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THIRD WAVE FEMINIST HISTORY AND THE POLITICS OF BEING VISIBLE AND BEING REAL

by

ROBBIN VANNEWKIRK

Under the Direction of Peter Lindsay

ABSTRACT

This project works to illuminate some of the main theoretical claims that writers of the third wave make in order to understand these claims as rhetorical devices used to make themselves visible and real. *Being visible* is a common theme in third wave texts and *realness* is a site that is both contested and embraced. *Being Visible* and *being real* work together to situate third wave actors in a U.S. feminist continuum that is sprinkled with contradiction and ambiguity. This thesis will examine the contextual development of third wave feminism, and then using examples of realness and visibility in the three third wave anthologies, *Being Real*, *Third Wave Agenda,* and *Catching a Wave*, this thesis will interrogate at the rhetorical significance of those themes.

INDEX WORDS: Authenticity, U.S. feminist history, Third wave feminism, Visibility, Being real

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ROBBIN VANNEWKIRK

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Chapter One: Introduction

> "For now the revolution takes place when I stay up all night talking with my best friends about feminism and marginalization and privilege and oppression and power and sex and money and real-life rebellion. For now the revolution takes place when I watch a girl stand up in a crowd and talk about sexual abuse. For now the revolution takes place when I get a letter from a girl I've never met who says that the zine that I wrote changed her life. For now the revolution takes place when the homeless people in my town camp out for a week in the middle of downtown. For now the revolution takes place when I am confronted by a friend about something racist that I have said. For now the revolution takes place in my head when I know how fucking brilliant my girlfriends and I are."
>
> — Nomy Lamm, "It's a Big Fat Revolution" In *Listen Up: Voices from the Next Feminist Generation* (1995)

I have a confession to make. I am very much the third wave, *the next generation*, and the *new face of feminism*; I carry most of the signifiers and readily recognize all of the cultural artifacts for it. I have listened to riot grrrl music, lamented the selling-out of artists such as Liz Phair, read zines, performed in a radical cheerleading group, continued to reinvent my sexuality, participated in *cyberactivism,* and talked about myself excessively in academic papers. In addition, I have embraced the label of *feminist* since I was a freshman in college and I took my first women's studies class, and this is also significantly *third wave* of me because it means that I came of age in an era when women's studies was offered readily in academia. In making this confession I am reminded of what Judith Butler (1990, 2004) asks about sexuality, "If a sexuality is to be disclosed, what will be taken as the true determinant of its meaning; the phantasy structure, the act, the orifice, the gender, the anatomy" (123)? I make this connection to

the disclosure of my *third wave feminist* identity because the label is steadily creeping into the mainstream while it is unclear as to who belongs to the third wave and because many of the characterizations of it are ambiguous. In fact, many of the writers who contribute to third wave texts offer narratives of how they both identify and disidentify with feminism; they seem to be comfortable only when multiplicity and contradiction are present. Meanwhile, many readers of third wave anthologies may feel like they are stuck in-between the generations— too young to be second wave and too old to be third (Drake 1997). Or they may indeed be a member of the *next* generation but feel alienated from the style or the subject matter of third wave texts. Also, feminists coming out of the second wave have been very vocal about their discomfort with and/or skepticism of the third wave (Steinem 1995; Davis 1995; Pollitt and Baumgardner 2003) . Exploring the tension that third wave feminism creates is what led me to this thesis, which begins with a discussion of the term *third wave*. Following the discussion of the term *third wave*, I will explore two themes that emerge from third wave feminism using three anthologies that have come out of this particular feminist discourse.

Analyzing the texts of the third wave is useful in order to uncover the theoretical perspectives that may not be obvious from a superficial reading. Many of the essays included in third wave anthologies are styled like confessionals and personal narratives, which has come to be one of the oft mentioned criticisms of this type of feminist epistemology (Dicker and Piepmeier 2003; Henry 2004; Heywood and Drake 1997). In confessions and personal narrations the theory is not obviously presented in a logical and methodical format, nor are there citations or key figures present in the writer's analysis.

Instead, the theory may be extrapolated through common themes, which address issues dealing with culture and politics.

With this in mind, the question persists, can the so-called third wave be distinguishable from other waves, or is third wave discourse a problematic dialectic that contributes nothing new to feminist theory? I believe that the criticisms of the third wave are very much legitimate and substantial—they are a vital part of what can make third wave writers continue to analyze critically the claims that they make; however, I also believe that third wave feminism has been a necessary course in the feminist continuum. Perhaps recognizing themes that consistently (re)surface within third wave feminist writing will mend the theoretical framework and make the conversation richer and more exciting.

I have chosen three third wave feminist texts from which to draw my analysis. In chronological order of publication, they are *To Be Real: Telling the Truth and Changing the Face of Feminism* (1995) edited by Rebecca Walker; *Third Wave Agenda: Being Feminist and Doing Feminism* (1997) edited by Leslie Heywood and Jennifer Drake; and *Catching a Wave: Reclaiming Feminism for the 21st Century* (2003) edited by Rory Dicker and Alison Piepmeier. I could have chosen any three third wave feminist anthologies to focus on, but I was drawn to these three because of the time in which each of them entered into my own development as a feminist and because of the differences each of them proclaim to have. I read *To Be Real* when it first came out and I was coming out as a budding, young feminist. This book was a great inspiration to me and my scholarly work at the time. I read *Third Wave Agenda* during my first year of graduate

school, and I gave a book report/presentation on it as a requirement for one of my graduate courses. I had a lot of issues with the book at the time, but I have since resolved some of these. I picked up a copy of *Catching a Wave* at the National Women's Studies Association (NWSA) conference after I had already begun to look for ways in which third wave theoretical perspectives were shaped, and I was inspired knowing that there was a Third Wave Feminist Caucus created within NWSA.

To Be Real is one of the first so-called third wave anthologies to be published, and it is often cited as an influence on others that follow. In fact, one of the main themes of reoccurrence that I have chosen to discuss comes from the title of this book, *realness. To Be Real* has since come to characterize third wave literature as overly emphasizing personal narrative as Walker leads the way when she discloses her discontent with her mother's generation of feminism and the limitations of labels. In *Third Wave Agenda* the editors pick up where *To Be Real* left off, claiming that the contributors of their anthology incorporate more theory into their personal narratives and cultural critiques. Drake (1997) has been outspokenly critical of Walker, even stating, "I can't help but be annoyed with Walker on the grounds that it would have been so cool to grow up with a feminist community as she did, and it seems that she's taking that privilege for granted" (p 13). *Catching a Wave* also claims that the contributors better analyze *new* versions of feminism by blending theory and personal narration. *Being Visible* has been a significant theme in social movements instigated by the oppressed and the marginalized throughout history. To make onself visible is to render one's subjectivity and position meaningful in politics and social discourse; it is also a strategy for creating space for social justice for

people whose needs are normally deemed illegitimate. Addressing the two themes, *being real* and *being visible,* as threads that link these texts together shows that despite their claimed differences they are, in fact, similar. As the contributors to these texts negotiate their understanding of feminist history with their personal experience and manage their love-hate relationship with an academic climate guilty of its own abuse of power and privilege, they continuously reinvent feminist theory.

Chapter Two: A People's Guide to the History of U.S. Third Wave Feminism

> "Maybe she [mother] just found other ways to get back at me, like when she taught me that 'I Am Woman' was the national anthem. When my teacher asked my first-grade class, 'Does anyone know the national anthem?' I proudly responded 'yes' and proceeded to sing 'I Am Woman' to my class. Their laughter was an indication that not everyone used this song to express their feelings of patriotism."
> – Amelia Richards, "The Immaculate Conception" In *Listen Up* (1995)

As a member of the feminist third wave I can attest to the influence of third wave literature on activist and feminist scholarship for many of us born after 1961.[1] In fact, the books *Listen Up: Voices from the Next Feminist Generation* (1995) and *To Be Real: Telling the Truth and Changing the Face of Feminism* (1995) were largely responsible for my venture into the field of women's studies, a field that engenders raised eyebrows and blank stares from the mainstream population. Like many other feminists, I found a safe haven within the women's studies classroom to cultivate and secure my feminist consciousness that grew from reading third wave texts. Meanwhile, the now infamous "I'm not a feminist, but..." phenomenon that occurs even within women's studies classrooms is something that I have heard of and experienced. Many feminist writers have been responding to this state of ambiguous feminism by analyzing its meaning and significance. A third wave theory seems to want to justify people's hesitations to claim a feminist identity while also finding new language appropriate for an inclusive feminist consciousness. When Gina Dent (1995) says, "That's what makes me stop now and consider just what it was that I was doing before I was calling it feminism—and why it is that many women, especially young women, are doing what looks to me like feminism

and not calling it that" (62), she is responding to people's resistance to labeling even when what they believe and how they act could be construed as being in line with feminist behavior. The backlash against feminism and its academic home within women's studies makes the need for definition and visibility feel even more urgent and necessary, thus shaping much of the feminist theory being published during the last ten years.

Feminists in the third wave have come to identify themselves within a historical context that traces its legacy from the second wave of the feminist movement; however, while they pay scant homage to their *foremothers* they maintain that the feminist experience is different this time (Baumgardner and Richards 2000; Dicker and Piepmeier 2003; Henry 2004). During the beginning of the third wave, writers positioned themselves against both post-feminism and second wave discourse in order to claim a different position. This location, according to them, allows for more room for individuality and difference. Ultimately, these feminist actors in the third wave become defined by what they are not. Thus, they claim to not be a version of the 1960's *white women's feminism* nor the late 1980's and early 1990's more conservative *power feminism*, but instead, claim to be a more multicultural, international, class conscious feminism. They also emphasize a version of feminism that is more inclusive of sexualities that may not fit into a strict gay/straight binary. This rhetorical device makes them appear to be a distinct generation of feminists. In this chapter I will outline the different feminist *waves*, addressing the main terms and issues, and then I will offer a more detailed description of the development of third wave feminism, discussing the

ways in which it is characterized.

The First and Second Waves and the Politics of Inclusion

Many times when I tell people that I am working on a thesis about third wave feminism, they ask me what the first, second, and third waves are, inquiring about the main issues that each wave represents. This is undoubtedly a difficult question to answer because the feminist waves are not monolithic constructions, and the standard descriptions of them are only based on mainstream historical constructions of them. Like Estelle B. Freeman, the author of *No Turning Back: The History of Feminism and the Future of Women* (2002), I am utterly self-conscious when I try to describe in a nutshell what comprises the three feminist waves. I realize my own stake in trying to be as accurate and as inclusive as possible when so much of my work is on politics of inclusion, border-cultures, and what I call the interstice— or that place where people lie when they are either in the process of crossing metaphorical borders or stuck in the in-between. Therefore I cannot very well mention the second wave superleader Gloria Steinem without mentioning Angela Davis, but it goes so much more beyond just that. What about all the unnamed women that worked during the second wave within the Third World Women's Alliance, publishing feminist leaflets and pamphlets in both English and Spanish so that more women could have access to information about their reproductive rights and the state of welfare? Or what about the lesbians that were so marginalized during the second wave that they had to form their own consciousness raising groups and caucuses? There is not an easy way to measure the impact and influence that these particular women had on feminism, yet the wave model persists as a way for delineating

feminist histories.

The wave is a metaphor for generational relationships, but for the purpose of feminist history it is also a metaphor for mother-daughter relationships (Henry 2004). Neat, little descriptions of first, second, and third wave feminisms compress feminist activity onto a timeline beginning with the Seneca Falls Convention of 1848 (Baumgardner and Richards 2000). The first wave feminist movement is largely associated with women's suffrage, which concentrated on gaining the right to vote for white women. In addition, first wave women worked on gaining a legal identity for themselves that included but was not limited to, the right to own property, to sue, and to form legal contracts (Dicker and Piepmeier 2003). Despite the fact that prominent figures in the first wave started out as abolitionists, in the quest to secure legal rights for themselves, they ignored issues of racism and poverty that were central to the lives of black women (Freedman 2002).

The second wave is known as the era of "women's liberation." It is associated with, among other things, consciousness raising (or CR groups), the Equal Rights Amendment (ERA), abortion rights, women's healthcare, and the eradication of violence against women. Contributors to second wave discourse also debated the notion of biological or inherent differences between the sexes, making a claim for the power of social construction to create differences between men and women (Dicker and Piepmeier 2003). Ironically perhaps, the second wave, which largely began when women organized due to their frustration with their secondary status within the Civil Rights Movement and the Black Power Movement, was fraught with tension between white women and women

of color as white women were accused of and responsible for practicing exclusionary politics and of implementing self-serving agendas (Henry 2004).

Black feminism disrupts the wave model as the waves are typically distinguished by the activism of white women (for example, Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony in the first wave and Betty Friedan and Gloria Steinem in the second wave) (Springer 2002). The charge that it was a white women's movement, while a legitimate challenge to white women's racism within the movement, eclipses the major contributions black women and U.S. third world women had to the first and second waves.[2] Kimberly Springer (2002) expresses a very important limitation of the wave metaphor in her work on "Third Wave Black Feminism." She argues that feminist resistance to gendered oppression predates the use of the wave metaphors, and that work of scholars such as Angela Davis and Deborah Gray White on enslaved African women's forms of resistance to gendered violence in the U.S. disrupts the waves (1062).[3]

Indeed, before Betty Friedan expressed her grief over "that problem that has no name," there were women who had no difficulty in naming their hardships and sources of depression. [4] Contrary to popular renditions of feminist history, U.S. third world feminists were not only organizing around issues and themes that responded to war, racism, poverty, immigration, capitalism, women's health, violence against women, and globalization. The Third World Women's Alliance, begun in 1968 and lasting five years, responded to these issues in pamphlets they published called *Triple Jeopardy*, which linked classism, racism, and sexism (Anderson-Bricker 1999). The Combahee River Collective also issued a "black feminist statement" in 1974 that bridged sexism and

racism and issues that took a more global perspective on institutionalized poverty and women's health (Freedman 2002). Benita Roth (1999) states,

> The reemergence of feminism in the 1960s and 1970s needs to be understood as the reemergence of 'feminisms,' plural form of the noun, because feminisms from different racial and ethnic groups formed organizationally distinct feminist movements in the second wave. At the same time, these movements were linked in a crowded, competitive social movement sector, and there were mutual and complicated relationships between feminist activists from different racial/ethnic communities. (70)

This passage responds to both the monolithic construction and the metanarrative of second wave feminism. Perhaps the editors of third wave texts, in particular, benefit from the way that feminist history is retold; it inevitably allows them to proclaim a newer and better version of feminism if the previous one was homogeneous and racist. For example, in *Catching a Wave* (2004) the editors repeat the common, however well intended, argument that U.S. women of color developed their main theoretical praxis in response to their marginalization within the mainstream feminist movement. Dicker and Piepmeier state,

> In the 1970s and 1980s, U.S. women of color and lesbians, responding to their marginalization by the mainstream white, middle-class women's movement, extended the insights of second wave feminism by theorizing about their experiences. They called for a recognition that identity is intersectional– in other words, that gender, race ethnicity, class, and sexuality are interlocking and that

> oppression is not experienced simply along one axis. These women, who labeled themselves U.S. third world feminists, questioned the tendency within the second wave to reduce the category of 'women' to its essence. (9)

This oversimplification of the advent of activism by women of color (re)centers mainstream white feminism each time it is retold, and the implication is that women of color followed white women into the feminist movement (Roth 1999; Springer 1999). The suggestion then seems to be that third wave feminists have learned from the past and are all entering on equal ground. Third wavers seem to want to illustrate a picture of the third wave that is concerned with race and more aware of the intersections of oppression. The problem with this analysis, of course, is that it does not take into account the ways in which members of the third wave silence and marginalize each other or privilege particular forms of oppression over others.

The conundrum worth analyzing is that while we must responsibly recognize that the second wave feminist movement involved white women who monopolized the movement by making white women's concerns central to the feminist discourse, it is problematic to dismiss the era as simply being a *white women's movement*, thus ignoring the activism of women of color that has left a crucial legacy for third wave feminists to follow and be influenced by. In fact, the theories and activisms of U.S. third world feminists are arguably the greatest and most under-represented influences of third wave feminism. In *The Oxford Companion to Women's Writing in the United States*, Chela Sandoval (1995) defines third world feminism as follows:

> Under late twentieth-century, first world cultural conditions, U.S. third world

> feminism is a theory, method, and praxis permitting entry to a new mode of historical consciousness. It is a praxis which generates another kind of decolonizing subjectivity/citizenship across what were once considered 'natural' boundaries of nation, race, culture, sex, gender, and class. (880)

This "geopolitical upheaval," as she calls it, is linked explicitly to late 1960s and early 1970s feminism when "hegemonic feminist theory and practice" overshadowed the creative mobile activism of women of color (Sandoval 2000, 42.3) [5] Third Wavers pride themselves in being aware of this politics of location that makes room for subjectivities that exist across both literal and metaphorical boundaries. As one third waver puts it, "The third wave is a global wave, but it must sweep through and carry back messages from women all over the world– and those messages should, in their own words, articulate their visions, their concerns, and their histories" (Darraj 2003, 203).

In light of Roth's and Sandoval's historical perspectives, I wish to contextualize the third wave feminist emergence as occurring on multiple levels and within multiple sites of *feminisms.* It is commonly agreed that it is no longer sufficient to define feminism in narrow terms, although it is challenging to attempt a theoretical platform that holds multiple ideologies and experiences, and this may come across as confusing. Nevertheless, it is important to see how mobilization exists within interstitial gaps and along borders that are often rendered invisible and unreal because they are outside of the hegemonic purview. Interestingly, these sites are often the most subversive and challenging to systems of oppression because they fall under the radar. This figurative location within the gaps will come to influence the themes of visibility and realness that

are so pervasive within third wave feminist literature; the location is a place where *natural* boundaries get called into question.

Third Wave: The Roots

Third wave feminism as a contemporary representation of feminism has its roots in the early nineties when Rebecca Walker, activist, Yale graduate, writer, and daughter of acclaimed second-waver, Alice Walker, said in a *Ms*. magazine article, "I am not a post-feminist feminist, I am the third wave." It was like the shot heard around the world for feminist history. This comment, which drew the distinction between what some would call a dangerous *trend* in feminism called *post feminism*, and what some would say was a more brave and inclusive version of feminism called *third wave feminism*, would begin to signify a group of young women who may or may not even call themselves *feminists*. Third Wave signified a group of women who considered themselves too heterogeneous to be linked to the *white women's feminism* of the second wave and living too much in the margins or the interstice to associate themselves with the *power feminists* of the eighties and early nineties. As Rebecca Walker (2004) states in her foreword to *To Be Real*, "We want to be linked with our foremothers and centuries of women's movement, but we also want to make space for young women to create their own, different brand of revolt, and so we choose the name Third Wave" (xvii). Thus, she was voicing the beginning of a new theory.

Walker initially made this third wave distinction in response to feminist discourse that rose significantly in intensity during the Anita Hill-Clarence Thomas hearings of 1991. The widely publicized, watched, and discussed hearings brought out into the open

the reality of sexual harassment through Anita Hill's experience and the reality of racism through the very visible *public lynching* of a black man and the humiliating over-sexualization of a black woman (Henry 2004). The debate among feminists resulted in numerous letters, editorials, discussion groups, and lectures. It eventually led to the publication of *Race-ing Justice, En-gendering Power: Essays on Anita Hill, Clarence Thomas, and the Construction of Social Reality,"* edited by the internationally acclaimed fiction writer Toni Morrison (1992), proving not only that wherever one happens to lie on the spectrum, feminism had not succumbed to the supposed apathy and/or cynicism of Generation X, but also illustrating that racism and sexism can be historically and politically linked together. It incited Rebecca Walker to state, "I intend to fight back. I have uncovered and unleashed more repressed anger than I thought possible. For the umpteenth time in my twenty-two years, I have been radicalized, politicized, shaken awake. I have come to voice again, and this time my voice is not conciliatory," (Garrison, 2000, 147).

Walker's declaration of her third wave identity in the *Ms.* article instigated a conversation between Walker and Shannon Liss, a young activist in New York City, and together, they co-founded The Third Wave Foundation. The first project of the third wave was Freedom Ride 1992, a three-week-long bus tour to register voters in poor communities of color across the U.S. (Orr 1997). Interestingly, this organization avoids the term *feminism*, instead stating that they work for "the empowerment of all young women" (<www.thirdwavefoundation.org>). The emphasis on *young* is the operative word. Given the supposed *death of feminism* and the popularity that Generation X had

drawn, it is not surprising that the founders of the Third Wave Foundation felt the need to emphasize *youth*, thus drawing *young* people into an activist movement. Just like the slogan, "Don't trust anyone over thirty," which separated the hippies and the yippees from the conservative and overly serious, mainstream establishment in the 1960s, emphasis on youth for the third wave separates them from what they interpret as a controlling and judgmental older generation. The interesting thing about the way that the third wave comes to signify youth is that they will, according to their own definition, have to become something else as soon as they get to be over the age limit. In contrast, members of the second wave may remain second wave even as they grow older. Therefore, aging may become the *death of feminism*, as the third wavers understand it.

Claiming that they are more multicultural, transnational, and global than second wavers, third wavers argue that it is inclusion and multiplicity that also makes them different. While some critics of the second wave will clarify that they are specifically talking about a *mainstream* second wave feminist movement that was primarily concerned with white, heterosexual women's needs and issues, most of the critiques are overwhelmingly generalizing, dismissing the second wave as simply a "white women's movement." As a result of this, many third wavers distance themselves from the use of the term *feminist* altogether— a kind of strange conundrum. In *The Fire This Time: Young Activists and the New Feminism* (2004), Vivien Labaton and Dawn Lundy Martin argue,

> The feminism of younger activists goes beyond the rhetoric of inclusion. The most significant lesson that we have learned from the second wave's faux pas is that a

> feminist movement cannot succeed if it does not challenge power structures of wealth and race. If the model within which one works centralizes whiteness and/or wealth, the poorest and most victimized women in the world will be overlooked. This concentration on 'traditional' women's rights often obscures the importance of the complex network of gendered injustices that we bring to the foreground in *The Fire This Time.* In other words, we see a new movement evolving from one in which there is a dialogue *about* feminism and race to a feminist movement whose conversation *is* race, gender, and globalization. (xxix)

Meanwhile, collections of essays such as *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color* (1983) edited by Cherrie Moraga and Gloria Anzaldua and *Home Girls: A Black Feminist Anthology* (1983) edited by Barbara Smith, could be considered *third wave* if *multicultural* is going to be the measuring stick by which this version of feminism is interpreted (Henry 2004, 165). It raises the point that the way that feminism gets conceptualized is problematic. Henry (2004) states,

> What is surprising is how third wave feminists themselves participate in this representation when they habitually portray second-wave feminism— the feminism from which they are trying to differentiate themselves— as being a white thing...We are left with a paradox. Feminist theory produced by women of color is foundational to third wave feminism, yet third wavers cannot use the very feminists who created this theory to exemplify second wave feminism lest they dilute the argument third wavers make about the limits of the previous generation. (166)

Unfortunately, it is this problem of representation that might explain why many women are not only wary but also antagonistic to feminism in general. It helps to explain the "I'm not a feminist, but..." phenomenon that resides in many anti-sexist, anti-racist discussions. For Astrid Henry, it is not simply that women may be antagonistic to feminism; they are, like rebellious daughters, antagonistic to their *mothers*.

Postfeminism

Understanding the role that so-called *post-feminism* played at the time of third wave feminism's emergence is worthy of consideration; it adds to the understanding of why third wave feminists began to make *visibility* and *realness* central to their theoretical and rhetorical claims when feminism seemed to have stopped moving forward or was not moving at all. Although the terms, *post*, *power*, and *victim* for describing feminism and its various participants may seem overwhelming, these terms have been commonly used to separate feminist ideological camps. I am undoubtedly embedded within this *post*, *power*, and *victim* divide because I strongly oppose a lot of the work that came out of the post feminist era., and while others might refer to third wave feminism as being a post feminist phase, I find the use of *post* to suggest the end of feminism troubling. Aside from that, I also do not adhere to the more conservative flavor of a post feminist era (for example, the argument that women have gained all the equality they need and justice has been granted to them since the second wave).

Post-feminism is a term that has periodically popped up throughout feminist history to mark the end of a movement (Henry 2004). Paradoxically, post-feminism is both critical of feminism and also celebratory of feminism because the use of the term

seems to imply both, "feminism has been successful at gaining women what they wanted," and also "feminism is dead and unnecessary." *Post* implies the end of an era and also a death of something. Some post-feminist feminists are also referred to as the *power feminists*, those who benefitted from the second wave's liberal gains, but at the same time are critical of the second wave. Liberal gains are usually associated with the gains that are exclusively economical, meaning that women could enter the workforce and should they decide to have children they should have access to daycare. It has been a very white, middle class, and heterosexual viewpoint of what women want and desire. This has been touted as *power feminism* because equality is supposed to grant women the same access to power as their male counter-parts. Setting themselves apart from so-called *victim feminists,* they emphasize personal choice and agency as true determinants of a person's worth. These divisions simply signify feminist ideologies.

The so-called *post-feminism* was not the only feminist thing going on in the 1980s, and the meaning of it also has a lot to do with the so-called *backlash* against feminism. Susan Faludi's popular 1991 book *Backlash* demonstrated for both an academic and also a mainstream audience the process by which this backlash took place within the media. Astrid Henry (2004) states,

> While expressing some truth, the notion that the 1980s can be dismissed as a post-feminist decade is, in great part, a fiction that has helped to propagate conservatives' view of feminism and that now serves to grant a new generation of feminists a way by which to distinguish themselves from their immediate predecessors. The mainstream media has played an important role in the

construction and maintenance of this chronology of feminism's history. (21)

Henry points out the significant role the media played in creating a post-feminist decade. Post-feminism and the media backlash against feminism worked hand in hand as they both added to the mainstream discourse occurring over feminism's worthiness and necessity— or lack thereof— after the 1960s and 1970s. Much of this could have to do with the media's interest in white, heterosexual feminist figures to place on center stage. The same media practice transpired during the second wave when the media was transfixed on Gloria Steinem and other straight, white women libbers. Post feminists seemed to be universally white and heterosexual with Naomi Wolf and Katie Roiphe acting as two post feminist darlings.

In 1998 *Time* published a cover story on feminism that radiated with the post feminist vibe that had ensued. Under the headline "Is Feminism Dead?" *Time* printed a collection of four photographs including Susan B. Anthony, Betty Friedan, Gloria Steinem, and actress Calista Flockhart as she played Ally McBeal. The journalist of this article, Gina Bellafante, took a stab at feminism arguing that "feminism today is wed to the culture of celebrity and self obsession" (Gilley 2005, 187). Never mind that Ally McBeal is not a real person, the fact that Bellafonte would pick the self-obsessed McBeal as representative of late-nineties was both interesting and troubling. If one were to believe the hype surrounding her character as being representative of women's ability to achieve economic success in traditionally male-dominated worlds– including gaining equality even in the unisex bathrooms of her office– then one might really believe that feminism was not something that women needed to mobilize around. In fact, it was the image of the

Ally McBeals that made it seem as if feminism had only complicated women's lives to the extent that they could no longer sustain successful careers. Referring to the premature declaration of feminism's death as "False Feminist Death Syndrome," Jennifer Pozner (2003) outlines the media's role in creating this mythological "death of feminism." Pozner adds,

> In an on-line debate about their 'Is Feminism Dead' attack, feminist author Phyllis Chesler asked *Time'*s Ginia Bellafante why she 'didn't...take on the media' instead of blaming the women's movement for its own misrepresentation in popculture, Bellafante's curt answer spoke volumes: 'My next job won't be at Time Warner, and then I'll rip the media to shreds' (49).

Bellafonte's response is compelling and it reflects the era when media is not separate from the corporations that own them. Journalism also reflects this as journalists report stories according to private interests. In her essay challenging corporate owned media and their stories, Pozner advocates lobbying and demanding the media's accountability when it comes to their derogatory claims.

Meanwhile, popular books such as Katie Roiphe's *Morning After: Sex, Fear, and Feminism* (1993), Naomi Wolf's *Fire With Fire: The New Female Power and How to Use It* (1993), and Rene Denfeld's *New Victorians: A Young Woman's Challenge to the Old Feminist Order* (1995) attempted to "reclaim feminism for the majority," (Siegel 1997, 47). While purporting to be the voice of the new feminism, Roiphe, Wolf, Denfeld, along with celebrity feminists Camille Paglia and Christina Hoff Summers, seemed to want to convey the message that feminism as people knew it was outdated and puritanical

and that the new face of feminism would not need the grassroots activism nor the academic stronghold (Siegel 1997). Catherine Orr (1997) refers to these authors as "feminist dissenters" (34). Their interests were not with long-term feminist goals.

The Generational Debate

Astrid Henry (2004) provides the most comprehensive history of the development of the third wave in her recent book, *Not My Mother's Sister: Generational Conflict and Third-Wave Feminism.* The title of the book playfully mocks the second wave proclamation that "Sisterhood is Powerful." Henry focuses on the generational conflict between the second and the third wave in which the *daughters* do not, in fact, have a sense of sisterhood with their *mothers.* Furthermore, third wavers acknowledge that *sisterhood* is a relationship that white women claimed for *all* women while women of color did not have within the women's movement a sense of shared family values.[6] If the mainstream second wave second wave feminist movement identified woman as the unifying construct to mobilize for and around and argued that all women are sisters in the struggle, then the third wave sees the term *woman* itself as problematic. Thus, *Not My Mother's Sister* creatively identifies this problem in which third wavers are both metaphorical *daughters of* but not *sisters to* feminists in the second wave. They build a connection to and express a rejection of feminists that came before them.

By looking at the metaphorical mother-daughter relationship between second and third wave feminisms in U.S. history, Henry unpacks some of the issues and challenges that the third wave and other contemporary feminists inevitably encounter. She points out that the use of a *wave* as representative of something *new* is not unique to the third wave.

Second-wavers came to define themselves as *second wave* in order to seem *new* and *improved*. Henry notes that early second-wavers did much to establish the death of the older version of feminism in order to legitimize the rebirth of the new generation, thus they would establish a typical pattern for feminist narration in which the new reality feminists claim is rested in a notion of progress. This progress narrative is accepted because it has been repeated enough times to be believed.

Henry is not the first writer to discuss the mother-daughter relationship; her argument is based on earlier literature. For example, in *Manifesta: Young Women, Feminism, and the Future* (2000), Jennifer Baumgardner and Amy Richards include a chapter titled, "Thou Shalt Not Become Thy Mother." They state, "To do feminism differently from one's mother, to make choices that are our own, and not simply a reaction or a rejection, is the task of our generation" (215). Indeed, many writers included in third wave anthologies write about their relationships with their mothers as crucial to the formation of their feminist identities; however, they tend to argue that the second wave ignores the younger generation's unique concerns. In *Manifesta: Young Women, Feminism, and the Future*, Jennifer Baumgardner and Amy Richards (2000) state,

> Third Wave's goals are derived from analyzing how every issue affects this generation of young women. We have inherited strategies to fight sexual harassment, domestic abuse, the wage gap, and the pink collar ghetto of low-wage women's work from the Second Wave, which identified these issues. Together, we are still taking on them. And we have modern problems of our own. Prominent Third Wave issues include equal access to the Internet and technology, HIV/AIDS

> awareness, child sexual abuse, self-mutilation, globalization, eating disorders, and body image...Sexual health is of special concern to young women, because we now tend to have more partners and to be more sexually active at a younger age (and are more likely than not to have a sexually transmitted disease). The choice of whether to have a baby is under siege for our generation. Teenagers and young women may have their children taken away from them based on any excuse; gay couples are often denied access to adoption and 'couples only' sperm banks as well as to legal marriage. (21)

While defining the third wave implies a separations between an older generation and a younger generation of feminists, making age a criterion for membership to this group is undoubtedly problematic when ideology does not fit exclusively into age groups. Obviously, many authors do not fit neatly into either the second or the third wave. For example, where would bell hooks or Judith Butler lie on the feminist continuum if they are not somewhere in-between the generations? Furthermore, the issues that the third wave demands are not limited to young women, and besides, members of the third wave are also going to get older, which will significantly alter their *newer and better* claim. Under this guise, they will be forced to continuously reinvent themselves.

The issues listed by Baumgardner and Richards are no more exclusively a young woman's problem than arthritis and breast cancer is exclusively an older woman's problems. Siegel (1997) points out that, "If age is not the primary determinant, then third wave feminism becomes more of a stance than a constituency, a practice rather than a policy," (56). If age no longer becomes part of the third wave criteria, then a cohesive

theory or belief must be emphasized. Therefore, the imagination of the third wave rests on the individual. The third wave, unlike their second wave predecessors, manages to upturn the notion of any *we* that exists to unify a monolithic ideology or subject. The infamous torch metaphor has instigated conversation between at least one third waver and one second waver. In the afterward to *Catching a Wave* a conversation between second waver, Katha Pollitt and third waver, Jennifer Baumgardner (2003) transpires that is illuminating to the debate. Pollitt states, "When you and I talk in public or in larger discussion groups about generational shifts, I tend to take your side, but this familiar talk of passing the torch makes me inclined to agree with the older feminist who said, 'Get your own damn torch!' (311)." Baumgardner writes in response to this statement, "The torch metaphor cuts both ways: younger feminists have gotten their own torches, only to be told, 'You call that a torch?!' (313). Siegel (1997) state,

> Naming the third wave emphasizes the imperative for the second wave to pass the torch and let the next generation carry it wherever historical conditions may lead. The metaphor most commonly employed to describe intergenerational relations among feminists, that of familial generations, is so fraught with intense emotion that perhaps we need a new way to conceive the difference between cohorts of feminists. (66)

Ultimately, the mother-daughter trope is based on archetypal notions of the mother and the daughter. In this archetypal relationship the mother can be depicted as the puritanical, over-bearing, and meddlesome mother while the daughter is depicted as the selfish, spoiled, and unappreciative daughter. On the other hand, the mother may also be someone

that the dutiful daughter looks up to and aspires to be, someone she loves and needs (Henry 2003). Either way, family problems ensue, and in the end the daughter must cut the metaphorical umbilical chord and establish herself as an independent woman.

Reconfiguring Activism

The statement made by Kathleen Hanna, lead singer of the riot grrrl band Bikini Kill, stands as a third wave resolve to see agency and subversion as existing in multiple locations. Third Wavers resist the idea that to be a feminist activist one must prescribe to specific behaviors and beliefs. She states,

> Resistance is everywhere, it always has been and always will be. Just because someone is not resisting the same way you are (being vegan, an out lesbian, a political organizer) does not mean they are not resisting. Being told you are a worthless piece of shit and not believing it is a form of resistance. (Garrison 147).

Third wavers write as much about social activism as they do about culture and gender identity. Examples of third wavers' issues in the activist realm span from abortion rights to the prison industrial complex. Of course abortion rights and women's health were major second wave feminist issues, but feminists coming out of the Black Power movement (and other nationalist movements such as Chicano, Puerto Rican, and Native American) were prison abolitionists, and many of them linked prison with capitalism. Still, the third wave likes to portray themselves as having a keener activist strategy—whether they call it *feminist* or not.

Not only is activism important, but the activist site is important. The definition of

activism broadens as the activist territory expands, and the technological advances in the last twenty years have significantly altered activists' ability to connect with each other. Now there is *cyberactivism*, which has expanded the conception of activist possibilities. Not only can activists connect with each other via cyberspace, but they can also hack into sites in order to sabotage those they disagree with. Listserves, webzines, chatrooms, and blogs have worked to replace the old school pamphlets, leaflets, and zines that were integral to activism in the past. To be connected to the internet is to be connected to the world; cyberspace has allowed people to cross borders in the matter of seconds, making globalization an even bigger reality and global activism something to be aware of.

The reconfiguration of activism is well illustrated in Chela Sandoval's (2000) book, *Methodology of the Oppressed.* Sandoval describes the method of differential consciousness that U.S. feminists of color have strategically enacted as an activity that allows movement "between and among ideological positionings considered as variables, in order to disclose the distinctions among them" (Sandoval, 58). She states, "Differential consciousness represents a strategy of oppositional ideology that functions on an altogether different register. Its powers can be thought of as mobile—not nomadic, but rather cinematographic: a kinetic motion that maneuvers, poetically transfigures, and orchestrates while demanding alienation, perversion, and reformation in both spectators and practitioners" (Sandoval, 44). While Amanda D. Lotz (n.d.) argues that this strategy differs from previous forms of feminist activism (6), Sandoval actually links current methods of activism to historical methods— making visible the activism of women of color that has remained under the radar. Lotz's argument does what Kimberly Springer

(2002) calls "drowning out black feminism" by the wave (1061) when she misuses Sandoval's theory for oppression.

A Question of Theory

The question of theory has been a focal point for feminist arguments since women's studies began. How does one go about *theorizing* in academia without supporting a patriarchal, hegemonic model for knowledge production? Many feminist thinkers have voiced concern over the production of theory and how theory is legitimized within academia, and this has been a special concern for third wave feminists who are either distrustful of academia themselves or must combat other people's arguments that feminism is elitist and exclusionary. This is another recognizable factor in distinguishing third wave feminism; third wave writers should have a general understanding that knowledge is socially constructed and shaped by one's social location. This has shaped feminist theory in the social as well as the hard sciences, but the irony, is that a lot of this theory is available within academia.

The critique of academia seems paradoxical at times. As David Golumbia (1997) states, "It rests on a firm and elaborate critique of existing institutions; but it is also often enmeshed in one of our longest-standing institutions, the university," (101). *Colonize This!* (2002) speaks to the "bitter-sweet" intellectual tradition celebrated in white feminist women's studies classrooms. The editors state in their introduction,

> Like many other women of color, the two of us first learned the language of feminism in college through a white, middle-class perspective, one form of colonization. Feminism should have brought us closer to our mothers and sisters

> and to our aunties in the Third World. Instead it took us further away. The academic feminism didn't teach us how to talk with the women in our families about why they stayed with alcoholic husbands or chose to wear the veil. In rejecting their life choices as women, we lost a part of ourselves and our own history. (xxii)

Third wave feminists have been fortunate enough to come of age in a time when women's studies is offered in many universities. As a result, many women find feminism through college classes, and many third wave authors document this transformation in their lives. Kristina Sheryl Wong laments,

> Too bad the rest of the world couldn't understand the kind of feminism I was embracing without taking a women's studies class. Was it also possible that the only people who know about this so-called third wave feminism are the 'learned' feminists who have already struggled with the definition in classes and discussion groups? (296)

Third wavers like Wong have been influenced by thinkers such as Patricia Hill Collins. Collins challenges the white feminist hegemonic pattern of suppression of Black feminist thought in her book *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment.* She argues that this has had a major effect on theory and the ways in which we view the experience of the feminist subject (2002). As Collins points out, the problem largely rests in how we define and come to accredit whom the intellectual is, setting up an institution that categorically displaces knowledges and expressions that remain beyond our peripheral vision. Collins calls for a challenge to the very terms of

intellectual discourse itself. Within women's studies classrooms, third wave feminists have also been exposed to different ways to express theoretical perspectives and challenges to racism and sexism. The women's studies canon now includes feminist anthologies such as *This Bridge Called My Back* and *Home Girls.* The influence of these texts has been heavily influential to the literature produced by third wave authors.

Third wave feminism has been accused of making use of postmodern theory in order to pit itself against second wave feminism, thus seeming more like an academic construction than a grassroots movement (Alfonso and Trigilio 1997). This accusation raises the question of whether the third wave is anything more than just elitist *talking* or is it actually based on regular women who are doing something? While this point is valid and interesting, it takes for granted the fact that feminist theory is anything but marginalized within academia, and it also does not consider the power that talking in academia can have on ordinary women's lives and vice versa.

While some feminists feel anxiety over how to go about theorizing much of the third wave literature, is has actually been criticized for not being theoretical enough—a strange conundrum that many young, feminist writers must deal with. Catherine Orr writes,

> At its best, *To Be Real* deals with the messy contradictions one encounters when attempting to apply feminist theory to everyday life. These stories are refreshing for those of us who are sometimes beleaguered by questions of how much difference our theoretical debates make in the lives of women outside the academy. (31)

She also argues that the third wave anthologies *To Be Real* and *Listen Up* seem to have no clear analytic path, something that other writers have brought up when critiquing the third wave. In the Introduction to *Third Wave Agenda* (1997), the editors Leslie Heywood and Jennifer Drake characterize third wave feminism as being about personal narration and cultural critique. They use two early third wave anthologies, *Listen Up* and *To Be Real*, as illustrative of this because in both books, the authors of each essay write in a personal style that lies somewhere on the edge of autobiography in order to develop new feminist knowledge. The editors of *Third Wave Agenda* claim that their anthology is more grounded in cultural history and theory than the previous anthologies. They state,

> Fusing the confessional mode of earlier popular feminisms with the more analytic mode that has predominated in the academy since the 1980s, both the *Third Wave Agenda* and *'Bad Girls'/ 'Good Girls,'* comprise essays that give an emotional life and a personal stake sometimes missing from academic writing, while maintaining an analytic focus. (2)

Similarly, the editors of *Catching a Wave* (2003) distinguish their anthology from *Listen Up* and *To Be Real*, stating that, "Unlike texts such as *Listen Up* and *To Be Real, Catching a Wave* offers essays that use personal experience as a bridge to larger political and theoretical explorations of the third wave; these essays function as the very tools we need to effect change," (13). It is interesting that the use of the progress narrative seems to persist even within the waves. The contributors to the third wave theoretical perspective argue with each other over who is newer and better—the result of the pressure to develop new incites and theory. Orr even goes as far as including the fact that

Heywood and Drake are both young faculty in research institutions when she commends their anthology over *To Be Real* and *Listen Up.* She states, "Therefore, Heywood and Drake, both young faculty at research institutions, attempt to provide the much-needed historical grounding for third wave feminism in their introductory essay," (37). Does the fact that they are both professors, or better yet, professors at *research* institutions make them more legitimate or their claims somehow more grounded in research? This raises questions of power and makes one wonder if they are only reinscribing social systems of power and privilege that other feminist activists are trying to deconstruct.

In response to the criticisms of members of the third wave's use of the personal narrative, I am in agreement with Deborah Siegel (2002) when she states, "I envision the third wave as a moment that asks us as scholars to re-imagine the disparate spaces constructed as 'inside' and 'outside' the academy instead as mutually informing and intersecting spheres of theory and practice" (70). The creative methods of confession and personal narration disrupt the binaries that inform our ideas of public/private, man/woman, gay/straight, etc. Their uses may draw feminists in who resist feminism because they think of it as rigid and unable to register ambiguity and complexity. It is with this that I begin Chapter Two of this thesis that looks at two reoccurring themes in third wave literature and the ways these themes mark and emphasize the individual. I begin with a look at how the third wave is inherently linked to postmodernity because contributors to the third wave literature document the anxiety they feel over their fragmented selves. In many ways the emphasis they put on fragmentation and contradiction is a response to what they see as a second wave feminism that essentializes

the universal woman as much as they emphasize equality with men. *Realness* and *visibility* are two ways they deal with fragmentation and contradiction in order to claim that this hybridity is a valid, authentic, legitimate, and *true* as any other version of reality.

Chapter Three: Really Visible and Visibly Real

> "Every morning during high school I wake up pissed off, screaming 'goddammit' at the top of my lungs, envisioning the hallways filled with lockers and kids and hate, envisioning my own invisibility and the institutionalized invisibility of us all. It's pointless really, because no one hears that scream but me."
>
> — Christine Doza (1995), "Bloodlove" in *Listen Up: Voices from the Next Feminist Generation*

In 1995 Ani Difranco released the song, "32 Flavors," which became an instant anthem for young, rebellious girls and women everywhere in the U.S. The main chorus of the song states, "I am a poster girl with no poster, I am thirty-two flavors and then some," encapsulating the feeling of not fitting the dominant cultural (fill-in-the-blank) expectation. As Difranco unapologetically challenges her antagonist with, "I'm beyond your peripheral vision, so you might want to turn your head" she responds to the feeling of being culturally illegible with indignation (Righteous Babe Records). This song along with her other youth anthem, "Not a Pretty Girl," is especially notable due to the way Difranco calls her own subjectivity into question; she fits no universality nor claims any one location from which to speak for she is "thirty flavors and then some." She is also aware of the way that her position on the periphery of someone else's vision also affects her subjectivity— the formation of her "I." As Judith Butler points out, "No subject is the point of its own departure" (9). Thus, a third wave perspective, like Difranco's identity in her song, is born out of dealing with the position of *becoming a position*. They labor to define their subjectivity using rhetorical tools that both contest universality and argue for

authenticity and truth through standing for something. This chapter makes the shift from describing the historical context of the third wave and moves into an exploration of the theoretical issues within third wave literature; it explores how the third wave makes use of the themes of *being visible* and *being real* through the three anthologies, *To Be Real*, *Third Wave Agenda*, and *Catching a Wave*. While certainly not the only themes present in third wave literature, *visibility* and *realness* reflect best the consequences of a feminist-activist history fraught with tension over inclusion as well as the anxiety young theorists have over using categories to mark and order identity. Furthermore, these themes represent "a retreat into the individual" that is remarkably different from the way these themes may have been evident in second wave literature where women could speak for women and take it for granted that they were speaking for all women.

In Light of the Postmodern

My thinking has taken a turn while doing this project, and I can credit a kind of postmodern sensibility with a good portion of this shift. Initially, when I began to try to conceptualize the third wave I wanted to show that the activism of the third wave was not newer or better than anything anyone in the second wave feminist movement was doing. I wanted to point out the problematic ways in which theorists in the third wave promoted a progress narrative of feminist history. I began to realize, however, that the point is not that they are making this claim of progress and they are wrong, the point is that they had to establish themselves and make themselves visible and legitimate themselves when they did because of several factors including the supposed *death of feminism* in the early nineties. Third wave feminists were also responding to a history laced with tension over

inclusion, resulting in their need to claim space for multiplicity of identities and theory based on the intersection of oppression. Additionally, the "I'm not a feminist, but..." phenomenon that illustrated people's hesitation to be associated with feminism even if they believed anti-sexist goals to be necessary, seemed to call for a public relations face-lift of feminism in order to make it more inclusive. The need for the progress narrative was the third wave *reality* at the time and its *reality* now, and "every reality constructs its own notion of progress" (Natoli 1997, 20). Somehow, when I contextualized the emerging third wave feminism, I could no longer fault third wave activists for these ahistorical claims or deny my own participation in this *newer* version of feminism even though I have only a few years left before my age could make my membership into the third wave questionable.

Even more interesting when I started to think about the third wave's linkage to postmodern thought was that I found out that a lot of people are confused by the postmodern. In this essay, I have tried to explain what the third wave is, but perhaps this has been confusing as well. If ambiguity and contradiction are main frames of both the third wave and the postmodern and definition only serves to constrict and limit each of these sensibilities, then they should be challenging to understand. In his "Essays in Postmodern Theory and Culture," Ihab Hassan (1987) has a list of postmodern features that are remarkably third wave feminist-like. His eleven features are, *Indeterminancy, Fragmentation, Decanonization, Self-less-ness/Depth-less-ness, The Unpresentable/Unrepresentable, Irony, Hybridization, Carnivalization, Performance/Participation, Constructionism,* and *Immanence.* These features, which

point to postmodern's ambiguity, rupture, contradiction, subversion, feminization, "self-impersonation," and mysteriousness, can easily signify third wave feminist perspectives. For example, third wave feminists embrace *fragmentation* rather than uniformity. They also celebrate *irony,* especially when they look up to or use cultural artifacts to explain meaning. And of course *performance* is everything, especially where the topics of gender and sexuality are concerned.

Third wave feminism is as much a result of the postmodern as it is a product of first and second waves. Thus, the third wave is indebted to postmodern themes. To link the third wave to a second wave suggests a linear scheme of time that may only be partially useful when the third wave reflects so much dissonance and discord. This goes back to the idea of *feminisms*, plural form of the noun, being the emphasis. For example, when Mocha Jean Herrup (1995) states, "My lesbian identity didn't always make sense. I mean, how could I call myself a lesbian when the woman I once had a crush on continued to make my knees wobble when she turned up later as a man" (240), she suggests that there are many variations and ways to express pleasure and desire through identity. In third wave feminism, linear definitions are not necessarily suitable, and yet they use the wave model because that is the model offered to mark historical delineations.

Indeed, the *postmodern* perspective makes the claim that no subject is a *stable subject,* and postmodern critics interrogate the subject's construction as *natural* (Butler 1992). Estelle B. Freedman (2002) states, "Postmodern critics point that Enlightenment ideas about fixed race and sex rest upon biological definitions that have often been used to restrict the rights of women and minorities" (93). Thus, it would seem to be a given

that postmodern theory and feminism would work together; however the paradox is, as Linda Singer (1992) points out that, "the terminology of 'feminism' and 'postmodernism' works dramatically against the grain of much of the writing, theory, and practice to which they are supposed to refer" (464). The *isms* portray an ideology that may indeed be modeled after mechanisms of power, and the challenge is to recognize and resist sustaining any one form of power. This returns us to Sandoval's theory of *differential consciousness*, which is a practice that "does the ideology in order to undo it." *Catching a Wave* contributor Emi Koyama (2003) challenges people to move between ideological positionings by stating,

> None of us should be expected to reject every oppressive factor in our lives at the same time; it would burn us out and drive us crazy. The sum of our small rebellions combined will destabilize the normative gender system as we know it. Various forms of feminisms, queer activism, transfeminism, and other progressive movements will attack different portions of the common target, which is heterosexist patriarchy. (252)

Koyama's effort is to speak from nowhere and everywhere at the same time and to use mobility while also "attacking a common target." This postmodern sensibility allows the individual to strategically mobilize according to what they feel is the significant issue for themselves at that moment.

Sandoval's postmodern *differential consciousness* illustrates well a method for feminist practitioners who are distrustful of monolithic and essentialized constructions of identity. The categories that are signified and thus deemed legible and real mystify

movement that occurs within the interstitial gaps, places where those of us sometimes remain when we are crossing borders. Butler states in *Gender Trouble,* "The more insidious and effective strategy it seems is a thoroughgoing appropriation and redeployment of the categories of identity themselves, not merely to contest 'sex,' but to articulate the convergence of multiple sexual discourses at the site of 'identity' in order to render that category, in whatever form, permanently problematic" (1999, 163). In *Methodology of the Oppressed* Chela Sandoval describes the method of differential consciousness that U.S. feminists of color have strategically enacted as an activity that allows movement "between and among ideological positionings considered as variables, in order to disclose the distinctions among them" (Sandoval, 58). She states, "Differential consciousness represents a strategy of oppositional ideology that functions on an altogether different register. Its powers can be thought of as mobile—not nomadic, but rather cinematographic: a kinetic motion that maneuvers, poetically transfigures, and orchestrates while demanding alienation, perversion, and reformation in both spectators and practitioners" (Sandoval, 44). It is something that is learned by oppressed people as a survival skill, but this survival skill is much different than conventional notions of identity politics. *Identity politics* as a modernist mode of oppositionality, has essentialist requisites which result in the production of unproblematic essentialized identities (Garrison 2000). Sandoval (1991) argues,

> The praxis of U.S. third world feminism represented by the differential form of oppositional consciousness is threaded throughout the experience of the social marginality. As such it is also being woven into the fabric of experiences

> belonging to more and more citizens who are caught in the crisis of late capitalist conditions and expressed in the cultural angst most often referred to as the postmodern dilemma. The juncture I am proposing, therefore, is extreme. It is a location wherein the praxis of U.S. third world feminism links with the aims of white feminism, studies of race, ethnicity, and marginality, and with postmodern theories of culture as they crosscut and join together in new relationships through a shared comprehension of an emerging theory and method of oppositional consciousness.

Garrison (2000) explains, "In other words, a differential oppositional ideology-praxis makes possible a 'tactical subjectivity' in which multiple oppressions can be confronted by shifting modes of consciousness as various forms of oppression are experienced," (147).

Donna Haraway calls all identities "fabricated hybrids," and she argues that our consciousness of gender, race, or class "is an achievement forced on us by the terrible historical experiences of...patriarchy, colonialism, and capitalism." Taking issue with the way categories create constricting labels, third wave feminists also seem to be enamored with categories and labeling. The consequence creates an illogical contradiction. Taking into account third wave's penchant for the personal narrative, the paradox becomes even thicker. How does one talk about one's own personal experience without reinstating those categories that are ostensibly immobile and at times even commodified? And how does one go about contesting *the real* without discrediting and invalidating all those who speak about *real*, sometimes painful and poignant, experiences. Concerned with the language of

categories and labeling Judith Butler (1990) states,

> I'm permanently troubled by identity categories, consider them to be invariable stumbling-blocks, and understand them, even promote them, as sites of necessary trouble. In fact, if the category were to offer no trouble, it would cease to be interesting to me: it is precisely the *pleasure* produced by the instability of those categories which sustains the various erotic practices that make me a candidate for the category to begin with," (121).

Here, Butler expresses the pleasure received from the instability of categories, thus making it apparent that the third wave might be marked with ambiguity and contradiction, but it is this contradiction that draws feminists to it. Entangled in all of this are those that resist postmodern(ism) and poststuctural(ism) because these ideological positionings are just other methods for closeting one's desire. Responding to Butler, *Third Wave Agenda* contributor, Carol Guess (1997) argues, "I don't feel that using the word *lesbian* consistently to refer to my altogether inconsistent, changeable, and expanding understandings of my own eroticism in any way limits those understandings" (159). For her, postmodern theory or more specifically, poststructuralism, in their replication of dominant hierarchies, makes it hard for her to be herself without feeling the pressure of *mastering* the language and concepts of the academy.

Thus, many of the third wave writers must negotiate the popularity of viewing categories as unstable with their need to make their *authentic* selves legible. As people grapple with trying to understand a cohesive definition of this *third wave agenda*, it should help to have some knowledge of where and how the third wave began, something I

have outlined in the last chapter. The third wave is a movement about recognizing and legitimating the individual story. While the second wave focused on collective identity, the third wave focuses on individual identity. And while the themes of *visibility* and *realness* were present in various forms during both the first and the second wave, it seems that these themes are about self discovery and individual testimony for the third wave. Obviously, technological advances and cultural evolutions have also affected the ways that themes in the third wave manifest themselves, but ultimately, the emphasis on the reality of the individual bears a remarkably different kind of feminist emphasis and perspective.

To Be Visible

While *becoming visible* has been a common theme in women's history projects, who becomes visible and how the characters and actors are chosen for visibility often gets ignored.[7] While postmodernism delegitimates the canonized author and the metanarrative, so does third wave feminism. Third wave feminists look to "re-write the American-Script" (Heywood and Drake 1997) and claim a place for women's issues and feminism. They do this in an era when many of us have come of age with women's studies readily available in universities and when gender and identity are readily talked about even in the traditional disciplines, such as English, History, and Anthropology. Also, because third wave feminists have developed their sense of identity in a "world shaped by technology, global capitalism, multiple models for sexuality, changing national demographics, and declining economic vitality" (Dicker and Piepmeier 2003, 14), the means for becoming visible look different than they did for feminists during the second wave. For example,

Mocha Jean Herrup (1995) states, "In cyberspace, a realm in which the body is not physically present, where confirmable identity markers such as anatomy and skin color are no longer visible, the fluidity of identity is thrown into high relief" (241). Cyberspace also poses a challenge to the traditional canon because knowledge is exchanged at a quicker and more accessible rate. It has in many ways, replaced the canon as the best source for supposed knowledge and truth.

Visibility refers to the act of being both seen and heard. Making oneself visible is a political act that renders one's existence both legitimate and legible. Complicating the notion further, being visible does not always mean being believed. The politics of visibility must take into account that culturally intelligible gender, for example, must make room for ambiguity and consideration of how "various individuals conceptualize their positions within specific configurations of the visible" (Walker 1993, 888). I argue here that third wave feminist anthologies have made accessible spaces for the complexities of visibility. How might, for example, one talk about the oppression of women in the Middle East without (re)creating the image of the meek and docile harem kitten (Darraj 2003)? [8] Or, how might one go about making an argument for the subversiveness of femme identity when many of the signifiers for femme identity mirror heteronormative images for sexuality (Delombard 1995)? Third wave theory leaves room for the complexity of these questions, and if the theory makes people uncomfortable, then the theorists are doing their job. Third waver Melissa Klein (1997) states, "Feminism has moved from the struggle for equality toward an engagement with difference, as assertion that girls can have the best of both worlds (that they, for example, can be both violently

angry and vampily glamorous)" (208).

The issue of visibility becomes even more complicated when being seen is not necessarily the most sought after device for subversion. Being visible, for example, makes one vulnerable to forms of prejudice and violence. Being visible may also reify oppressive categories. Being seen may make one a target for surveillance or arrest by the police in instances where there is criticism of the government taking place. In addition, becoming visible does not always suggest that one is naturally invisible. People with disabilities and people who speak of issues pertaining to fatphobia, may speak of not being seen because their presence is disturbing or perceived as disgusting even in circles that claim to be liberal and open-minded. While disability studies is a small portion of feminist studies, it is often excluded from texts. The three texts that I have chosen to focus on *Third Wave Agenda, To Be Real,* and *Catching a Wave* all omit disability from their feminist lense. Cheryl Green addresses this issue in *Listen Up,*

> The [feminist] movement has come far in acknowledging the diversity of women with respect to ethnicity, sexual preference and economic status. But where the movement still fails miserably is in disability. Women with disabilities are grossly concentrated in the margins. We are women, yet our histories and identities are ignored. Our disabilities are accommodated at rallies, conferences and meetings where we mostly hear nondisabled feminists speaking. I believe that all the accommodations are significant first steps to including us in the movement. However, I can't help being dissatisfied because women with disabilities should routinely be speaking about our own experiences alongside nondisabled feminists.

(143)

The third wave theorists and advocates may claim that they are more inclusive than previous generations, but in their criticism of the second wave they may be overlooking places within their own movement where they are themselves oppressive. This is, it seems, something that feminists are looking to solve. The multiplicities of identities and the growing list of ways that people categorize themselves and feel oppressed makes the conversation over visibility ever changing. Lisa M. Walker (1993) argues,

> Privileging visibility has become a tactic of late twentieth-century identity politics, in which participants often symbolize their demands for social justice by celebrating visible signifiers of difference that have historically targeted them for discrimination. For example, the lesbian and gay community gives symbolic power to cross-dressing as a signifier of homosexuality by selecting a drag queen to be 'Miss Gay Pride' for the annual June Pride march and sending her down Fifth Avenue in a convertible. Similarly, the Black Power Movement's slogan Black is Beautiful gives symbolic value to skin color and ethnic styles as signifiers of racial difference by reversing Eurocentric definitions of beauty. (868)

She goes on to explain some of the problems that might arise from the privileging of the visible. When certain signifiers with political value are emphasized repeatedly, those figures that do not present those signifiers may become marginalized or absent. Thus, visibility necessitates a constant re-defining and re-emphasis of inclusion when folks feel excluded or absent from the categories offered by the dominant group. In fact, it goes beyond merely *inclusion,* which may connote tokenism by white, heterosexual women of

the other and into how participation is managed so that everyone's view is expressed and spoken for.

Making oneself visible can occur in a multitude of ways, but the method third wave authors use that is particularly striking, not to mention controversial, is through the act of confession. Again, this is not to say that women in the second wave were not making use of the testimonial and confession, but the need to create a collective consciousness through personal confession is not necessarily the goal for third wave members. Instead, they may highlight the differences they feel from other third wave feminists, emphasizing the multiplicity of their identities while making it apparent that they are still feminists even if they do not fit any one expectation or definition for the identity of feminist. A foucaultian analysis of this renders it nothing new or extraordinary. Confession results from censorship and silence, and acts that repress people's desires simultaneously creates a space where *freeing up* those desires through language (Foucault 1978). Transforming every desire into discourse is the act of confession. While confession was at times meant to be a way for the sick to cure themselves of their debauched minds, confession becomes in the 19th and 20th centuries a means for liberation. The gay and lesbian movement visibly proclaimed, "We're here. We're Queer" as the ultimate form of confessional liberation. In *To Be Real,* Gina Dent states,

> A confession is about form, not content. It is about the act of confessing, about the experience of that moment of revelation, and about those before whom the revelation is made. This practice of making confessions concerns itself little with the factuality of the story, or with the desired outcome of its telling, but rather

> with the performance of telling itself. At the moment of confession, one can imagine the self extending outward and into a community that assumes it has something in common with you and that you in turn identify with. (64)

Dent argues that each community sets up limits as to what can be confessed, and some things may be considered inappropriate, too outlandish, or not serious enough. This is seen in the academic world where confessional styles of language are often criticized for not being backed up enough by theory. Feminists might find discomfort with confessions that are laced with contradiction. "Young feminists in particular feel the edges of feminist history grind against the conservative cultural contexts in which our lives unfold; we live inside the contradiction of a political movement that affirms and encourages expressions of female and/or alternative sexualities, and the 'real world' of workplaces, families, and communities that continue to judge women harshly for speaking of sex, much less expressing one's 'deviant' acts and complex erotic imagination," argues Merri Lisa Johnson (2002, 2).

Self-publication is a form of confession that has not yet been totally incorporated into the discourse on feminist theory. Like the traditional journal, zines (small, handmade self-published handbooks), have been a staple for young activists' and writers' lives. In *Catching a Wave,* Alyssa Harad (2004) speaks of zines' potential to invent a community through writing and exchange. Zine authors speak freely of the "intimate details of their lives, detailing stories of abuse, fantasy, and persistent desire." (93)

In *Catching a Wave,* performance artist, Kristina Sheryl Wong makes a case for third wave feminism's ability to count for those that exist outside of the traditional

feminist purview. In "Pranks and Fake Porn: Doing Feminism My Way," she explains that feminism was a label that she resisted until she found third wave feminism and realized that it was possible to redefine feminism so that she felt included. Her act of becoming visible manifests itself into a website she created called "Bigbadchinesemama"in which she uses political incorrectness in order to challenge the cultural assumptions and stereotypes of Asian and Asian-American women. Creating her website is an act of political disturbance. The website exists so that men looking for the "lotus blossom" Chinese mail-order brides will instead find images of Asian women beating and hurting white men. All these images are meant to be subversive responses to the commmodifying gaze placed on most Asian women on the web.

To Be Real

Danzy Senna begins her essay "To Be Real" with, "Growing up mixed in the racial battlefield of Boston, I yearned for something just out of my reach— an 'authentic' identity to make me real." Thus, she articulates what many authors in the third wave feminist anthologies also struggle with. As with visibility, realness is something that a person *yearns* for when they want to be rendered legible. The *yearning* third wave authors experience is coupled with *passion,* and it is equally akin to *entitlement* (Drake 1997). This urge to claim an identity is an act of self-empowerment and self-determination, something that is feminist, although as many of the third wave writers illustrate, it does not necessarily adhere to any one kind of feminism or feminist expectation.

In opposition to the second wave agenda of putting the category of *woman* into the public sphere, many of the writers proclaiming their *realness* are working on several

fronts at once. Catherine Orr (1997) proclaimed her displeasure with the third wavers' initial proclamation of realness,

> Like many who position themselves within the third wave, I am not old enough to remember the women's movement of the seventies in any detail. Theoretically, this makes me the target audience for these books. I must admit, however, that I did not rush out to buy *To Be Real* when it first hit the shelves. Although I knew Walker to be an informed and outspoken young feminist activist (a cofounder of The Third Wave, in fact), the title turned me off: 'What are we? Imposters? Has the previous generation of feminists been *lying*? Has it battle-weary face aged to the point that it is now *unattractive* to the MTV generation?' All I could see was another best-seller decrying the historical obsolescence of feminism. (30)

Realness does not mean any singular thing; it is quite the opposite. For example, they may be challenging the idea that there are limited ways in which a person can perform real feminism, and they may also be objecting the notion that there is only one way to be Arab, lesbian, masculine, partnered, American, etc. Astrid Henry (2004) argues that *To Be Real* is a black feminist text in which Rebecca Walker points to the ways in which her feminism and her blackness are not inherently in conflict with one another. While it may have seemed as though *women* once needed to proclaim that they were in need of a class struggle based on this identity, it is now no longer sufficient to make *woman* the category with which to mobilize around. For third wave feminists this means they need to claim that their identities are just as real. It is why Darraj claims, "When I read how they and other black feminists dared to assert that American feminism was a predominantly white,

capitalist movement that needed to be broadened, I believed that I could identify myself as an Arab American feminist and be neither untrue no inaccurate" (199).

Theorists such as Jean Baudrillard say that *reality* is a simulacrum and representations in the media dominate our perceptions of the world (Heywood and Drake 1997). Given this train of thought, the media landscape takes on *hyperreality* as it is experienced as being even more exciting and colorful than everyday *reality*, yet there is always enough of the *real* self there to make it familiar (Kellner 1995). Herrup writes about *virtual identity,*

> Cyberspace is different from other kinds of erotically charged mediums because it is interactive. In order to engage in cybersex, you must actively write, create, and present a self. And when this cyberspace self becomes the vehicle for real-life arousal, what you think of as your 'real-life self' becomes implicated in whatever sexuality you experience on-line.

Donna Haraway's *Cyborg Manifesto* has gained cult-like status by using the Cyborg as a metaphor for this hybridity between real-life-reality and virtual-reality. The cyborg is, in Haraway's words (1991), "a hybrid of machine and organism, a creature of social reality as well as a creature of fiction." It may also be taken literally in the sense that the age of technology has changed to include a constant interaction with computers and machine. Attached to computers, we all, in a sense become part animal-part machine. It is a metaphor for crossing borders.

Realness has the effect of making a person feel like they belong and are accepted by those around them. Being interpreted as real, as opposed to inauthentic, legitimizes

one's performance; it means that a person's performance has been successful. *Realness,* with its troubling relationship to the notion of *natural* is a problem for those of us trained to see *natural* as an oppressive force. For example, the image of the *natural* woman invokes the female stereotypes that are limiting and bound to one's sex, something that has been disputed since before Simone DeBeauvoir famously proclaimed "One is not born a woman, but rather becomes a woman" and argued that the female is a victim of her species (Schneir 1994).

Contributors to third wave feminist theoretical perspective are greatly influenced by queer theorists such as Judith Butler who have to justify their experiences against compulsory heterosexual. In her most widely read and most contentious work, *Gender Trouble* (1999), Butler argues that everything is a performance and there is no original from which copies are made. Drag performance, in other words, is a copy of a copy and not an imitation of *natural* gender norms. Butler even warns against privileging culture over nature, arguing that discourse on the social construction of human behavior has promoted a binary relationship of hierarchy based on a model of domination. Thus, third wave authors consistently contest the real while they also argue that they are *real*, a paradox that is playful as much as it is crucial to their politics.

For Walker, it was crucial that she include authors that *tell the truth,* and for her that is achieved by respecting the role that personal experience plays in shaping ones *true* sense of self. She states in her introduction,

Neither myself nor the young women and men in this book have bowed out. Instead, the writers here have done the difficult work of being real (refusing to be

> bound by a feminist ideal not of their own making) and telling the truth (honoring the complexity and contradiction in their lives by adding their experiences to the feminist dialogue) " (xxxiv)

How does one go about "transgressing various truths" and "telling the truth" at the same time, or does this contradiction only reflect a disconnect in third wave feminist discourse? It is this contradiction with which third wave feminists are most comfortable.

Conclusions

I began this thesis with the goal in mind of making sense of the tension surrounding the advent of the third wave feminist political and ideological identity. I was particularly interested in third wave feminists' use of the progress narrative in which these feminists pitted themselves against second wave feminists and seemed to be claiming a *newer* and *better* theoretical perspective. While they could do this by targeting the "white women's feminism" of the second wave and make the claim that the third wave is more inclusive of multiplicity and has a greater understanding of the ways in which oppressions intersect each other, third wave writers and theorists seemed to be reinscribing a narrative that white-washed history by ignoring the activism of U.S. third world feminists, such as the cohorts of feminists of color and lesbians that created The Third World Women's Alliance and other covert nationalist and/or lesbian groups.

While I was researching, thinking, talking, and writing I started to see the reasons why the third wave feminists began to distinguish themselves. I saw that there was a need to make themselves visible and real through language, and as language is a limiting method at times for making meaning, they were using only what was available to them. If the wave model was the easiest way to make their movement visible on the feminist time line, then it only makes sense that they became the *third wave*. Also, they could define themselves in problematic, contradictory, and confusing terms because that is what is appropriate right now within postmodern discourse. Postmodernism calls for ambiguity and fluidity, and the third wave feminists take advantage of this. They do not have to define them selves in complete and methodical terms because to do so would reduce what

they have to say to another theory, which resulted in the rise in tension during the second wave. The third wave feminists have had to disrupt the old notion of feminism in order to allow feminism to grow. Theory cannot move forward unless it does something to disrupt the old. Disrupting the comfortable theory of the old allowed the necessary dissonance for new theory to form.

The greatest evidence for what the third wave is rests in the third wave feminist anthologies that have been published since the mid nineties. Within these texts third wave writers have responded to what they have learned was the monolithic and exclusive feminism of the past. Third wave feminists focus on individual identities partly in response to the version of the version of the second wave, which celebrated a collective identity, whether it be through *consciousness raising* groups or a political agenda that adhered to the idea that a select group of women knew what was best for every other woman. This *every woman* mentality and *sisterhood is global* ethic was hotly contested, particularly by women of color whose political and social concerns were eclipsed by this agenda. Third wave feminists, coming of age in a time when women's studies was available in universities, learned bits and pieces of this history and began to shape their own feminist perspectives accordingly. *Being real* and *being visible* are two ways that they can claim that their individual identities are relevant and authentic, but contradiction and ambiguity is what covertly challenges essentialism and hegemonic productions of knowledge.

Notes

1. Making the argument that membership to third wave feminism is determined the year in which one is born is problematic and will be addressed further in this paper.

2.Francis Beale published "Double Jeopardy: To Be Black and Female" in Robin Morgan's (1970) *Sisterhood is Powerful* in which she named the second wave of U.S. feminism a "white women's movement" because it was organized based on a gender division alone. See Beale's essay along with Chela Sandoval's *Methodology of the Oppressed* (2000) and Kristin Anderson-Bricker's essay (1999), "'Triple Jeopardy:' Black Women and the Growth of Feminist Consciousness in SNCC, 1964-1975" in *Still Lifting, Still Climbing.*

3.Springer is referring to Davis's (1981) *Women Race and Class* and White's (1985) *Ar'n't I a Woman: Female Slaves in the Plantation South*, which both explore the history of oppression and resistance in African American women's lives.

4. Friedan's (1962) book *The Feminine Mystique,* which spoke for millions of middle-class housewives who were bored out of their minds in the suburbs of America, is sometimes accredited with being the first major second wave feminist text and even with beginning the second wave feminist movement; however, this has been contested (Baumgardner and Richards 2000; Henry 2004).

5. Sandoval's specific name for this method is "differential consciousness," a complex strategy in which the practitioner works within the ideology in order to undo it. It is thoroughly outlined in her book, *Methodology of the Oppressed* (2000), and will also be revealed later in this paper.

6. *Sisterhood is Powerful* became an even more popular slogan with the publication of the white feminist Robin Morgan's 1970 collection of essays called *Sisterhood is Powerful: An Anthology of Writings from the Women's Liberation Movement.* .

7. The women's history book, *Becoming Visible: Women in European History*, which was first published in 1976, became a staple in many women's history classrooms.

8. Postcolonial feminist theorists such as Chandra Talpade Mohanty and Jaqui Alexander have heavily influenced and/or paved the way for third wave feminist authors to draw such conclusions. See *Feminist Genealogies, Colonial Legacies, Democratic Futures* (1997).

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