

## A third wave: about the politics of proclaiming a 'new' feminism

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process of becoming consisting of micro-movements around and about macro-discourses. Such a conceptualization contests a view of women as entrenched within static confrontational discourses and so points the way to a far more subtly nuanced understanding of the nature of lesbian motherhood. To support her new ways of thinking about lesbian motherhood, Hequembourg provides illustrations drawn from thoughtful analysis of the narrative accounts provided by lesbian mothers. These self-portrayals provide evidence of a variety and subtlety that seriously challenge the validity of more popular discourses that tend to produce a more limited, stereotypical view.

While it may have been useful if the difference between micro- and macro social contexts had been distinguished and defined more clearly and there was a tendency at times to repeat rather than to elaborate, Hequembourg's attempt to develop an alternative conceptual framework is commendable. In my view, this book is an extremely valuable addition to thinking about lesbian motherhood.

## REFERENCE

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## A THIRD WAVE: ABOUT THE POLITICS OF PROCLAIMING A 'NEW' FEMINISM

Stacy Gillis, Gillian Howie and Rebecca Munford, eds  
*Third Wave Feminism: A Critical Exploration*, expanded 2nd edn  
Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007, 310 pp., ISBN-13 978-0-230-52174-2

The second edition of *Third Wave Feminism: A Critical Exploration* interrogates the wave metaphor while seriously engaging with the arguments of self-identifying third wave feminists. This revised collection of essays opens with a new foreword by Imelda Whelehan and concludes with an afterword by Jane Spencer. This second edition also contains an interview with Luce Irigaray and newly commissioned chapters that explore a broad range of issues: transgender feminism (Susan Stryker), postfeminism (Amanda Lotz), Polish feminism (Agnieszka Graff), post-colonial feminism (Anastasia Valassopoulos) and pornography (Melanie Waters).

As the section headings indicate, the overarching themes of the collection centre around the issues of 'Generations and Genealogies' (Part I), 'Locales and Locations' (Part II) and 'Politics and Popular Culture' (Part III). In the introduction, the editors Stacy Gillis, Gillian Howie and Rebecca Munford voice their concerns about the discourse that contrasts different feminist generations. They argue that a generational approach to differences within feminisms risks establishing a divisive rather than dialogical framework. The issues of generations and genealogies are also addressed

in the chapters by Lise Shapiro Sanders and Alison Stone. Lise Shapiro Sanders asks questions about generational and other differences among women. Alison Stone also acknowledges women's differences while presenting a genealogical perspective in order to reconceive of women as a social group in anti-essentialist ways.

The theme of differences within feminist thinking as well as among 'women' features strongly in the entire collection and is approached from various angles. Winifred Woodhull calls for western feminists to engage with women's movements throughout the world. Similarly, Mary Orr's reflections on Julia Kristeva's writings alert feminists to think about the translingual and transnational parameters of their work. The quest to incorporate women's differences in feminist analyses is also addressed in Leslie Heywood and Jennifer Drake's chapter on the third wave as well as in Stacy Gillis's concerns about the emancipatory potential of cyberfeminism.

In her foreword to the collection, Imelda Whelehan takes up the issues of a third wave politics. She states that there are many questions to be asked about the 'free-ranging and individualist statement of political purpose' (p. xviii) as proclaimed by third wavers. Various contributors examine the emphasis on individual, as opposed to collective effort that seems to be apparent in third wave feminisms. They do so particularly in relation to popular culture, critically investigating Buffy (Patricia Pender), Ally McBeal (Kristyn Gorton), representations of the postfeminist action hero (Cristina Lucia Stasia), the Riot Grrl and Girlie movements (Rebecca Munford). Some cultural texts are regarded as politically engaged and potentially oppositional (Buffy in Pender's chapter). However, most authors voice concerns about the political message that third wave feminist icons communicate. Kristyn Gorton, for example, critiques the focus on the personal (rather than collective) struggle in Ally McBeal. Although the book editors argue that third wave feminism has moved away from a politics of individualism, the question of the third wave's emancipatory potential remains prominent.

While the themes of feminist generations, difference and politics are overarching, some contributors also seek to address the phenomenon of postfeminism and ask how it can be distinguished from third wave accounts (Amanda Lotz, Leslie Heywood and Jennifer Drake, Rebecca Munford, Elaine Showalter). Equally important, debates on essentialism are taken up in various chapters and discussed in contrasting ways. Mridula Nath Chakraborty calls for an embodied essentialism that 'acknowledges woman as an *essentially* racialised category within configurations of the contemporary nation state' (p. 102, emphasis in original). Taking an opposing stance, Andrew Shail argues for a radical critique of the category 'sex' in his reflections on male-embodied feminism. Similarly, Niamh Moore advocates anti-essentialism by championing eco-feminist activism as a reconfiguring of the categories 'woman' and 'nature'.

The essays in this collection manage to scrutinize third wave feminism while taking seriously the ideas and arguments of its proponents. Amanda Lotz draws attention to third wavers' disavowals of previous feminisms. Ednie Kaeh Garrison explores the way in which third wavers' distancing of preceding feminist politics seems to support culturally dominant misconceptions of (second wave) feminism. In light of these observations, it would have been interesting to see a further exploration of third wavers' 'eagerness to signal a break from an earlier feminist generation' (Gillis et al., p. xxiv). The fashioning of a new term for feminism raises

questions about the motivations for doing so, the function that this new prefix seeks to fulfil and the possible consequences of the renaming of feminism. When third wavers are adamant that their feminism is different from preceding feminisms, what exactly are they distancing themselves from? Various third wave authors emphasize that the new feminism is more 'inclusive' than second wave feminism allegedly was. However, this rhetorical move seems to cast previous feminisms as stable entities, potentially overlooking their complexities. Furthermore, a new feminism that carries a different name arguably gives rise to further exclusions: in order to distinguish itself from that which it seeks to supersede, a new feminism has to differ from, and potentially exclude the other feminisms that it has challenged.

The contributors to this collection certainly address these issues in more or less explicit ways, inviting further reflections about the motivations for the championing of a new wave. In her chapter on the third wave's negotiation of pornography, Melanie Waters argues that the third wave's foregrounding of pleasure involves the 'attempt to make feminism more agreeable to a generation of young women who have been fed the myth that feminists are the fat, man-hating, no-fun lesbians' (p. 258). Numerous chapters point to negative stereotypes attached to (second wave) feminism. If the fashioning of third wave feminism is partly motivated by the attempt to disassociate feminism from the stereotypes attached to it, then this move has to be critically investigated. While this is not to argue against the endeavour of rendering feminisms more popular, it seems to be crucial to ask who and what is rejected when third wave feminism claims to be different from previous feminisms. If the problematic stereotype of the unattractive, 'unfeminine' woman features in such an attempt then the motivations for and possible consequences of a 'new' feminism have to become the object of critical enquiry.

Raising multiple questions about third wave feminism, the collection invites a broad range of readers to reflect upon the third wave. It is a thought-provoking and enjoyable read that is particularly engaging because it interrogates the third wave from a variety of perspectives. Exploring third wave feminism in sometimes critical and sometimes more appreciative ways, feminists from different locations discuss numerous issues. These range from debates on essentialism to eco-feminism (Niamh Moore), male-embodied feminism (Andrew Shail), feminisms of colours (Mridula Nath Chakraborty), cyberfeminism (Stacy Gillis) and materialist feminism (Gillian Howie and Ashley Tauchert). Further themes are touched upon in the interview with Luce Irigaray who talks about several issues including her model of sexuate difference. When asked about her feminist identification, she states that she 'does not belong to any "ism" category' (p. 283), protesting against the fact that she could be called a feminist. Interestingly, such an attitude is frequently attributed to 'young women' who are believed to distance themselves from feminism. This observation takes us back to some of the key themes of the book: questions about the usefulness of the generation metaphor, feminist negotiations of 'difference' and its resultant politics. The collection represents a stimulating engagement with these crucial issues, inviting further reflections on how the 'third wave' constructs previous feminisms and what the proclamation of a 'new' feminism potentially excludes.

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