1991, President Bush nominated Clarence Thomas to the U.S. Supreme Court. Towards the end of the confirmation hearings, sexual harassment allegations by Anita Hill, a law professor who had previously worked with Thomas, were leaked to the press.⁷⁹ The events were publicized around the world, and raised similar questions in France. According to a survey orchestrated by the *secrétariat d'État aux droits des femmes* in December 1991, 93 percent of the French public took sexual harassment in the work place to be very serious while 70 percent favored an expanded definition of sexual harassment to include fostering a hostile work environment. Eighty-eight percent thought that sexual harassment was an issue of justice and therefore a serious problem.⁸⁰ Yet the front page of *Le Monde* called the Thomas-Hill hearings “a sordid spectacle” and Annette Lévy-Willard of *Libération* and a former feminist activist commented: “the witch-hunting season is open, confusing equality and prudery.”⁸¹ Elizabeth Badinter, a French philosopher and feminist, wrote that Thomas was a victim of “a kind of terrorism inspired by a relentless feminist inquisition.”⁸² On the topic of American feminist inquisitors, Badinter elaborates that they “share with the Puritans their hatred of sex, in particular of the male sex. Men’s desire neither flatters nor seduces them—it terrifies them. In their eyes, men are not friends,

⁷⁶ Ezekiel, 348.

⁷⁷ Ibid, 346.

⁷⁸ Eric Fassin. “The Purloined Gender: American Feminism in a French Mirror.” *French Historical Studies* 22.1 (1999): 118. Web. 7 July 2010.

⁷⁹ The very public hearings that followed raised many issues for the American public and the commentary surrounding the event served as a painful reminder that issues surrounding race, gender, sexual harassment, and victim-blaming were far from resolved.

⁸⁰ Ibid, 135.

⁸¹ Ezekiel, 350.

⁸² Ibid, 350.

allies, or lovers, but enemies and oppressors.”⁸³ French historian Mona Ozouf points to an “everyday feminist discourse” that “flows logically from ‘female fundamentalism’, a ‘new American woman’s religion.’”⁸⁴ Though employing sensationalist language, these French descriptions of American feminists exhibit popular depictions of American feminism by confusing the women’s movement, separatism, Puritanism, and militancy.

Post-Feminism

While French feminism has problematically come to stand for an academic and theoretical support of femininity in direct opposition to American feminism, “American feminism” has come to stand for a militant and radical group of feminists who are actively waging the “battle of the sexes.” However, a point of convergence has emerged once again as growing criticisms of feminist causes by American and French media and intellectuals alike have ushered in an alleged era of post-feminism.

The term “post-feminist” appeared in the United States as early as 1982 in a *New York Times* article entitled “Voices from the Post-Feminist Generation.”⁸⁵ Since then, the term has been used widely with varied meanings. In 1990, *Time Magazine* published a cover with the caption “Is Feminism Dead?” In a 1990 *Newsweek* article “The Failure of Feminism,” Kay Ebeling asserted that indeed, feminism was dead, having failed an entire generation of women by destroying traditional roles within the family unit.⁸⁶ In 1993, the *Atlantic* published Wendy Kaminer’s article on “Feminism’s Identity Crisis” about the contradictions and failures in the movement.⁸⁷ Besides pointing to the failures of the movement, some point to the backlash against the feminist movement, like Lisa Hogeland’s article “Fear of Feminism,” published in *Ms. Magazine* in 1994.⁸⁸

Post-feminism is an amorphous and slippery concept to pin down. It is more of a shorthand term used to describe a number of new stances about the feminist movement: (1) support for the women’s movement has decreased; (2) backlash has increased; (3) the women’s movement is no longer relevant, either because it failed

⁸³ Ibid, 352.

⁸⁴ Ibid, 352.

⁸⁵ Susan Bolotin. “Voices from the Post-Feminist Generation.” *New York Times Magazine* 17 October 1982, Final: 29. Web. 15 July 2010.

⁸⁶ Kay Ebeling. “The Failure of Feminism.” *Newsweek* 19 November 1990. Web. 15 July 2010.

⁸⁷ Wendy Kaminer. “Feminism’s Identity Crisis.” *The Atlantic* October 1993. Web. 15 July 2010.

⁸⁸ Lisa Maria Hogeland. “Fear of Feminism.” *Ms. Magazine* November/December 1994. Web. Reproduced on Vancouver Rape Relief & Women’s Shelter website. 15 July 2010.

to achieve gender equality or because it was successful enough that young women no longer need it; (4) a new version of feminism has developed for young women who claim “I’m not a feminist, but...” such that they support the tangible goals of feminism but reject the label “feminist.”⁸⁹ A solid body of evidence substantiates that post-feminism is a phenomenon widely discussed in American and French media though survey-data also strongly supports rejecting the first three notions of post-feminism in favor of more compelling theories.

Hall and Rodriguez compare those three notions (decrease in support, increase in backlash, and/or declining relevancy) with actual survey data from the 1980s and 1990s. They conclude that the negative media portrayal of feminism is not supported by the actual opinions of survey takers. By analyzing survey data from the Roper Poll database along with National Expert Survey (NES) and the General Social Survey (GSS), Hall and Rodriguez found, in fact, that the support for the women’s movement has actually increased between 1972 and 1996.⁹⁰ In addition, they found that the data do not support the claim that young women have grown increasingly anti-feminist. Young adults were more likely to support the women’s movement than other sample ages and nearly twice as many youth reported being very supportive of the women’s movement as older people.⁹¹

If public support for the women’s movement in the United States has indeed improved, then why exactly has post-feminism entered the ring as a legitimate alternative to feminism? Hall and Rodriguez point to the process in which, over the decades, post-feminism has been “talked into existence.”⁹² Indeed, the term “post-feminism” has certainly crept into academia and scholarly jargon, though it was originally coined by journalists. As post-feminist discourse becomes increasingly more popular, many women and men, though supporting the various causes of feminism, distance themselves from the feminist label, which appears either too radical or a sunk ship. Interestingly, when survey takers were asked if they were feminists, they were slightly less likely to answer in the affirmative as when asked if they were supporters of the women’s movement. This attitude, the “I’m not a feminist, but...”, is a major facet of modern feminism and shall be discussed below.

Post-feminism also appeared in France in the early 1980s when the French media announced the death of feminism.⁹³ Though textual and survey data analysis are not available to confirm or refute the accuracy of post-feminist claims in France, there is compelling

⁸⁹ Elaine J. Hall and Marnie Salupo Rodriguez. “The Myth of Postfeminism.” *Gender and Society* 17, 6 (2003): 879. Web. 9 July 2010.

⁹⁰ *Ibid*, 886.

⁹¹ *Ibid*, 889-890.

⁹² *Ibid*, 884.

⁹³ Gill Allwood and Khursheed Wadia. “French Feminism: National and International Perspectives.” *Modern & Contemporary France* 10.2 (2002): 215. 9 July 2010.

evidence for the fact that feminism may manifest itself differently now, but is no less potent. The social and political atmosphere in France especially fostered media speculations about the “death of feminism” or its declining relevancy. The “death of feminism” rhetoric seems to have originated from the ongoing struggles within the women’s movement. Though the French women’s movement was never monolithically or hierarchically organized, by the 1980s it had frayed as various feminists group were alienated by *Psych et Po*’s tactics. Where the media saw the decline of the women’s movement, feminist groups were simply organizing along new lines with new tactics.

Besides, the “declining relevancy” rhetoric may also stem from the perceived institutionalization of feminism. In 1981, the Socialist government established the Ministry of Women’s Rights and appointed Yvette Roudy its first minister.⁹⁴ Indeed, the advent of a state-controlled feminism contributed to the fragmentation of the movement even further. On the one hand, the Ministry of Women’s Rights seemed to be an authority of the feminist agenda and a success of the French feminist movement. On the other hand, many non-governmental feminist groups found themselves competing with the state in the fight for reproductive rights and workers’ rights.⁹⁵ Not only did the state seem to have some media monopoly over non-state feminism, but the government agency was also contained by the realities of politics (i.e. majoritarian politics, the challenges of imposing reform). Thus groups that chose to remain autonomous from the state splintered and lost the broader, collective bargaining power of the 1970s beneath the banner of the MLF. Observing the decline of this strand of feminism, the French media “announced the end of feminism, represented as a vulgar Anglo-Saxon aberration, and the return of French-style femininity.”⁹⁶

In both the United States and in France, support for issue-driven feminisms grew even as the collective, unified (and utterly constructed) Feminism was proclaimed to be a failure. However, what the mass media had glossed over as the death of feminism was in fact a reconstitution in both countries of feminism behind many faces and forms.

⁹⁴ Allwood and Wadia, 215.

⁹⁵ Michèle Le Dœuff and Penelope Deutscher. “Feminism is Back in France: Or is it?” *Hypatia* 15.4 (2000): 246. Web. 13 July 2010.

⁹⁶ Allwood and Wadia, 215.

***“I’m not a feminist, but...
(I support feminist causes)”:
Issue-driven feminism and the Third Wave***

These many new faces of feminism seem to gravitate around single issues, although in the United States and in France this occurred in different ways and for different reasons. In the United States, the scholarship on the subject seems to support that young women championed the cause of equality and many actions of the various feminist movements, but purposefully distanced themselves from “Feminism” for a number of reasons (negative connotations as bra-burning radicals⁹⁷, increase in individualism, and a failure to identify with other women as a group). In 2000, Bushman and Lenart observed that the young female respondents were more likely to positively evaluate the “women’s movement” than feminism.⁹⁸ Kaminer found that polls “indicate strong majority support for feminist ideals” yet “the majority of women are hesitant to identify themselves as part of the feminist movement.”⁹⁹ In a 2004 study, Zucker found that engagement in political ideology was quite strong among university-age women, but that avoidance of the label “feminist” had much to do with linking feminism to extremism and deviancy -an attitude heavily perpetuated by the mainstream media of the 1970s.¹⁰⁰

Pamela Aronson’s study of young women’s attitudes towards feminism found that though nearly all of her respondents supported feminist issues such as equality and equal opportunity for women, nearly half refused to call themselves feminists and those who did call themselves feminist provided qualifiers.¹⁰¹ Aronson noted five main groups within her study—women who called themselves feminists, women who said “I’m a feminist, but...,” women who explained “I’m not a feminist, but...,” women who just were not sure, and women who had never thought about feminism before. In addition, the qualifications that women provide when asked if they are feminists point to the wide array of feminisms that one can agree and disagree

⁹⁷ At the 1968 Miss America Pageant, demonstrating feminist threw bras and high-heels into a trashcan as a symbolic trashing of the objectification of women. However, according to feminists who were present, no bras were burned. Erroneous reporting sensationalized the American feminist demonstrators, portraying them as radicals who were given to setting things alight. Alison Dahl Crossley. “When it suits me, I’m a feminist:” International students negotiating feminist representations.” *Women’s Studies International Forum* 33.2 (2010). Web. 9 July 2010.

⁹⁸ Lorin Basden Arnold. “What is a Feminist?” *Students’ Descriptions.* *Women and Language* 23.2 (Fall 2000). Web. 16 July 2010.

⁹⁹ Arnold.

¹⁰⁰ Alyssa N. Zucker. “Disavowing Social Identities: What It Means When Women Say “I’m not a feminist, but...” *Psychology of Women Quarterly* 28.4 (2004): 425. Web. 16 July 2010.

¹⁰¹ Pamela Aronson. “Feminists or ‘Postfeminists’?: Young Women’s Attitudes toward Feminism and Gender Relations.” *Gender and Society* 17.6 (2003): 912. Web. 16 July 2010.

with—making qualification necessary to explain one's association. Though it may seem counterintuitive, identification as specifically Feminist seems to have declined while the acceptance of feminist attitudes has increased in the United States.¹⁰²

Another kind of feminism that is present in the United States is the concept of “issue-driven” feminism. Though grass-roots support of Second Wave Feminism seemed to decline, political participation actually increased during the 1990s around specific, feminist-oriented issues such as reproductive rights.¹⁰³ The hybridity of feminisms was embraced as activists began organizing around “connections between racial, sexual and gender identities.”¹⁰⁴ New feminisms emerged that recognized the different experiences of young women with a variety of identities. American feminists reflect this variety through the great diversity of feminist groups, including reproductive rights groups such as Planned Parenthood and NARAL Pro-Choice America, political groups such as EMILY'S list and Women's Voices, Women Vote, feminist artists like the Guerrilla Girls, and umbrella groups such as the NOW.

Though the scholarship is less empirical and extensive regarding similar attitudes in France, evidence supports that there is an international movement of young women distancing themselves from the title “feminist” while supporting feminist agendas and causes themselves. For instance, a 2003 study of female international students from 12 different countries attending Goldsmiths College in London, all from 21-25 years old, found that women “from such diverse backgrounds referred to feminism in surprisingly uniform ways, including using terms such as ‘man hating,’ ‘lesbian,’ and the fictional “bra burning” to distance themselves from a feminist identity.” Though not one of the young women surveyed by Aronson was from France, their rhetoric echoes the negative stereotypes thrown about by intellectuals in the French and American media about feminism. Indeed, it is not so strange to think that “I'm not a feminist, but...” attitudes are extant in France. Carla Bruni-Sarkozy, First Lady of France, said: “For a woman nowadays, it's important to have a job and to keep it... but I'm not such a feminist.”¹⁰⁵

There is, however, extensive documentation of issue-driven feminism in France, which has kept feminism alive since its supposed decline in the 1980s. Throughout the 1980s, feminists organized into issue groups such as the *Collectif féministe contre le viol* and the *Collectif féministe contre le racisme*. They demonstrated around policies that would provide access to state childcare, better workplace conditions and against laws that would restrict

¹⁰² Arnold.

¹⁰³ Aronson, 905.

¹⁰⁴ Aronson, 905.

¹⁰⁵ Celizic, Mike. "Carla Bruni: I want Michelle Obama's advice." MSNBC: The Today Show November 19 2008: n. pag. Web. 19 July 2010.

access to abortion rights.¹⁰⁶ In the 1990s, feminist-led trade unions organized walkouts against the Balladur government's employment law which had the effect of pushing women back into the home. The Juppé social security reform plan of 1995 brought as many as forty thousand protestors to the streets who were demonstrating for reproductive rights, employment rights, and equality, organized by the *Coordination des associations pour le droit à l'avortement et à la contraception* (CADAC).¹⁰⁷ Other major issue-driven actions of the 1990s and early 2000's include the demonstration for women's rights (November 1995), the UN Conference on Women (1995), the *Marche mondiale des femmes* which protested violence and poverty (2000), and the International Day against Racism demonstration (2001).¹⁰⁸

Today, feminist groups continue to organize around a number of issues such as anti-rape campaigns, reproductive rights, the rights of immigrant women, the rights of working women, and sexism. Examples include groups that identify as feminists such as *Mix-Cité* and *Chiennes de garde*, feminist groups for immigrant women such as *Ni Putes, Ni Soumises, Les Nanas Beurs, Voix d'Elles Rebels*, student groups such as *Les Sciences Potiches*, and groups that organize directly around single issues such as *Le Collectif féministe contre le viol, CADAC* and *CDNF*.¹⁰⁹ Though many more groups remain active, most issue-driven feminist groups reject the separatism of the 1960s (in which men were excluded both from membership and collaboration) and organize around specific entities or identities rather than under the umbrella of "womanhood."¹¹⁰

The "Third Wave" is as tricky a concept to define as feminism itself, precisely because it must be explained in terms of its own complexity. It is a term that first appeared in the mid-eighties, coined by a diverse association of feminists who together wrote the anthology "The Third Wave: Feminist Perspectives on Racism."¹¹¹ It is quite telling that this group of feminists called themselves the Third Wave, as if they and their perspectives are something altogether divergent from that of the Second Wavers. Many theorists locate the Third Wave as emerging in opposition to the Second Wave.¹¹² As one feminist scholar asserts "the Second Wave vs. Third Wave controversy persists... reifying dividing lines."¹¹³ Indeed, it is, in some

¹⁰⁶ Allwood and Wadia, 216.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid, 217.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid, 217.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid, 218.

¹¹⁰ Ibid, 218.

¹¹¹ Catherine M. Orr. "Charting the Currents of the Third Wave." *Hypatia* 12.3 (1997):30. Web. 11 September 2010.

¹¹² Jacquelyn N. Zita. "Introduction." *Hypatia* 12.3 (1997): 2. Web. 11 September 2010.

¹¹³ Jennifer Purvis. "Girls and Women Together in the Third Wave: Embracing the Challenges of Intergenerational Feminism(s)." *NWSA Journal* 16.3 (2004): 92. Web. 12 September 2010.

instances, through the problematic treatment of the Second Wave as Feminism, something monolithic, white, and middle class, and by ignoring the complexity of the Second Wave, that the third has something against which to oppose itself.¹¹⁴ Opposition and reconstitution form along many lines with generation, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status playing hefty roles as points of conflict.

However, the Third Wave is not wholly engaged in discourses of opposition to the Second Wave. Another prominent characteristic of the Third Wave is its welcoming the “ambiguity, contradiction, multiple identities, and hybridity” of its followers and their perspectives.¹¹⁵ The Third Wave movement, like the Second Wave, is not hierarchical and is not comprised of a single group of feminists. Rather, it stands as a signifier of a new paradigm for understanding the complexity of identity in response to “the political, economic, technological, and cultural circumstances that are unique to the current era.”¹¹⁶

¹¹⁴ Zita, 2.

¹¹⁵ Ibid, 2.

¹¹⁶ Amber E. Kinser. “Negotiating Spaces for/through Third-Wave Feminism.” *NWSA Journal* 16.3 (2004): 124. Web. 12 September 2010.

Conclusion

Feminism is not dead. Post-feminism remains a misleading and unhelpful term that implies the cessation of feminist ideals, when in fact, feminist postures have simply multiplied and deepened, as can be expected of any healthy movement. It is a term that encompasses the changes that have occurred in the feminist movement—the recognition of multiple feminisms with many different agendas and identities—during a time when many lacked the vocabulary or data to describe these various feminisms more specifically. The backlash against feminism, a major element of post-feminist theory, only confirms feminisms' influence and continued importance and should be seen as a tribute, not a slight. Social and political movements with little influence or importance rarely have the pleasure of experiencing backlash. By recognizing the diversity of feminisms in the United States and France, their similarities and differences forged throughout a 350-year shared history, modern-day activists, diplomats, and government officials will be better-positioned to bring about positive and real change for women.

Indeed, certain issues prove recurrent and still relevant as one surveys the comparative histories. Future studies of these issues would prove fruitful not only for academic purposes but also for feminist groups and policy makers considering policy that stands to affect women. First, the conflict between gender and class issues may work both to advance and to detract from progress for women. For example, during the Napoleonic era, French aristocratic women with the help of the Church adopted the constraints of domesticity for the sake of upholding class superiority to the detriment of women's rights. The socialist movements and labor unions of the late 19th century saw both a synergy of activisms and a conflict between the two issues. On the one hand, both in France and in the United States, feminists formed a public and radical platform on which to stand and were able to intensify the fight for women's rights with the energy for labor rights as a solid base. On the other hand, as in the instances of Elizabeth Gurley Flynn and Mother Bloor, certain feminists openly promoted class issues over feminist issues. Today, multiple feminisms with different orientations towards class issues illustrate this conflict.

Second, the issue of motherhood has presented itself as a double-edged sword in the rich histories of the women's movement. Early American and French feminists used motherhood as a justification for gaining political rights, while some later feminists distanced themselves from the motherhood issue or rejected it

completely as partially responsible for the systematic oppression of women. The various roles that motherhood has played in past feminisms still operate today in the debate over what equality actually is. The breast-feeding debate illustrates this conflict. As both the French and American public increasingly vilify women who choose not to breastfeed, feminist responses vary. Certain feminists argue that breast-feeding is a mechanism by which women can take control of their bodies and their mother-child relationships in the face of the “medical hegemony” that now holds power in nearly all areas of maternity in the Western world.¹¹⁷ Feminists like Elizabeth Badinter, on the other hand, blame the politicization of breast-feeding and “green” maternal practices such as reusable diapers and organic foods for pushing women back into the home, as these are time-consuming practices, even going so far as to assert that the baby has become “the best ally of masculine domination.”¹¹⁸ Motherhood also plays into legal questions. Are women fundamentally different from men (owing at least in part to motherhood) and therefore in need of fundamentally different legal protections to ensure equality? Or, are men and women fundamentally the same—in need of equal protections under the law? The Pew Institute Survey reveals that in both France and the United States, men are still viewed as having better lives, so the question of how to improve the lives of women is sure to figure prominently in future debates.

In addition, the media have played an important constructive and destructive role in feminisms of France and the United States. Without a doubt, it was only with the help of mainstream media that the Second Wavers spread their message around the world, so that today, the majority in most countries of the world (see Pew Global Attitudes Project) believes that women and men should have equal rights. In essence, the media helped to normalize and naturalize gender equality such that feminist attitudes have been adopted widely. Yet it was also only through mainstream media that feminists of the 1960s were pegged as man-hating bra burners and that Feminism in the 1980s was declared dead. As we saw in the United States and France, the post-feminism that was talked into existence has also contributed to men and women around the world distancing themselves from the “feminist” brand, while at the same time, supporting feminist issues. The role of media has special relevance to feminism today: though the mainstream media continue to portray Feminism both positively and negatively, the emergence of the new media returns some power of portrayal to feminists themselves.

Finally, what does it mean for women’s rights if such a multitude of individuals support it but refuse to call themselves

¹¹⁷ Glenda Wall. “Moral Constructions of Motherhood in Breastfeeding Discourse.” *Gender and Society* 15.4 (2001): 593. Web. 12 September 2010.

¹¹⁸ Steven Erlanger and Maïa de la Baume. “In Defense of the Imperfect Mother.” *New York Times* 4 June 2010, New York Web. 12 September 2010.

feminists? Without getting into the epistemological issue of reality as a matter of perception or absolute truth, the “I’m not a feminist, but...” crowd, which refuses to call itself feminist, may indeed represent a new strand of feminism in its support for specific feminist issues and for gender equality more generally. However, this large group of individuals differs from other feminist groups. First, it is just that—individualistic. In fact, by rejecting the feminism label, these individuals reject community organization based on women’s rights. As such, though this demographic may prove to be a useful ally in the struggle for gender equality at the individual level (as voters and on issues that stand to affect them very personally), these closeted feminists cannot be relied upon to organize politically with specifically feminist groups. However, continued positive representations of “feminism” through the new media, and ultimately, the mainstream media may gradually soften the label’s toxicity among this group and in public discourse more generally.

Modern media and technology have altered the landscape of communication, such that international communication is now instantaneous. New technologies combined with the forces of globalization have fostered a novel environment for transatlantic communication and action between feminist groups in France and the United States. By utilizing these networking tools and fostering international cooperation, activists may once again re-foster the international networks of feminists in France, the United States and elsewhere.

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