

Summer 8-2019

Academic Feminists Analyses of Female Celebrities from the 1980s to Today

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The University of Southern Mississippi

Academic Feminists Analyses of Female Celebrities from the 1980s to Today

By

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A Thesis
Submitted to the Honors College of
The University of Southern Mississippi
in Partial Fulfillment
of Honors Requirements

Summer 2019

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Abstract

This thesis examines the history of academic feminists and their changing debates over race, class, sexism, and sexual preference from the 1980s to the present. In the 1980s, white feminists tended to focus on sexism in the workplace and class discrimination, while black feminists focused instead on the racism and classism that black women faced both inside and outside of academia. More recently, millennial feminists, in both third- and fourth-wave feminism, have continued to focus on racial discrimination within feminism (and broader society) while also examining women's sexual preferences. However, they have stopped focusing on sexism in the workplace and class discrimination. In this thesis, Alice Kessler-Harris and Rosalind Rosenberg represent the perspectives of 1980s white feminists, while Patricia Hill Collins, Angela Davis, bell hooks, and others represented the perspectives of 1980s black feminists. Ashanka Kumar, Jacqueline Warwick, Audra Gaugler, Joyce E. Marshall, and Janell Hobson represent the perspectives of millennial feminists. Recently, millennial feminists have analyzed the feminism of celebrities such as Madonna, Lady Gaga, Beyoncé, and Diana Ross.

There are multiple purposes to this study. As described above, the first is to describe how white and black feminists from the 1980s to the present analyzed race, class, sexism, and sexual preference. The second is to show the methods in the public sphere through which feminists have raised and analyzed issues of concern. In the 1980s academic feminists wrote print books and magazines and newspaper articles; millennial feminists have written more on social media platforms and are more concerned with commenting on celebrities. This thesis emphasizes the growing importance of celebrity, alongside social media, in transmitting feminists' messages. The final purpose of this thesis is to highlight that race is the only issue that both black feminists

in the 1980s and millennial feminists have given equal consideration. However, this thesis also cautions millennial feminists not to lose sight of the continued importance of tackling class and workplace discrimination.

Keywords: Feminism, *EEOC vs. Sears Case*, Black Feminism, Millennial Feminism, Third-and Fourth-Wave Feminism, #MeTooMovement, Black Lives Matter Movement.

Dedication

For my loved ones.

Acknowledgements

This thesis came into creation with the mental and intellectual support of a variety of people I appreciate very much. First, my family, who has always encouraged me to work hard and follow my dreams no matter what hardships, present themselves. My parents are my inspiration for my interest in the subject of labor through the eyes of other races, classes, and sexualities. Their teachings on the lives of others have pushed me to share the messages of these academic feminists, both white and black from the 1980s and today. I appreciate the opportunity and instruction the Honors College gave me to be able to do this thesis and be able to share my findings with others. Also, I am thankful for getting the opportunity to learn the basics of thesis preparation through Dr. Wesley Follett, who has provided me with the background knowledge to start this academic writing process. I want to thank Dr. Douglas Bristol for his expertise in the topics of black history and the 1980s that gave me the ideas for the issues I have chosen to write about. I could not have written this thesis without his creativity and historical knowledge.

Finally, I would like to thank Dr. Matthew Casey and Dr. Rebecca Tuuri for their constant encouragement and patience with me throughout this project. Their eye for detail and dedication helped me with the overall presentation of this scholarly work. Their diligence on mechanics through the writing process was something I was previously unconfident with. Their tips and assistance have given me the confidence always to aim higher to present the best form of scholarship.

Table of Contents

Introduction.....	1
Chapter One: Alice Kessler-Harris vs. Rosalind Rosenberg.....	8
Chapter Two: Black Feminist Critiques of White Feminists Scholars.....	24
Chapter Three: Baby Boomer feminist Scholars vs. Millennial feminist Scholars	35
Conclusion.....	58
Bibliography.....	60

List of Figures

Figure 1.1: Kessler-Harris and Rosalind Rosenberg.....	11
Figure 2.1: bell hooks.....	26
Figure 2.2: Angela Y. Davis.....	28
Figure 2.3: Patricia Hill Collins.....	29
Figure 3.1: Sassy December 1988 Cover.....	38
Figure 3.2: <i>Bitch</i> Fall 1998 #3 Cover.....	39

List of Abbreviations

EEOC- Equal Employment Opportunity Commission

BYP 100-Black Youth Project 100

WAVAW - Women Against Violence Against Women

WAVPM -Women Against Violence in Pornography and Media

WAP- Women Against Pornography

Introduction

From the 1980s to today, academic feminists have analyzed women in the workplace and their struggles to attain high paying jobs and obtain more political power. My thesis compares feminists in the 1980s with millennial feminists on the issues of race, class, and sexual preference. My main argument is that there are shifts in emphasis between the 1980s and millennial academic feminists in the themes they discuss and the areas of life they analyze. In the 1980s white and African American feminists focused on race and class while, today, millennial feminists concentrate on race and sexual preference. Feminists in the 1980s discussed sexuality in events like the Sex Wars, where various organizations such as Women Against Violence Against Women (WAVAW), Women Against Violence in Pornography and Media (WAVPM), and Women Against Pornography (WAP) protested against the promotion of pornography.¹ However, the Sex Wars still lacked the strong focus on the topic of sexual preference on which millennial feminists concentrate. Another shift of emphasis from the 1980s to now is the way that feminists highlight discrimination. The 1980s academic feminists analyzed workplace discrimination cases, community complaints, and inequality of political power. On the other hand, millennial academic feminists use celebrities to understand race and sexual preference, which helps explain why millennial feminists focus less on class. My overall argument is that, besides gender, race is the only topic on which both 1980s and millennial feminists focus equally. Race trumps sexual preference and class with 1980s and millennial feminists, proving there are still race-related issues within the feminist movement today.

¹ Lynn, Comella. "Revisiting the Feminist Sex Wars." *Feminist Studies* 41, no. 2 (2015): 441. Doi: 10.15767/feministstudies.41.2.437.

Scholars have demonstrated the divisions within the 1980s feminist movement. These are most clearly embodied in a lawsuit against Sears Company in that decade. *The Equal Employment Commission (EEOC) vs. Sears Case* (1984) was an example of a workplace dispute that involved two academic feminists that gave competing testimonies for the EEOC and Sears.² Alice Kessler-Harris represented the EEOC, and Rosalind Rosenberg represented Sears. The EEOC said that Sears demonstrated discrimination based on sex for not hiring enough women in their higher-paying sales positions. In contrast, Rosalind Rosenberg defended Sears saying there was no numerical proof of discrimination. This case caused a divide within the Women's Movement because of the conflict between politics and scholarship.³ Some feminists, like Kathryn Kish Sklar, sided with Kessler-Harris because she refused to go against working women.⁴ Others, like Catherine Clinton, sided with Rosenberg because she thought that the freedom of research should be encouraged regardless of political opinion.⁵ The *EEOC vs. Sears Case* represented a workplace issue that sparked debate within the women's movement. The case addressed the issues of sexism and class from a middle-class white perspective.

Other issues that divided 1980s feminists included the imbalance of power between white and black women. Patricia Hill Collins, Angela Davis, and bell hooks, along with other black feminists, argued that middle-class white women needed to possess a real understanding of the

² Ruth, Milkman. "Women's History and the Sears Case." *Feminist Studies* 12, no. 2 (1986): 376. Doi: 10.2307/3177974.

³Samuel G. Freedmen. "Of History And Politics: Bitter Feminist Debate." *The New York Times*, June 6, 1986. 33. Accessed December 4, 2018. <https://www.nytimes.com/1986/06/06/nyregion/of-history-and-politics-bitter-feminist-debate.html>

⁴ Milkman. "Women's History and the Sears Case," 385.

⁵ Freedmen. "Of History And Politics: Bitter Feminist Debate", 33.

black experience.⁶ Without going out into the black community and listening to the concerns of black women, white academic feminists would not have been able to accurately capture the African American experience. Black feminist critics also stated that low-income white and minority women needed to have a leading voice in the movement and that black women needed to communicate more with other races. If other minority women worked together instead of fighting amongst themselves, then they would be able to have a more significant voice within the feminist movement rather than be divided and be forced to go against the middle-class white majority.

Collins, Davis, hooks, and others also criticized middle-class white feminists for using low-income white and black women's experiences for their career advancement and for focusing too much on sexism and not enough on race and class.⁷ In short, the fight for race and class is also a fight against sexism because they are all connected as methods of oppression. Even relatively privileged white women claimed to be victims of oppression due to the workplace discrimination they endured. Black academic feminists argued that white middle class women were taking on the victim role, spending too much time focusing on sexism when race and class were more important. The explanation that black academic feminists gave was that, unlike middle-class white women, lower -income white and minority women could not afford to be victims because they were too busy trying to survive. Overall Collins, Davis, hooks, and others used the lack of black and minority women in leadership positions as a reason to focus more on race and class rather than just sexism.⁸

⁶ Patricia Hill Collins. "The Social Construction of Black Feminist Thought." *Signs* 14, no. 4 (1989): 752.

⁷ Angela Davis, *Women, Culture and Politics* (New York, NY: First Vintage Books, 1990). 30.

⁸ bell hooks, "Sisterhood: Political Solidarity between Women." *Feminist Review*, no. 23 (1986): 127. Doi: 10.2307/1394725

Decades later, millennial feminists engaged in similar debates about women's oppression with the aid of new media platforms and publishing outlets. The transition began with academic publications and news magazines from the third-wave feminist movement. The third-wave feminist movement occurred during the years of 1990 to 2008. The fourth-wave began in 2008, with the height of using social media as a way to spread feminist messages and is still continuing in present day. Elizabeth Groeneveld demonstrates that the third-wave used magazines such as *Bitch* and *Hue* to transport information. These magazines discussed controversial topics like interracial relationships, female sexual stimulation, and lesbian relationships. Later, fourth-wave feminists could use social media websites like Facebook, Twitter, and personal blogs, to share concerns about police racial violence and sexual harassment.⁹

Perhaps as a result of these new forms of media, millennial academic feminists are using past and current celebrities as role models of feminism to publicize feminist issues. This is different from the 1980s academic feminists who focused on working people as their basis for discussing problems within the women's movement. For example, Audra Gaugler is a writer who uses Madonna as a feminist symbol because of contribution to empowering women to express their sexuality. This empowerment allowed women to be sexual for themselves and not for men. Madonna's music videos even make a statement by having dancers and actors from different racial backgrounds her music videos.¹⁰ Jacqueline C. Warwick discusses girl groups from the past, like The Supremes, to demonstrate that women in these musical groups had to deal with race discrimination and lack of sexual freedom, very similar to the level of racial

⁹ Elizabeth, Groeneveld, *Making Feminist Media: Third-wave Magazines on the Cusp of the Digital Age*. (Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2016). 1.

¹⁰ Audra Gaugler, "Madonna, an American pop icon of feminism and counter-hegemony: blurring the boundaries of race, gender, and sexuality by Audra Gaugler." (2000). 1. Theses and Dissertations. . Paper 662.

discrimination and sexual oppression that women are still facing today.¹¹ Ashanki Kumari uses Lady Gaga as a feminist symbol because she demotes the use of labels when it comes to sexuality. Kumari claims Gaga promotes the freedom of sexual preference in society and that labeling is a way for divisions to arise; if there were no labels, there would be no divisions.¹² Jocelyn E. Marshall and Janelle Hobson both promote Beyoncé by using her as a symbol for black women because of her sexual expression, level of success, and overall promotion of female empowerment. Beyoncé has stated that black women can have it all just like white women.¹³

However, just as in the past, debates exist among feminists about these celebrities. For instance, bell hooks argues that Beyoncé, is in fact, a negative symbol for the empowerment of black females. bell hooks argues this by expanding on the fact that Beyoncé is too connected to white symbolism, and, therefore, could never fully symbolize black women.¹⁴ Despite these divisions, it is clear that celebrities, perhaps more than previous generations' concerns with workers, are becoming a major target for feminist analysis and debate.

Nevertheless, my research is different from what 1980s and other millennial feminists have done because I take a step back to understand the broad shifts from 1980s feminists topics of significance, such as race and class, to compare the shift of focus for millennial academic feminists concentration on race and sexual preference. The common topic with both the 1980s academic feminists and the millennial feminists is that racial equality is a concern within the

¹¹ Jacqueline C. Warwick. *Girl Groups, Girl Culture: Popular Music and Identity in the 1960s*. (New York: Rutledge), 2008. 9.

¹² Ashanka Kumari. "'Yoü and I': Identity and the Performance of Self in Lady Gaga and Beyoncé." *The Journal of Popular Culture* 49, no. 2 (2016): 403. Doi: 10.1111/jpcu.12405.

¹³ Janelle Hobson. "Celebrity Feminism: More than a Gateway." *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 42, no. 4 (2017): 999. Doi: 10.1086/690922.

¹⁴ Jocelyn E Marshall. "The Beyoncé Effect: Essays on Sexuality, Race, and Feminism AdrienneTrier-Bieniek, Editor. McFarland, 2016." *The Journal of American Culture* 41, no. 1 (2018): 100-02. Doi: 10.1111/jacc.12858.

feminist movement. To show these points I use a variety of sources within my research such as newspapers, articles, and books like the 1980s academic feminists did, and I use blogs, social media sites, and feminist websites, like my fellow millennial feminists are doing. This brings me to the conclusion that millennial feminists inherited the focus of race and gender from the 1980s feminists but have forgotten class because of their focus on larger-than-life celebrities. Going even further to say that millennial feminists can learn from previous generations of women both black and white because class still matters.

The first chapter of my thesis will attempt to show that white academic feminists in the 1980s were concerned primarily with workplace discrimination, class, and political power. To demonstrate this I use the *EEOC v. Sears Case* as a platform to explain the opinions of two women in the women's movement in the 1980s. Alice Kessler-Harris who represented working class people, and Rosalind Rosenberg who represented the middle-class feminists, are two feminists who had the most political power within the women's movement of this time. I discuss the feud that this case caused among feminists during that time and how the different ideologies from Kessler-Harris and Rosenberg caused the division. The conclusion of Chapter One explains how the *EEOC v. Sears* case represented the white middle class issue of sexism within the workplace. The main point of the chapter is to show that the majority of white feminists at the time focused on sexism and class but not race and sexual preference. The sources I will use in this chapter are Kessler-Harris's and Rosenberg's books, along with articles commenting on the case. I also include contemporary newspaper articles to explain what other writers' thought of Rosenberg and Kessler-Harris along with their reasons for opposing one over the other.

The second chapter focuses on the opinions of Patricia Hill Collins, Angela Davis, bell hooks, and others whose works centered on the subject of the second-wave feminist movement

and its flaws. For example, how the control of the movement was in the hands of white middle class academics that didn't understand black or minority women from a racial or economic standpoint. To start the chapter, I use articles that explain aspects of race, class, and some comments on lesbian sexual preference from the black community during the 1980s. I then discuss the opinions of race and class from Collins, Davis, bell hooks, and others by using their books on those subjects. Finally, I explain the main point of the chapter, which is how black feminist felt that white middle class academic feminists focused too much on sexism and not enough on race and class.

The final chapter of this project discusses third-and fourth-wave feminism and what has changed since the 1980s and what remained the same. Commencing with articles that explain the growth of media from the 1990s to today, I will go on to examine how during the third-wave magazines were used to promote diversity and sexuality with the change of the fourth-wave when social media is used to show those same ideals. I explain how third- and fourth -wave feminism was at the forefront of movements like the Black Lives Matter Movement and #MeTooMovement. Millennial academics' research on celebrities such as Beyoncé, Lady Gaga, Diana Ross, and Madonna also show how they promoted race and sexual preference and sexual freedom along with highlighting the criticisms that second-wave feminists made about celebrities like Madonna and Beyoncé. The main idea of this chapter is to show the change from race and class to race and sexual preference. Along with showing the changes in the way feminists' ideas are shared and how millennial academics use public figures to symbolize the current ideals of feminism.

Lastly, this thesis bases its conclusions on the argument that feminists from the 1980s and today fail to give impartial analyses about race, class, and sexual preference. The Kessler-Harris

and Rosenberg debate in the *EEOC v. Sears's* case illustrated the 1980s white academic feminists' concentration of sexism and class. While the black feminist intellectuals like Collins, Davis, bell hooks, and others did a better job of going into detail about class and race but still only briefly mentioned sexual preference as a product of race and class. Finally, the millennial feminists discuss race and sexual preference but fail to address class and yet have some acknowledgments and advancements to perform concerning race. Therefore, no perspective mentions race, class, and sexual preference in an equal measure. The main idea of this chapter is to show that neither side demonstrated an equal emphasis on race, class, and sexual preference. Race is the only constant factor of discussion among feminists because while third-wave feminists have had more diversity, they still have a long way to go in terms of embracing women of all ethnic backgrounds. There is still a crack remaining in the glass ceiling of feminism.

Chapter One: Alice Kessler-Harris vs. Rosalind Rosenberg

In the 1980s, one of the most significant areas of focus within the feminist movement was sexism within the workplace. For white feminists in particular, who were the main voices of the movement at the time, sexism and class inequality received more attention than race and sexual preference. The intense focus on sexism from white feminists and the minimal acknowledgement of other races and groups of people led to criticisms from black feminists. Another debate that arose among feminists in the 1980s was whether men and women were different or the same. This debate was central to explanations about whether sexism was occurring within the workplace.

I begin this chapter by introducing the first issue within the feminist movement, which was sex-based discrimination in the workplace. I use the *EEOC vs. Sears Case* to illustrate this

issue. This was a landmark case that started in 1973 but gained attention in 1982 when feminists Alice Kessler-Harris and Rosalind Rosenberg provided testimonies about whether Sears was discriminating against women. Then I will show how this debate was tied to larger questions about whether men and women were the same or different. Alice Kessler-Harris, who testified for the EEOC, believed that Sears was demonstrating discrimination toward women and that men and women were the same. Therefore they both would go after the same types of job positions based on their economic need or professional wants if they were given the same opportunities to do so. On the other side of the debate, Rosalind Rosenberg represented Sears. She said they were not showing discrimination. Rosenberg said that men and women were different because women give in to society's sexist expectations, meaning that women will choose lower paying jobs due to their personal obligations in the household; this, Rosenberg said, was not the fault of Sears.

This debate expanded to the rest of the feminist movement to the point where prominent feminists took sides between Kessler-Harris and Rosenberg. Finally after going into detail of the testimonies between Kessler-Harris and Rosenberg within the case and between other feminists I will explain how these debates underemphasize race. The lack of focus of this issue caused uproar for black feminists in the movement.

I argue that the *EEOC vs. Sears Case* was a symbol for sexism within the workplace, which is why white feminists put so much focus into that issue instead of other issues like race. The Sears case was divisive because it could be interpreted either way using different strands of academic feminist thought. It captured ongoing debates perfectly and probably made them more intense. Lastly, I argue that this case shows the lack of attention white feminists were giving to race, which is why feminists in the black community would chastise white feminists for their lack of knowledge and assistance they failed to offer to the black community.

Analysis of Evidence

In 1972 the Equal Employment Opportunities Act enabled the EEOC or Equal Employment Opportunity Commission to bring suit against any employer who discriminated in their employment practices. The EEOC's action against Sears began in 1973 and had been stuck in informal conciliation since 1977. The judge ruled that it had reasonable cause to believe that Sears discriminated against women and minorities.¹⁵ Sears was not the first target of the EEOC. A strong influence was the *AT&T Case* that led to a settlement that helped 15,000 women and minorities; it was a historic victory for the EEOC.¹⁶ Other companies like General Motors and General Electric at the time settled out of court.

Unlike these other companies, Sears went on the defensive. From the periods of 1973 through 1980 "sixty percent of every type of sales position at Sears and forty percent of those qualified for commission sales were women. However, they only received forty percent of the promotions."¹⁷ Sears's discriminatory employment methods were attacks on working women, and the EEOC felt confident in this being a successful case; unfortunately, unlike the previous cases, the *EEOC* did not end up having the successful outcome they had imagined. Judge John

¹⁵ Jerry, Knight. "EEOC Ends Conciliation In Sears Case." *Washington Post*, February 3, 1979. Accessed December 3, 2018.

https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/business/1979/02/03/eoc-ends-conciliation-in-sears-case/d14e4d53-a1f0-4c6e-962d-c135e4b4d5af/?utm_term=.D8fee4b47f66.

¹⁶ Marjorie, A. Stockford. *The Bell Women: The Story of the Landmark AT&T Sex Discrimination Case*. New Brunswick, NJ: (Rutgers University Press, 2004), 16.

¹⁷ Jon Wiener. *Professors, Politics and Pop*. (London: Verso, 1994), 23.

A. Nordberg ruled that statistical analysis provided by the EEOC failed to show that Sears had discriminated against women in hiring and promotions for commission sales jobs.¹⁸

Figure 1: “Kessler-Harris and Rosalind Rosenberg”¹⁹



Both the EEOC and Sears called upon academic feminists to make their case. Alice Kessler-Harris and the EEOC said that Sears demonstrated discrimination because of their failure to hire female workers. Alice Kessler-Harris became involved in the *EEOC vs. Sears Case* in

¹⁸ Steven, Greenhouse. "Federal Judge Rules For Sears In Sex Bias Case." *The New York Times*, February 4, 1986. Accessed December 3, 2018. 21.

<https://www.nytimes.com/1986/02/04/us/federal-judge-rules-for-sears-in-sex-bias-case.html>.

¹⁹ Alice, Kessler-Harris. "Equal Employment Opportunity Commission v. Sears, Roebuck and Company: A Personal Account." 51.

September of 1984. She received a call from the EEOC requesting her to testify on the EEOC's behalf against Sears.

She was curious as to why the EEOC would need a historian to testify in the first place. They explained that Sears had already recruited academic feminist Rosalind Rosenberg to represent them, so the EEOC wanted to do the same. The EEOC told Kessler-Harris that Rosenberg was arguing that women were not interested in commission sales; therefore, Sears was not displaying discrimination. The EEOC told Kessler-Harris that Rosenberg also cited Kessler-Harris's research as evidence for the basis of her argument. Kessler-Harris did not agree with Rosenberg's claim, so she decided to join the case.²⁰ Kessler-Harris argued that Rosenberg's testimony neglected the central issue of Sears's willingness to hire on a nondiscriminatory and sex-blind basis.²¹ The EEOC found that Sears had fallen short of placing women in commission sales jobs specifically within installed home improvements, carpets, home appliances, and auto parts.²²

Rosalind Rosenberg claimed that there was no evidence to prove that Sears was showing discrimination toward female employees. She stated that there were multiple reasons why she testified for Sears. The first reason was that she believed that the Sears affirmative action plan of 1974 did recruit a lot of women and minority males into nontraditional jobs. The second reason was that the EEOC failed to provide direct testimonies from women who were victims of Sears's discrimination. Rosenberg said, "If there's ever a complaint in this case; I am not going to

²⁰ Alice, Kessler-Harris. "Equal Employment Opportunity Commission v. Sears, Roebuck and Company," 46.

²¹ Ruth, Milkman. "Women's History and the Sears Case." *Feminist Studies* 12, no. 2 (1986): 376. Doi: 10.2307/3177974.

²² Kessler Harris. "Equal Employment Opportunity Commission v. Sears," 48.

testify.”²³ She said that the absence of complaints was critical. A third reason was that she honestly believed that the EEOC’s accusation was a bit faulty. Rosenberg used her position as a historian to determine whether the claim the EEOC made had merit and she determined it did not.

Rosenberg thought the reason that others did not testify for Sears was that they feared criticism. She felt that it was her responsibility no matter the criticism she received to represent Sears. Rosenberg’s success led many academic feminists to accuse her of going against the women’s movement. Rosenberg’s response to all the harsh criticism was that “Scholars must not subordinate their scholarship to their politics, even if their scholarship appears to be heading in a politically dangerous direction. If the scholars allow their politics to drive their scholarship, they will be left with bad scholarship and misguided public policy.”²⁴ Despite the criticism she had supporters as well that agreed with her approach of following what you believe is correct based on scholarship despite criticism or political opinion.

Both Kessler-Harris and Rosenberg made arguments that went beyond whether Sears was demonstrating discrimination toward their female employees. Kessler-Harris and Rosenberg created the sameness or difference debate within feminism. Meaning two separate opinions, one where men and women were seen as the same and the other where men and women were viewed as different.

Rosenberg sided with the difference debate, saying that men and women are different. Therefore women were not going after the same job positions as men and discrimination was not

²³ Milkman. "Women's History and the Sears Case", 392.

²⁴ Samuel G. Freedmen. "Of History And Politics: Bitter Feminist Debate." *The New York Times*, June 6, 1986. 33. Accessed December 4, 2018. <https://www.nytimes.com/1986/06/06/nyregion/of-history-and-politics-bitter-feminist-debate.html>.

occurring. To defend her positions she used her own research along with the research of other feminists. Rosalind Rosenberg's testimony and book helped her win the case. She found that women and men possessed the same levels of intelligence and motor skills within a college setting.²⁵ Since they had the same levels of intelligence and motor skills from a physiology standpoint, it proves that men and women when willing to challenge themselves in different fields such as academia had the same likelihood from a biological perspective for success.²⁶ However, Rosenberg showed in her research that Helen Thompson, who conducted this experiment in 1900, found that women at times did have slower motor skills when surrounded by men because they felt pressure to be stereotypical feminine ladies.²⁷

Rosenberg stated that the reason that women were not going after the higher paying positions was that the schedules of women demanded them to be at home which restricted them from being able to pursue jobs with extended hours. She also mentioned that since all women regardless of race and class are limited to society's norms on motherhood, all women would be less likely to apply for the higher paying positions, which is not the fault of Sears. Rosenberg went further to prove her point by taking on Harris's testimony on minority based discrimination to show that Sears was not guilty of this either. She asked Kessler-Harris "What percentage of married women in 1980 were black or immigrants?" or "What percentage of these women worked?" and "Was not the total a relatively small proportion as a whole?" In other words, Rosenberg was trying to get Kessler-Harris to explain how Sears demonstrated discrimination

²⁵ Rosalind Rosenberg. *Beyond Separate Spheres: Intellectual Roots of Modern Feminism*. (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1993). 79.

²⁶ Rosenberg, *Beyond Separate Spheres*, 73.

²⁷ *Ibid*, 81.

toward black women. Kessler-Harris could not answer the questions presented to her and she could not prove that Sears was showing discrimination toward minority women.

Kessler-Harris responded by saying that Rosenberg's questions had many variables to them therefore they could not be easily answered. For example Kessler- Harris said that it depended on how work was being defined. Such as if the black women Rosenberg was referring to were working agricultural work then that would add up to a different percentage of workers then the amount of black women working in the domestic work which added up to significant numbers.²⁸ Kessler-Harris's inability to answer Rosenberg's questions and connect her rebuttal to the case helped Rosenberg win because she was able to prove that Sears was not showing discrimination with not only women but minorities as well. Her victory over Kessler-Harris garnered criticisms from other academic feminists. However, she did not regret her decision. Rosenberg's victory solidified for her that men and women were different but it did not make other feminists feel that way and it did not affect Kessler-Harris opinion either.

Kessler-Harris and EEOC said that women and men are the same and social norms have no connection to the reason why women were not getting the same types of jobs men are. Kessler-Harris used her book to present her evidence on the history of women's labor and how women always have worked. Economic reasons were the reasons why women at different periods worked certain types of jobs. She discussed how female employment in the colonial period was mostly domestic work performed by indentured servants or slaves. This was because white women from wealthier families were viewed differently from lower-income women or women of color. So, more affluent white women were not expected to work whereas low-income

²⁸ Kessler Harris. "Equal Employment Opportunity Commission v. Sears, Roebuck and Company", 62.

women or slave women had no choice.²⁹ The advancement of technology would move more toward wage labor. This change created more choices in the type of labor women were able to participate in. Such as more women were working in factories and receiving their own wages and their labor was not just limited to the domestic sphere.³⁰

All of this evidence conflicts with the stereotype of the women doing housework; instead, the women were beginning to work in the same occupations as men. She also went into detail about the effects of class and race on the changing outlook for wage working women. She says that white middle class married women were given more jobs as secretaries while poorer minority women were still doing more cleaning and factory work.³¹ So the white middle class women were earning more wages and doing the labor of the higher educated while low-income white, and minority women were receiving fewer wages and doing more physically taxing jobs.³²

Kessler-Harris continued to go against Rosenberg defending the EEOC's evidence. Kessler-Harris said that she did explicitly use the data the EEOC had which took into account the general and specific workforce experience and education from men and women. Kessler-Harris and the EEOC thought the evidence that requested Sears's potential employees qualifications was a way they discriminated against current and potential female employees. The EEOC found that Sears had fallen short of placing women in commission sales jobs specifically within installed home improvements, carpets, home appliances, and auto parts.³³ Kessler-Harris also accused Sears of racial discrimination but could not say how many black women work in the

²⁹ Alice, Kessler-Harris. *Out to Work: History of Wage-earning Women in the United States*. (Oxford: O.U.P, 1983), 10.

³⁰ Kessler-Harris. *Out to Work*, 21.

³¹ *Ibid*, 108.

³² *Ibid*.

³³ Kessler Harris. "Equal Employment Opportunity Commission v. Sears, Roebuck and Company,"48.

types of jobs like Sears compared to white women. She did not have enough evidence to connect Sears to racial discrimination. In the end, Kessler-Harris could not connect Sears to discrimination from sex or race. She did receive lots of support in the academic feminist community because she stayed true to the rights of women and brought up other aspects such as race and class in the conversation.

Debates about the similarities and differences between men and women went beyond Kessler-Harris's and Rosenberg's participation within the case. The debate was part of the feminist movement itself, which was already creating a divide among feminists. Kessler-Harris received the majority of support from her fellow feminists as opposed to Rosenberg. One of her supporters was Sandi E Cooper of The College Of Staten Island who wrote to another historian saying that Rosenberg's testimony "is an immoral act."³⁴ Cooper meant that anyone who would oppose the EEOC was opposing feminism as a whole therefore Rosenberg assistance to Sears was immoral because she went against women, who as a feminist she was supposed to protect. A group of historians held a meeting at the Organization of American Historians in December 1985 all of them said that "As feminist scholars, we have a responsibility not to allow our scholarship to be used against the interest of women struggling for equality in our society."³⁵ They believed that Rosenberg should not have represented Sears or if she did she should not have let her evidence to be used to hurt the cause of uplifting women.

Other historians sided with Kessler-Harris because they disagreed with Rosenberg. These were professors that Sears had asked to testify before they asked Rosenberg. One of them was Kathryn Kish Sklar who was a professor at the University of California Los Angeles, and the

³⁴ Freedmen. "Of History And Politics: Bitter Feminist Debate", 33.

³⁵ Ibid.

author of the book *Catherine Beecher: A study in American Domesticity*. She said, “Sears asked me. I said they were wasting their time; there was no way I was going to be a witness against the EEOC.”³⁶ Sklar was also displeased with Rosenberg for using her book as evidence in her testimony in the same way she used Kessler-Harris’s. She said that she did not agree with the idea of scholarship about women of the past being used to discriminate against women in the present. She claimed that it ignored the concept of historical study which is change over time. Sklar said that women’s history from the 19th-century perspective cannot be used to explain women’s participation in the labor force today.³⁷

Another historian that Sears had approached was Carl Degler of Stanford University, and the author of *At Odds: Women and the Family in America*. He was another source that Rosenberg used as evidence in her case to prove why Sears was not showing discrimination. Degler was the president of the American Historical Association. He also declined Sears’s request to represent them in the case. He said the reason was that he did not like using historical research as a way to limit people’s opportunities. However, he did admit that few women had taken these types of jobs in the past; he thought that more women would take on more nontraditional jobs in the future with the encouragement of employers.³⁸

Degler was on both sides of the case because later, he would regret his cowardice in not participating in the case. He thought Rosenberg did the right thing in at least joining the case. More historians supported Kessler-Harris and many opposed Rosenberg, who they asserted had misused their scholarship. For example, Duke University professor William Chafe, the author of *The American Woman: Her Changing Social, Economic, and Political Roles, 1920-1970*, said

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Jon Wiener. *Professors, Politics and Pop*. (London: Verso, 1994), 28.

³⁸ Wiener. *Professors, Politics and Pop*, 28.

that “All of the examples that Rosenberg cited from my work emphasize the institutional, cultural, and political obstacles to the achievement of sexual equality in the United States, none of them suggest that women wanted to be unequal or chose to have inferior jobs.”³⁹ Chafe and other historian criticized Rosenberg for using their research incorrectly.

There was a sentiment that Kessler-Harris was given a disadvantage by Sears and that Rosenberg should not have been in the case at all because she did not have direct expertise in labor history when she focused on intellectual historians. Carol Smith-Rosenberg, the Director of Women’s Studies at the University of Pennsylvania and the President of Berkshire Conference of Women Historians, said, “It is important for historians to serve as witnesses. But they must be careful to serve in the areas of their expertise. That is a moral responsibility.”⁴⁰ This reinforces the belief that Harris was an expert at labor while Rosenberg whose emphasis was in intellectual, academic feminism should have stayed to what she knew best. Historian Ellen DuBois focused on the political import that Rosenberg’s testimony had that Harris’s didn’t say which was

The EEOC lawsuit is part of a political battle that has been altering the cultural configuration Rosenberg says she laments. She argues that history shows the situation is too complicated for an affirmative action program to remedy. This argument is the essence of conservatism and must be read as an attack on working women, and sexual equality, an attack on the whole concept of affirmative action.⁴¹

DuBois’s statement says that Rosenberg’s argument was the definition of conservatism and was attacking every aspect of women’s rights from attacking working women, to sexual equality to attacking affirmative action as a whole.

Even though Rosenberg had fewer supporters than Kessler-Harris, she still had some feminists who supported her for standing up for her beliefs and scholarship. One person who

³⁹ Ibid, 29.

⁴⁰ Freedmen. “Of History And Politics: Bitter Feminist Debate”, 33.

⁴¹ Milkman. "Women's History and the Sears Case", 391.

supported both Kessler-Harris and Rosenberg was Carl Degler, who did not agree with the specific evidence Rosenberg presented in her case, but admired her for doing what she believed was right. He said, “Rosalind did the right thing. She agreed to look into an issue, she examined it and she testified. History is a discipline in which we try to uncover the truth, as we understand it. “It’s possible to disagree on interpretation, but that’s part of professional activity.”⁴² Another supporter of Rosenberg’s was Catherine Clinton, Assistant Professor of History at Harvard University. She said, “I’m someone who calls myself a feminist and owe my origins to the women’s movement but it would be throwing away my integrity to let politics, determine my scholarship and it would undermine women’s history.”⁴³ Regardless of whether they agreed with Rosenberg’s opinion, Degler and Clinton did not believe she should have been so strongly criticized for just defending her beliefs and research.

Another historian who supported Rosenberg was Regina Morantz-Sanchez of The University of Kansas, and author of *Sympathy and Science: Women Physicians in American Medicine*. Sanchez was in the middle with her support she said “Is it possible for women to have chosen not to take those jobs at Sears? My work on women physicians says it is but that does not mean that institutions do not discriminate against women. Sears could be discriminating in this case.”⁴⁴ This shows yet again that her supporters may not have completely agreed with her, but they did support her decision to stand by her beliefs and research. A person who did utterly agree with Rosenberg was Civil Rights activist and former head of the Americans Civil Liberties Union Charles Morgan Junior. He said that Sears had done its best to hire women for better-paying jobs because of the 1973 Sears Affirmative Action program. The EEOC fired back saying

⁴² Freedmen. “Of History And Politics: Bitter Feminist Debate,” 33.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Wiener. *Professors, Politics and Pop*, 29.

that it may have done a good job with minorities, but it did not do so well with women. Morgan said

I've always been against the Government. Where I come from [Birmingham, Alabama], Bull Connor was the government. What you've got to do is to make the Government use the law for the purposes for which it was intended. When you've got laws protecting women, minorities, the aged, the handicapped, including drug addicts and alcoholics and every kind of veteran, a company doesn't know what it should do because the Government is telling it too many confusing things ... The Government has to get its priorities straight. There's just no equation between minorities and women.⁴⁵

Morgan sided with Rosenberg because he did not feel that Sears was discriminating against women. At the same, however, his focus was on the discrimination of minorities and not women.

Another historian that admired Rosenberg's stance in the Sears case was Thomas Haskell. Haskell knew people who criticized Rosenberg and said it was a violation against academic freedom. He said specifically "It's not feminism its surly some shallow backwaters of Marxism or neo-classical economics."⁴⁶ Thomas Haskell and Law professor Sanford Levinson wrote a law review together. The review entailed details of the case and why Sears won the case. In the article, they discussed aspects of the case and explained the flaws of Kessler-Harris's argument. They pointed out that the harsh criticism directed at Rosenberg raised the question about academic freedom regarding the consequences of political disagreements within the scholarly community.⁴⁷ This statement raised the question had politics become more important to historians than research. Haskell and Levinson went into a more in depth analysis returning to

⁴⁵ Milkman. "Women's History and the Sears Case", 378.

⁴⁶ Thomas, Haskell, and Sanford, Levinson. "Academic Freedom and Expert Witnessing: Historians and the Sears Case." *Tex.L.Rev* 66, no. 1629 (1988): 1631-1632. . Accessed December 5, 2018.

⁴⁷ Haskell, and Levinson. "Academic Freedom and Expert Witnessing", 1632.

the criticisms Rosenberg made herself, which was that the EEOC failed to call any complaining witness to the stand.

Overall, Kessler-Harris's supporters sided with her because of her expertise in labor, which they felt Rosenberg did not have. Therefore Rosenberg should not have testified in the case. Kessler-Harris's supporters also sided with her because they thought that Rosenberg's testimony represented conservative goals and undermined their beliefs as feminists. Lastly, they supported Kessler-Harris because she did not use their research in a way that they did not agree with, whereas they accuse Rosenberg of using their research without permission and out of context. There were some scholars in the middle that believed both positions were right in their ways and that they agreed that it was all right for disagreements to occur but not to the point to where it put politics above scholarship. Rosenberg's supporters supported her because they felt that she was attacked unnecessarily and harshly. Others sided with her because they thought that the EEOC's case against Sears was too weak to prove discrimination. Lastly, some people felt that discrimination against women and minorities were not as equal in this context.

The *EEOC vs. Sears Case* focused on the key issue in the minds of white feminists, which was sexism in the workplace. The case also mentioned the division between women who thought men and women were the same and those that thought they were different. This debate went beyond the case and surged between white academic feminists in the movement.

Throughout the debate of difference and sameness and sexism in the workplace there was a lack of conversation that white feminists had about race. Throughout this entire case the only time race was brought up was when Alice Kessler-Harris tried to bring up the point that minority women were being discriminated against as well. Rosenberg went against this asking Kessler-

Harris “What percentage of married women in 1980 were black or immigrants?” or “What percentage of these women worked?” and “Was not the total a relatively small proportion as a whole?” Kessler-Harris responded by saying it depended on how work was being defined such as agricultural work and domestic work which added up to significant numbers.⁴⁸ This did not help Kessler-Harris win over the court. The only other time race was brought up was when Charles Morgan Jr., who was a Civil Rights activist and supporter of Rosenberg, said that Sears was following their 1973 Affirmative Action plan and that also applied to women. Morgan believed that discrimination against minorities was a bigger issue than the discrimination against women. This exclusion of minority women caused uproar from black women in the feminist movement.

Conclusion

The testimonies of Kessler-Harris and Rosenberg caused division in the sphere of intellectual feminism. There were some people in the middle, but it seemed like they did so to avoid backlash, being careful to reveal what they thought. The scholars who did choose a side were very vocal and opinionated as to why they sided with either Kessler- Harris or Rosenberg. Their reasons were primarily for politics or sense of freedom within scholarship, not because they genuinely believed the EEOC or Sears based on evidence. The *EEOC vs. Sears* debate revealed the most significant debate with white academic feminists, which was the difference versus sameness debate into why sexism was occurring within the workplace. With one opinion being that men and women were the same because they chose jobs based on class factors. Another where men and women are different based on the societal stereotypes placed on women making them all seem maternal despite their class or race. Kessler-Harris would briefly bring

⁴⁸ Kessler Harris. "Equal Employment Opportunity Commission v. Sears, Roebuck and Company", 62.

race into the debate but not be able to prove that Sears was discriminatory from a racial standpoint. Charles Morgan Jr. was the only other person to bring up race and stated that it is more important than sexism. Therefore, white middle class feminists only focused on sexism and class with brief discussions on race but none on sexual preference.

Chapter Two: Black Feminist Critiques of White Feminists Scholars

In the 1980s black feminists within the movement objected to the control that white feminists possessed in both academia and feminism as a whole. Patricia Hill Collins, Angela Davis, and bell hooks, along with other black feminists, felt that white feminists were using the black experience for their own career advancement. Also, while white academic feminists have focused on class alongside gender oppression, African American feminists have emphasized their inability to separate their race from their gender identity. They have also pointed out how they have faced added discrimination along gender, sexual, class, and professional lines because of race.

In addition, black feminists were treated poorly in academia by their white counterparts. Black feminists were discriminated against in academia because white scholars have scrutinized their ideas and evidence more than that of white men and women. I add to this topic by explaining how black feminists also contended with white feminists who have tried to boost their careers by analyzing black women's experiences. They cautioned that white women should first educate themselves fully before doing this. Finally, I end with how black feminists have helped to better contextualize black women's experiences and have cautioned white women from generalizing about and exploiting them. Overall, I argue that while white feminists have focused on class oppression alongside sexism in the workplace, African American feminists have

emphasized their inability to separate their race from their gender identity. Therefore, they emphasized the need to discuss both issues with equal focus when considering women's experiences. In addition, they have also pointed out how they, as black women, have faced added discrimination involving their sexual preference, class, and academic research.

Analysis of Evidence

White feminists during the 1980s were focused on the topic of sexism inside the workplace. Their focus on sexism led to their ignoring other issues like racism against black women, and this pushed many black women away from mainstream feminism organizations. Black feminists have emphasized that they cannot separate their race from their gender as women. Patricia Hill Collins, a sociology professor and a feminist who came up with a concept known as the "Outsider Within," which described the relationship that black women have with white people and themselves.⁴⁹ According to Collins, black women historically have been in meaningful relationships with white families, which gave them a personal connection and view into the lives of their white employers. On the one hand, black women were sometimes seen as a crucial part of the white family unit but were not allowed to be full members of the white family because of racism. Therefore, black women may have related to the plight of sexism, but racism was still a part of their oppression and cannot be ignored.

⁴⁹ Patricia Hill, Collins. "Learning from the Outsider Within: The Sociological Significance of Black Feminist Thought." *Social Problems* 33, no. 6 (1986). 3 doi: 10.1525/sp.1986.33.6.03a00020.

Figure 2.1: “bell hooks”⁵⁰



Another problem of white feminism was that white women’s assumption of shared oppression with black women was dangerous and wrong. According to bell hooks, an author, professor, feminist, and social activist, viewing all women's oppression as the same limited white women's and academia's full understanding of black women and other minorities' experiences. hooks explained that the theory of shared oppression mirrored the same sexist ideology that male supremacists used, which was that to be a female was to be a victim.⁵¹ White academic feminists used this explanation to define the female experience without taking into account other types of oppression. Women who did not feel or want to be defined as the victims felt ostracized by the women’s movement. African American feminists who chose not to believe in the victim mentality abandoned the feminist movement. Ironically, the women who embraced the victim mentality were the women who had the most privilege and experienced the least amount of oppression. hooks explained that women who are exploited and oppressed daily cannot afford to

⁵⁰ "bell hooks Biography." Encyclopedia of World Biography. Accessed April 08, 2019. <https://www.notablebiographies.com/He-Ho/Hooks-Bell.html>.

⁵¹ bell hooks. "Sisterhood: Political Solidarity between Women." *Feminist Review*, no. 23 (1986): 127. Doi: 10.2307/1394725.

take up the victim mentality as their survival depends on them embracing strength. Since racial limitations did not impact white academic feminists, they could quickly become victims.⁵²

Black feminists have also pointed out that black women experience homophobia and sexual reproductive rights differently than white women. Beyond the discussion of sexism and race, there was the topic of sexual reproductive rights and sexual preferences in the 1980s that became a significant discussion within academic feminism in the 1980s. Ruby Rich, a scholar and film critic of Latin films, described how the rise of conservatism impacted sexuality for women of different races and sexual orientations. She described how the 1980s was a time of sexual issues no longer being separated from politics as the new right tried to control sexuality through reproduction and the attack on abortion.⁵³ Baby boomers felt pressures to reproduce, while lesbians, pro-choice women, or those pursuing careers over children were ostracized.⁵⁴ This was also the age of the AIDS epidemic. The epidemic's connection to gay men (and intravenous drug users) negatively affected society's attitudes towards bisexuals and lesbians as well.⁵⁵ In the black community homosexuality in the 1980s was looked at in more of a negative light than white homosexuality.

Black academic feminists have pointed out that the black community views homosexuality differently, because the black community already had to deal with race and class struggles. Barbara Smith, who identifies as an African American lesbian socialist, has been an activist in feminism for decades. Smith conducted an interview with Loretta Ross and described

⁵² hooks, "Sisterhood: Political Solidarity between Women." 135.

⁵³ Ruby B. Rich. "Feminism and Sexuality in the 1980s." *Feminist Studies* 12, no. 3 (1986): 554. Doi: 10.2307/3177911.

⁵⁴ Rich, "Feminism and Sexuality in the 1980s." 554.

⁵⁵ Rich, "Feminism and Sexuality in the 1980s." 554.

what the hardest thing was about being a black lesbian in the 1980s.⁵⁶ She said, “ The hardest thing was being rejected by my black brothers and sisters.” Smith did not expect to get support from white people because she already lacked their support because of her race. She did voice her hurt from not receiving it from other African Americans, and she knew that there were places within the black community where she will still be considered an outcast.⁵⁷

Audre Lorde another black lesbian feminist intellectual pushed for black women to stop giving into the assumption that concealing their homosexuality could protect them from heterosexual or racist judgment. Lorde said that regardless of whether she kept silent on her sexuality or not she would have dealt with oppression because black women experienced more violation in patriarchal cultures irrespective of their sexual experience, clothing, makeup, or any other defining feature of propriety.⁵⁸

Figure 2.2: “Angela Y. Davis”⁵⁹

⁵⁶ Barbara, Smith. "Voices of Feminism Oral History Project." Interview by Loretta J. Ross. <https://www.smith.edu/libraries/libs/ssc/vof/transcripts/Smith.pdf>. May 8, 2003. 30. Accessed June 27, 2019.

⁵⁷ Smith, "Voices of Feminism Oral History Project." 30.

⁵⁸ Christopher S. Lewis. "Cultivating Black Lesbian Shamelessness: Alice Walker's "The Color Purple"." *Rocky Mountain Review* 66, no. 2 (2012): 161. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/41763555>.

⁵⁹ Bhavnani, Kum-Kum, and Angela Y. Davis. "Complexity, Activism, Optimism: An Interview with Angela Y. Davis." *Feminist Review*, no. 31 (1989): 67. Doi: 10.2307/1395091.



So, black academic feminists addressed the biases of black and white males and white feminists who wanted to silence black women from revealing their sexuality. Civil rights activist Angela Davis also contributed to the conversation about black lesbians by encouraging white lesbians within the feminist movement to take a more concerted effort to understand the individual impact that homophobia makes on women of color.⁶⁰ In order for the concerns of the black lesbian community to be heard the white lesbian community needed to welcome black lesbians' involvement in the movement.

Figure 2.3: “Patricia Hill Collins”⁶¹



⁶⁰ Angela Davis, *Women, Culture and Politics* (New York, NY: First Vintage Books, 1990). 30.

⁶¹ Patricia Hill Collins. Google Image Result for <https://globalsocialtheory.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/03/Smith-Photo-8-17-08-Photoshop.jpg>. Accessed April 07, 2019. <https://images.app.goo.gl/REAZN3faA2JPaAFJ9>.

Black feminists also pointed out that black women were more likely than white women to experience class discrimination. Collins said the black female experience is formed not only from race and gender-based experiences but also from the varying backgrounds of class. This was where the disagreement of the black female experience occurred between white and black feminists of different classes. While both blue collar and white collar black women may experience some forms of oppression, the types and ways they deal with the abuse and think about feminism may be different. Collins named specific black women such as Carolyn Chase, a thirty-one-year-old from the inner city, who said: "A heap sees, but a few know."⁶² So white feminists may have written about the experiences of blue-collar African American women, but they will never honestly know the hardships and be able to articulate their perspectives unless they are or once were working-class black women.

hooks addressed the issues of sexism and racism, as well as classism, within the movement. According to hooks, a common thought that white upper class women had early on was that if more working-class women joined the movement, there would be no issue on a class divide. This type of thinking was a denial that there was a class struggle in society in the first place, much less the movement. For white middle class feminists to portray women's history and have a strong women's movement that represented women different from themselves, they must do everything to expose and fight class exploitation. hooks said it's not enough for white academic feminists to take a low-income black woman to dinner or start dressing like her to try to understand her. Until she starts standing up and documenting the unequal distribution of wealth in the United States then there will always be a class judgment within feminism, unless

⁶² Patricia Hill Collins. "The Social Construction of Black Feminist Thought." *Signs* 14, no. 4 (1989): 758.

feminists take the time to protest the unequal distribution of wealth from a societal standpoint. hooks said the difference between a middle-class or rich white woman and a low-income black working-class woman is that the latter knows how it feels to be viewed as lower because of her sex and race. However, they also had to endure the physical effects of hard work and at times going without food, shelter, or medical care because they cannot afford it.⁶³ White middle class feminists may have fought for liberal causes but still live their lives through privilege and superiority over the women they are supposedly fighting for. They had to realize that just as the fight against racism was essential to fighting sexism so was the fight against classism. The class struggle was, from hooks's standpoint, an issue that needed to be taken up by every white feminist. Until white middle-class feminists addressed the inequality of class, they would never be able to truly understand and give a voice to lower-income black women.

Despite their privilege, black academic women have also been discriminated against. White men and women have been quick to scrutinize their ideas and evidence. Collins discussed black academic feminists and how their white cohorts challenged their research and perspectives about the black experience.⁶⁴ She explained how black female academics who studied the subjects of race, class, and sexuality from the black female perspective had to endure some conflicting opinions from both the white male and female perspectives. Collins argued that black academic feminists also attempted to defend their findings to white male and female academics. At times black academic feminists found themselves forced to connect their research to race conflict. To shed light on the differences in perspective of black and white academic feminists, Collins mentioned Geneva Smitherman an African American linguistics professor who said that

⁶³ hooks, "Sisterhood: Political Solidarity between Women." 136.

⁶⁴ Collins. "The Social Construction of Black Feminist Thought." 752.

documents are limited in what they can teach about the life of black women and the survival tactics they use.⁶⁵ In fact, according to Smitherman, it's quite harmful to rely too heavily on written research when documenting the black female experience. The difference between black and white women was that black women knew that they were oppressed in some ways at all times whereas white women did not always recognize it and were not be able to fully grasp this as they were trying to research the lives and experiences of black women.

Black feminists also had to contend with white feminists who tried to boost their careers by analyzing the experiences of black women. They cautioned that white women should first educate themselves fully before writing about black women's experiences. Collins explained that all academic feminists who want to research black women must have a process when analyzing them differently than they would any other group. However, this also applied to black academic feminists because if they failed to capture the perspective of black women, even if the scholars were from different walks of life, then they abandoned their community. There was a three-step process that both white and black feminists should use to acquire a better understanding of the black experience. The first was that they had to be "personal advocates for their material" or have experienced some situation that they were documenting or be willing to communicate their research with the everyday people.⁶⁶ The second-step was to get the research evaluated and accepted by the black feminist community because if the information documented did not represent the black experience fully, then it could negatively impact the way that black feminism was defined and then viewed by others.⁶⁷ The last step was that black feminist thought within academia must be prepared and strong enough to confront white male and female theories on

⁶⁵ Ibid, 759.

⁶⁶ Ibid, 771.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

black feminist thought.⁶⁸ Black academic feminists ran the risk that by challenging the positions of white male and female academics on the subject of black feminism, they could be ostracized by the academic community, which could render their research inaccessible. However, if they accepted the analysis of the white male and female academics as absolute truths, then the black female academic ran the risk of losing support in the black feminist community and defining black women's experiences in an unfair or incomplete light. Collins explained that the best path for black feminists to take, and for white academic feminists to attempt to make, while trying to document the black female experience was to be a mediator and use both Afrocentric and feminist epistemologies without choosing one approach over the other.⁶⁹ Collins said that black academic feminists had a responsibility to present their research in a way that was inclusive and accurately represented the black female experience.

Another voice on the matter was Delores S. Williams, a black female theologian and feminist, who described how feminists of all races could do a better job in telling the stories of women of color.⁷⁰ She argued that scholars could use theory, argument, and privileges to discuss the different perspectives that black and white academic feminists had on the topics of race, class, and sexuality. First, Williams urged scholars to be more responsible in their use of theory. She recalled the white scholars in psychology and sociology who visited her segregated school and conducted interviews. She described how they interviewed people who faced hardship, and she expressed the resentment she felt toward these researchers because after they found their theories, they would leave and never address the poverty they were witness to.⁷¹ When Williams

⁶⁸ Ibid, 772.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ Delores S. Williams. "Womanist/Feminist Dialogue: Problems and Possibilities." *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* 9, no. 1/2 (1993): 68. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/25002201>.

⁷¹ Williams, "Womanist/Feminist Dialogue: Problems and Possibilities." 68.

became an academic feminist herself, she noticed that white feminists were using theory as a way to escape a hands-on and direct approach to address oppression. White feminists according to Williams were using their positions in the academy and their research to try to explain what ideas should mean and construct their excuse or explanations on how and why aspects such as race, class, and sexuality are the way they are.

Williams also pointed out that an argument had a different meaning for white academic feminists than black academic feminists. She said that middle class white academic feminists heard and viewed argumentation differently than black academic feminists.⁷² For white academics, argumentation meant choosing a side using evidence to prove why their side was right. To Williams and others, argumentation had a negative connotation because of Williams' association of the term with yelling and even at times violence. Williams showed the hypocrisy that white academic feminists showed when they used the phrase "white privilege" as a negative term but have received or have used that same privilege to advance their careers or get ahead in their lives. To black academic feminists, it's a reminder of the unfairness they endured while surrounded by white feminists condemning the concept all the while taking advantage of it.⁷³

Conclusion

Ultimately, black feminists have helped to better contextualize black women's experiences and caution white women from generalizing about and exploiting them. Black feminists in the 1980s wanted to have a larger contribution within the women's movement. They knew that the only way for white people to truly understand their experiences was to hear the

⁷² Ibid, 69-70.

⁷³ Ibid, 70-71.

black perspective on the important topics of race, gender, sexual reproduction and preference, and class instead of just focusing on sexism. Finally, black feminists cautioned white academics to avoid exploiting the very women whom they sought to help. Instead of just using research to document the black experience, they encouraged all researchers to develop a sustained relationship with black women and the black communities that they study.

Chapter Three: Baby Boomer feminist Scholars vs. Millennial feminist Scholars

Millennial academic feminists are a part of two waves of feminism: the third- wave that began in 1991 and ended in 2008 with the increased use of technology and social media sites to get feminist messages out, and the fourth-wave began in 2008 when Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube were firmly entrenched in the cultural fabric and became the main means of feminist communication.⁷⁴ Feminists of both waves have used modern technology and social media to spread their feminist agenda that centers on race and sexual preference. They are not just limited to journal articles, magazines, and television but have expanded to blogs and social media sites. Millennial feminists also use celebrities, as role models to illustrate what feminism in the modern age should look like. By capturing the public's interest in feminism through mass media and

⁷⁴ Constance, Grady. "The Waves of Feminism, and Why People Keep Fighting over Them, Explained." Vox. July 20, 2018. Accessed March 29, 2019. <https://www.vox.com/2018/3/20/16955588/feminism-waves-explained-first-second-third-fourth>.

celebrities, millennial feminists better involve and inform the public than the previous generations of feminists.

In the 1980s feminists focused on sexism in the workplace, as well as race and class, with minimal mentions of sexual preference in discussions of white and black lesbianism and reproductive rights. Today's feminists focus largely on race, sexual preference and sexism in all walks of life, not just in the workplace. Feminists have helped establish activist movements such as “Black Lives Matter” and the “#METOOMOVEMENT.” The Black Lives Matter Movement is a “political and social movement originating among African Americans, emphasizing basic human rights and racial equality for black people and campaigning against various forms of racism.”⁷⁵ The “#METOOMOVEMENT” is a movement founded for people to campaign against sexual harassment. The LGBTQ communities continue to promote sexual acceptance and fight to stop gay and transgender violence. These movements are continuing to grow with the help of social media and through support from celebrities.

I begin this chapter by discussing the transition between second-and third-wave feminism. From the late 1980s to the late 1990s, magazines and books were the most popular ways that feminist agendas were spread. This changed to online blogs and social media sites as information went from print to digital. Next, I explain the history of third-wave feminism and how it focused on different issues than second wave feminists in the 1980s. The feminists in the 1980s primarily focused on sexism within the workplace, race, and class, while millennial feminists primarily focused on race and sexual preference. I will then discuss the history of

⁷⁵ "Black Lives Matter." Dictionary.com. Accessed March 24, 2019. <https://www.dictionary.com/browse/black-lives-matter>.

fourth-wave feminism as its own category and how it compares to the second-and third-wave. I end the chapter discussing how celebrities have become the new symbols of female empowerment as opposed activists, as in the past. I conclude by exploring how millennial feminists have changed the way they spread their feminist messages. They have also changed the types of people that display the desired feminists attributes to the world going from activist in the past to relying on celebrities to embody their feminist input.

Analysis of Evidence

In the early 1990s, third-wave feminist magazines began appearing on shelves of independent bookstores and record stores across the United States and Canada.⁷⁶ Magazines like *Bitch* (1996), *Bust* (1993), *Hues* (1992 to 1999), *Rockgrl* (1995-2006), and *Venus Zine* (1994-2010) brought their forms of feminism through topics such as like pop culture, identity, fashion, domesticity, and the arts.⁷⁷ The goal of these magazines has been to make a female-friendly space within mass media. According to feminist scholar Elizabeth Groeneveld, these magazines were involved in

actively doing feminism through creating and shaping feminist discourse on a range of topics from the arts and politics to sex by being more relatable to the millennial feminist reader.

⁷⁶ Elizabeth, Groeneveld, *Making Feminist Media: Third-wave Magazines on the Cusp of the Digital Age*. (Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2016). 1.

⁷⁷ Groeneveld, *Making Feminist Media* 1.

Case studies on the subjects of politics, race, fashion, and sexual preference helped shape feminist discourse in the 1990s and 2000s.⁷⁸

In the past, before third-wave feminist magazines, there were magazines such as *Tiger Beat*, *Teen Beat*, *Superteen*, and *Bop* that were less socially progressive and did not promote positive body images. They showed pictures of celebrities like Madonna and Rob Lowe describing him, as “Gorgeous is the first word you think of when you see Rob Lowe. His cornflower blue eyes, chiseled face, and muscular frame make you tremble inside.”⁷⁹ Along with sections of “beauty must do’s”, and advice on how to get your crush to like you. There were no pictures of plus-sized models like today’s celebrated “plus size” Ashley Graham nor were there promotions of women staying single, being an independent woman. A magazine that would start to implement bits controversial feminist rhetoric was *Sassy*, which began in 1988.⁸⁰ *Sassy* started the conversation of third -wave feminist topics because it was open about sexual exploration, which other magazines stayed away from at the time. It was sympathetic to homosexuals and was the first teen magazine in the United States to accept condom ads.⁸¹ As teen pregnancy rates continued to rise and AIDS became an increasing threat in the 1980s and 1990s, there was a debate about what kids should learn in school concerning sex. So, when *Sassy* released its “Losing your Virginity: Read This Before You Decide” in 1988, it sparked outrage with conservative groups such as Women Aglow, Christian women’s group followed by

⁷⁸ Ibid., 3.

⁷⁹ Perry, Nodelmen. "Teaching Girls About Men: Attitudes Toward Maleness In Teen Magazines." *Studies in Popular Culture* 9, no. 1 (1986): 103.

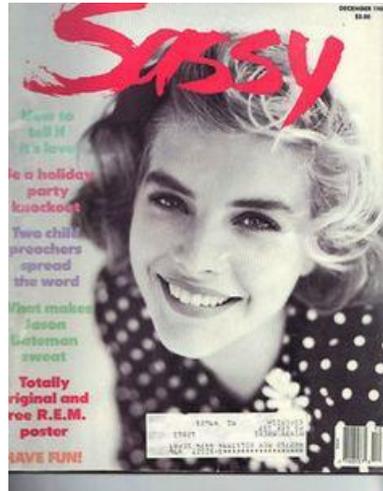
<http://www.jstor.org/stable/23412904>.

⁸⁰ Groeneveld, *Making Feminist Media* 26.

⁸¹ Ibid, 23.

American Family Association and Moral Majority.⁸² As a result, most advertisers pulled out of *Sassy* from that point forward the publication had to moderate its content.

Figure 3.1: *Sassy* December 1988 Cover⁸³



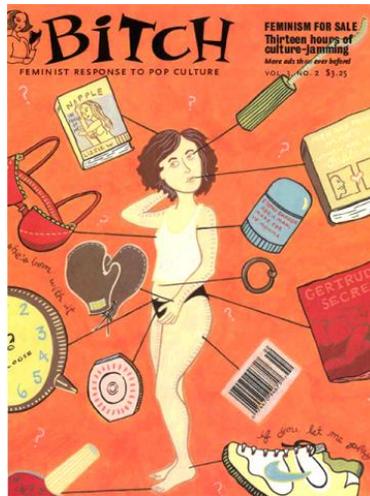
Although *Sassy* was sexually revolutionary, it sometimes fell short when considering race. *Sassy* published an issue every year created entirely by the readers. In 1989, readers chose two non-white women--an African American and Filipino American--for the cover. However, the publishers wanted to include at least one white woman on the cover, as *Sassy* wanted to continue to display a white, middle-class version of attainable affluence.⁸⁴ Many readers were frustrated by the lack of racial diversity in *Sassy*, and they turned instead to new magazines like *Bitch* and *Hue* that promoted deeper racial acceptance, sexual exploration, celebrities, and underground culture.

⁸² Ibid, 25.

⁸³ "Favorite Sassy Magazine Covers 1980's-1990's." Interest. May 17, 2016. Accessed March 30, 2019. <https://www.pinterest.com/rainerpierre/favorite-sassy-magazine-covers-1980s-1990s/>.

⁸⁴ Groeneveld, *Making Feminist Media*, 28.

Figure 2: *Bitch* Fall 1998 #3 Cover⁸⁵



These other magazines that expanded from *Sassy* were more graphic with their critiques of pop culture and politics, their debates over the dynamics of burlesque, their open embrace of sex, sex toys, and their expression of feminist pornography as both powerful and pleasurable.⁸⁶ bell hooks criticized these magazines because, while they did promote women embracing sex, they did not have anti-racist politics that acknowledged the important intersection between gender, race, class, and sexual preference.⁸⁷ For instance, *Bitch* omitted *Essence* and *Today's Black Woman* from an article comparing women's magazines but later apologized for this omission in the wake of hooks' criticism.⁸⁸ *Bitch* and other magazines started demonstrating commitments to include topics and writers who represented a range of identities, and the magazines tried to correct their mistakes when they missed the mark.⁸⁹

⁸⁵ "Orange." Bitch Media. Accessed March 30, 2019. <https://www.bitchmedia.org/issue/8>.

⁸⁶ Groeneveld, *Making Feminist Media*, 34.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 37.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*

One of the biggest third-wave feminist groups were the riot grrrls led by Kathleen Hanna who was the front woman of a punk rock band known as The Bikini Kill. Hanna and her band wanted to be a symbol for the third-wave, which revolutionized the topics of race and sexual preference by being more diverse in the groups included and topics discussed.⁹⁰ Hanna wrote the *Riot Grrrl Manifesto* in 1991, which included phrases like “Because we wanna make it easier for girls to see/hear each other's work so that we can share strategies and criticize-applaud each other.” This phrase was put included to promote females’ working together instead of tearing each other down. She continued, “Because we recognize fantasies of Instant Macho Gun Revolution as impractical lies meant to keep us simply dreaming instead of becoming our dreams and thus seek to create revolution in our own lives every single day by envisioning and creating alternatives to the bullshit Christian capitalist way of doing things.”⁹¹ This questioned and criticized the status quo.

Rebecca Walker, daughter of Alice Walker, coined the term "Third-wave feminism" and has argued that it is comprised of women from age fifteen to thirty, as well as women who started grad school in the 1980s and 1990s.⁹² The third-wave is also more inclusive than the second-wave because it includes women previously excluded from second-wave feminism because of their race, class, and sexual orientation.⁹³ According to experiments that feminist scholar Catherine Harnois conducted; she found that the feminists of the third-wave are indeed

⁹⁰ Melena Ryzic, A Feminist Riot That Still Inspires, <https://www.nytimes.com/2011/06/05/arts/music/the-riot-grrrl-movement-still-inspires.html>

⁹¹ “Riot Grrrl Manifesto”. Accessed April 01, 2019.

<https://www.historyisaweapon.com/defcon1/riotgrrrlmanifesto.html>.

⁹² Catherine Harnois, "Re-presenting Feminisms: Past, Present, and Future." *NWSA Journal* 20, no. 1 (2008): 121. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40071255>.

⁹³ Harnois, "Re-presenting Feminisms", 122.

more racially diverse than the feminist of the previous two waves.⁹⁴ They are also more likely than previous generations to have more representation with higher education and income. While women of the third-wave agree that they are still at a disadvantage compared to men, they can exercise sexual power more than the second-wave because they have access to birth control, legalized abortion, the right to vote, and/or many of the same educational and job opportunities as men.⁹⁵ Third-wave women embrace using erotic power to get the upper hand in a situation without being judged for it, whereas second-wave feminists criticized women for using their sexuality to dominate men.

Harnois says that the heart of the differences between the third-and second-wave feminists lies in perfection, plurality, and power. Perfection is defined by what it means to constitute legitimate feminist theories and practices. Plurality is complex identities, systems of oppression, and feminisms. Power is the systems of dominance and how they are created, maintained, and disrupted. For perfection and plurality, some third-wave feminists feel as if they have to live up to the accomplishments of the second- wave and that not doing so is viewed as a betrayal of sorts.⁹⁶ However, third-wave feminists have been up to the task, unlike the second-wave, of explaining the experiences of women who are different and have an alternative background, acknowledging that not every woman has to have the same history or lessons to be united in fighting for Feminists causes. Whereas in the second-wave of feminism, one was expected to put background, race, class, and sexual preference behind to fight against sexism, third-wave feminists have welcomed the multiple parts of one's identity. Harnois says that the third-wave feminists have expanded diversity as far as who is involved. While third-wave

⁹⁴ Ibid., 128.

⁹⁵ Ibid., 136.

⁹⁶ Ibid, 132.

feminism has prided itself on being diverse, it has failed to escape the charges of racial, ethnic, and class bias.⁹⁷ Millennial women of color in pursuit of gender equality have taken issue with this continued race, class, and ethnicity bias in the third-wave. While some third-wave academic feminists discussed race and class in books like Rebecca Walker's *To Be Real* (1995) and Hernandez and Rehman's *Colonize This!* (2002), other books like *Manifesta 2000* read as if there was no longer a concern with racial and class bias.⁹⁸ While having more variety in the types of women participating has led to more progressive views on race, women of different races and classes still need to be given more prominent roles within the movement.

The emerging fourth-wave of feminism began when books and magazines were being exchanged for online books and media. By the mid 2010s most feminist bookstores closed due to the growth of online booksellers like Amazon and eBooks.⁹⁹ This has led feminists to find their reading communities online, such as through Twitter. While promoting feminist groups, Twitter can also make a path for criticism, such as through the #SolidarityIsForWhiteWomen handle which addresses the blindness and privilege that white feminist groups often possess.

Fourth-wave feminists have also used online platforms to open up discussions about the relationship between race and feminism. Tumblr has fostered discussions of feminist literature, including Gloria Anzaldua and Cherrie Moraga's book *This Bridge Called My Back: Radical Writings by Women of Color* and have helped encourage republication of feminist books after they have been out of print for decades.¹⁰⁰ Feminists have also published blogs like Crunk Feminist Collective. For instance Crunk Feminist displayed love letters and poems that fans of

⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁹⁸ Ibid, 126.

⁹⁹ Groeneveld, *Making Feminist Media*, 161.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

Stacey Abrams made for her. One was a letter from a girl named Chanel from Brooklyn, New York, describing her days getting bullied and how her mother would tell her to stand up to the bullies. Chanel stated that Stacey Abrams is not the person to mess with because her determination is unmatched that is what led her to her victory as the Democratic candidate for governor of Georgia in the fall of 2018 (though she did not win the election).¹⁰¹ “Black Girl Dangerous” is another blog that publishes black feminist critiques.¹⁰² On YouTube, Anita Sarkeesian works to eliminate gendered tropes and stigmas in video games, expanding the gamer community to be more female inclusive.¹⁰³ The beginning of the feminist magazine culture for teen girls that discussed topics like sexual preference and race in the 1990’s has expanded to the digital age during the fourth-wave of feminism and has become more progressive and open to more controversial topics.

Fourth-Wave feminism has led to progressive movements such as Black Lives Matter, which profoundly influenced the third -wave feminist movement. Scholar Sarah J. Jackson interviews Cathy Cohen, a black academic feminist, and activist and asks about the involvement of feminism in movements like Black Lives Matter. Cohen explains how feminism makes people think differently about who and where victims of state violence are.¹⁰⁴ Feminism pushes people to remember that women are also oppressed by state violence in the denial of welfare assistance and the militarization of public schools in the areas where primarily black; Latino, and low-

¹⁰¹ Crunktastic. "Crunk Love Letters for Stacey Abrams." Cropped-original-1-3.png. November 28, 2018. Accessed March 30, 2019. <http://www.crunkfeministcollective.com/2018/11/28/crunk-love-letters-for-stacey-abrams/>.

¹⁰² Groeneveld, *Making Feminist Media*, 161.

¹⁰³ Ibid.

¹⁰⁴ "Cathy Cohen Discusses Black Lives Matter, Feminism, and Contemporary Activism with Sarah J. Jackson - Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society." *Signs*. January 02, 2019. 775. Accessed March 25, 2019. <http://signsjournal.org/ask-a-feminist-cohen-jackson/>.

income students attend.¹⁰⁵ These are different forms of state violence that are made aware to the public through feminism.

Fourth-wave feminists have founded the #SayHerName campaign to honor the life of Sandra Bland, and countless other women and girls of color, who have been killed or brutalized by police or anti-black violence. Another organization that has been created is the BYP100 a national member based organization of 18 to 35 year olds dedicated to creating freedom and justice for all black people. The organization does this through building a network focused on transformative leadership development, direct action organizing, advocacy, and political education using a black queer feminists lens.¹⁰⁶ BYP100 has an agenda called “Fighting Blue Lives Legislation” where the BYP100 opposes “Blue Lives Matter” Legislation to protect the safety of protesters who are against the police officers control of the protest against police brutality.¹⁰⁷ BYP100 has done other types of work in Chicago around the Reika Boyd case, and the Sandra Bland case is further proof that police violence is also happening to women.¹⁰⁸

Cohen has also shown how feminism within black organizations has informed the current organizations devoted to saving and improving black lives. Sociologist Belinda Robnett’s work on black women's "bridge leadership" in the civil rights movement and historian Barbara Ransby's work on Ella Baker's democratic and radical leadership have influenced these groups' leadership and organization.¹⁰⁹ The Black Lives Matter Movement leaders are young, queer, black women who promote the idea of having a movement with many leaders instead of one

¹⁰⁵ “Cathy Cohen Discusses Black Lives Matter, Feminism, and Contemporary Activism with Sarah J. Jackson”, 776.

¹⁰⁶ "Our Impact » BYP100." BYP100. Accessed April 01, 2019. <https://byp100.org/our-impact/>.

¹⁰⁷ "Our Impact » BYP100."

¹⁰⁸ "Cathy Cohen Discusses Black Lives Matter, Feminism, and Contemporary Activism with Sarah J. Jackson, 776.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

because of feminists' teachings.¹¹⁰ Young black feminists who have started this movement have learned about alternative ways to start and organize a movement from feminists.¹¹¹

The final connection to feminism and these movements, according to Cohen, is that feminism encourages people to broaden their demands to include policy changes to protect black protesters and communities from law enforcement. The outcome sought is that black activists will be able to make their voices heard without negative repercussions from law enforcement. Radical black feminists have also argued that the lived condition of marginal communities has to guide the struggle. For example, Beth Richie a black academic feminist scholar writes on issues of incarceration and violence against women. She says that, when people think about violence against women, they think about domestic violence and law enforcement intervention of those instances, but do not take into account that the state is the oppressor in many poor communities of color. So feminism challenges people to go in deeper about the issues of oppression.

A fourth -wave feminist movement that took on sexism outside of the workplace in regards to sexual harassment was the #MeTooMovement or Times Up movement. When the #MeTooMovement started, some women felt optimistic, but others were uncomfortable.¹¹² This movement was a growing phenomenon that started when Hollywood producer Harvey Weinstein was accused of rape and sexually abusing many women, followed by accusations against other big men in Hollywood like Louis CK. This reckoning caused divisions within feminist ranks. The biggest complaint came from feminists who thought the movement became too silly and lost

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹¹ Ibid.

¹¹² Moira Donegan. "How #MeToo Revealed the Central Rift within Feminism Today." The Guardian. May 11, 2018. Accessed March 25, 2019. <https://www.theguardian.com/news/2018/may/11/how-metoo-revealed-the-central-rift-within-feminism-social-individualist>.

its legitimacy.¹¹³ These feminists were Daphne Merkin and Bari Weiss in the *New York Times*, Katie Roiphe in *Harper's*, Germaine Greer in the *Sydney Morning Herald* and 100 French women in *Le Monde*, who complained that many of the incidents of harassment were too minor to warrant opprobrium.¹¹⁴ They argued that, by grouping together such a wide spectrum of sexual misbehavior, #MeToo had lost a sense of nuance.¹¹⁵ There were a lot of older feminists who called on third wave feminists to toughen up and said they were giving into a form of Victorian frailty by getting involved with this movement. Supporters of #MeToo argue that they are forming a broader group that stands with victims of sexual abuse, harassment, or rape. Some are calling it a fight between social, and individualist feminism, with white academic feminists forming the individualist standpoint insisting that women seek justice on a private and individualistic basis. The majority of the third-wave feminism is promoting the social avenue, which encourages sexual harassment victims to voice their complaints openly and use social media platforms to spread their message for other victims to step forward. Black feminists have embraced the #MeTooMovement, saying it provides them with more resources to stop sexual harassment than the individualist approach.

Black academic feminist Kimberle Crenshaw points out that oppression looks different to different types of people including sexual abuse. Crenshaw created the term Intersectionality in the 1980s and it explains how women may all be experiencing sexism but in different ways based on an individual background or race. Crenshaw explains this in her book that discusses the

¹¹³ Donegan, "How #MeToo Revealed the Central Rift within Feminism Today."

¹¹⁴ Ibid.

¹¹⁵ Ibid.

change occurring with women and violence during this time.¹¹⁶ She mentions how rape and battery were once a private or individual issue often kept quiet but is now becoming a social problem where the point is no longer hidden but is more likely to be discussed. The communicative approach has benefits for more groups such as African Americans, gays, lesbians, and other people of color because it has provided strength, community, and intellectual development which would have been less likely to happen before because these groups would have been more likely to keep their stories quiet in fear of judgment and loneliness. Since sexual harassment has become more of a public issue that is getting reformed, there are more places minority groups can turn to seek help and acceptance.

This can be applied to the #MeTooMovement to explain how even sexual assault can be seen and experienced differently depending on a person's background, race, and religion. The #MeTooMovement encourages women to stand up and share their testimonies and stories which gives representation to a variety of female groups. The #MeTooMovement has created a group for third and fourth wave feminists to come together regardless of race and has created a divide between old feminism and new.

Fourth-Wave academic feminists have commented on popular media. Writer Roxane Gay has remarked on how women are still primarily the costar or love interest in a film, how musicians like Robin Thicke have songs saying that he as a man knows that women "Want it" in *Blurred Lines*, or how Jay Z uses the word "Bitch" as punctuation to degrade women and strengthen male masculinity.¹¹⁷ Gay discusses how in the past feminists have used the title

¹¹⁶ Kimberle, Crenshaw, "Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence against Women of Color." *Stanford Law Review* 43, no. 6 (1991): 1241-1242. Doi: 10.2307/1229039.

¹¹⁷ Roxane, Gay. *Bad Feminist: Essays*. (New York: Harper Collins USA, 2014) 5.

feminist for marketing themselves when they are not supporting what this new generation of women want and have failed the public. She says the key to improving feminism is to have everyone included, formally educated or not, rich or poor, known or unknown. She also warns against making feminism a symbol of perfection because feminism is a real movement, so it requires average, every day, people to be a part of it.¹¹⁸

Feminist scholar Janell Hobson describes how significant symbolism is placed on celebrities to be our role models. For instance, there is a widespread belief that the beauty and strength of Beyoncé is almost like the third-wave feminist movement. However, according to Roxane Gay, Beyoncé is just a gateway.¹¹⁹ She is a gateway because she is a visual of black feminism, but black feminism is not a person; it is an idea. A person can look to Beyoncé to be an example, but a person has to embody what she represents. Hobson cites the thinking of Andi Zeiser to bring up the point of how celebrities are great when promoting social issues, but the celebrity machine runs on money and fame, so how much can stars do if they are monitored through the system? Hobson does bring up a flaw in Zeiser's perception, which is the assumption of just because a person is rich and famous does not mean she has not faced discrimination or oppression. Hobson says that celebrity feminism can add to academic feminism without undermining it. This feminist suspicion of celebrity influence on feminism has been happening for a long time. In the 1960s and 1970's the Miss America Pageant was under fire for representing "white supremacist, capitalist, and militarized heteropatriarchy," and some feminists were protesting anything that poses a favorite brand of femininity or objects that were created to

¹¹⁸Gay. *Bad Feminist: Essays*. New York: Harper Collins USA, 2014, 6.

¹¹⁹ Janell Hobson. "Celebrity Feminism: More than a Gateway." *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 42, no. 4 (2017): 999. Doi: 10.1086/690922.

please or cater to male sexual desire.¹²⁰ However, the protest of the Miss America Pageant led feminists to see other issues with pageants other than being sex symbols for men. It brought up the idea that women of color were not included, which meant there was a stereotype of not considering women of color to be feminine. This led to the creation of the Miss Black America Pageant in 1968.¹²¹

Academic feminists have used celebrities to reclaim their ideas about feminism, and they either complement or criticize a female star based on what they bring to feminism. For instance, post-feminist critic Camille Paglia describes Madonna as a sex positive real feminist because she sees Madonna as a symbol of sex, which is taboo, but she positively uses her sexual preference and liberation. By promoting sexual liberation as something that women benefit from not just men and that is inclusive to all genders, and races. bell hooks also, at one point, shared this view of Madonna. However, hooks did criticize Madonna by accusing her cultural appropriation of black gay subculture.¹²² bell hooks would demonstrate that academic feminists are victims of falling for either positive or negative views of public personas more than they want to admit. When hooks interviewed rapper Little Kim, she found out Kim had hesitations about being a public symbol of sexual liberation.¹²³ While hooks sympathized with Kim, ironically she criticized Beyoncé for using her sexual image to make money.¹²⁴ hooks has criticized Beyoncé's adherence to traditional norms of heterosexual marriage and motherhood, as well as her exploitation of colorism.¹²⁵

¹²⁰ Hobson, Janell. "Celebrity Feminism: More than a Gateway." 999.

¹²¹ Ibid.

¹²² Ibid.

¹²³ Ibid.

¹²⁴ Ibid.

¹²⁵ Ibid.

Black feminists continue to debate over whether Beyoncé is a feminist and a positive symbol of black women. To hooks, she was a “terrorist” and a “slave” to the symbol of black women.¹²⁶ She destroyed the black woman by creating a look that was a false image to the way the average black woman was because of her white washed appearance and she was a slave to the media by displaying her family and self as an image of perfection. Melissa Harris Perry, by contrast, proclaimed Beyoncé as a feminist icon because she explains the struggles that black women face in her music. Angela Davis maintained the middle ground saying by praising Beyoncé for highlighting the work of writer Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie while questioning the pop star’s feminist expressions.¹²⁷ Hobson demonstrates how feminists use celebrities to help cultivate their message, which can be a criticism or praise for the star.

Jocelyn E. Marshall is another feminist who discusses Beyoncé’s symbolism in sexual liberation, race, and feminism. She describes Beyoncé’s transitional moments as feminist, such as her transition from Destiny’s Child to going solo, from using alter egos to boost her confidence to not needing them anymore, and separating her professional career from her marriage to Jay Z and the birth of her children. The moments in Beyoncé’s life can also be used as ways to describe different moment within the black experience. For example, Terri Francis analyzed Beyoncé’s performance at the 2006 Fashion Rocks and made political connections to twentieth century performer Josephine Baker. Marshall also highlighted Beyoncé’s inclusion of feminist cultural texts like such as Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie’s “We Should All Be Feminists” TED talk.¹²⁸ Feminist scholars, such as Janell Hobson and Roxane Gay, look at all of her career

¹²⁶ Ibid.

¹²⁷ Ibid.

¹²⁸ Jocelyn E Marshall. "The Beyoncé Effect: Essays on Sexuality, Race, and Feminism AdrienneTrier-Bieniek, Editor. McFarland, 2016." *The Journal of American Culture* 41, no. 1 (2018): 100-02. Doi: 10.1111/jacc.12858.

moments and parts of her life for their analysis. Another essay by Sonita R. Moss, for example, is “Beyoncé and Blue: Black Motherhood and the Binds of Racialized Sexism,” which discusses the racism and sexism that black mothers must teach their daughters about. Next in the collection is the article “I’m Not Myself Lately: The Erosion of the Beyoncé Brand,” by Kristin Lieb which offers a feminist friendly critique of Beyoncé’s branding and capitalist ventures. The final article is “The Visual Album: Beyoncé, Feminism, and Digital Spaces,” Jamila A. Cupid and Nicole Files-Thompson is a follow-up arguing in favor of the pop star “feminist strategic communication.”¹²⁹

Marshall explains Adrienne Trier-Bieniek's work illustrating how Beyoncé’s life experiences can be used to define black feminism. Everything from her business ventures in her career to her marriage and children can show black women that they too can be a successful career woman and mother. However, Marshall is quick to point out the feminist who don’t think Beyoncé is a symbol for black feminism; in fact, some, such as hooks, say she is a threat against it.¹³⁰ As mentioned earlier, hooks has called Beyoncé a "terrorist" because her image is one that feeds white supremacist, capitalist patriarchy, where black women are denied full personhood and sexual independence because in hooks opinion Beyoncé’s looks and fame cater to white audiences. Even though Beyoncé’ uses her reputation as a platform to promote black causes, Beyoncé remains careful not to go too far with her platform because of the risk it could pose to her career. Hooks concludes that these aspects are oppositional to the black feminist work of dismantling structures of oppression.¹³¹ Angela Davis refutes the terrorist comments, by saying

¹²⁹ Marshall, Jocelyn E. "The Beyoncé Effect: Essays on Sexuality, Race, and Feminism" Adrienne Trier-Bieniek, Editor. 100.

¹³⁰ Ibid.

¹³¹ Ibid.

that to her terrorism comes from attacks by white supremacists like Bull Connor in the 1960s attacked innocent people for standing up for their beliefs the image of Beyoncé cannot compare to that. Davis does say that Beyoncé has found ways to survive and thrive to a point where she could be a benefit to the feminist cause. However, she “complicates representations of black womanhood and resist racially sectionalize meanings ascribed to the female body.”¹³² Meaning she has the popularity and resources and is a symbol for black feminism, but her image does present some fakeness and white washing compared to what a black female image should be. Marshall shows how celebrities have an influence in third and-fourth wave feminisms and how academic feminists of the 1980s can use celebrities of today as examples (or not) of feminism.

Feminist critic Audra Gaugler explains how Madonna is a feminist icon because she “radically attempts to change society by eliminating societal labels that are used to separate people like male, female, straight, gay, bi, or transsexual, and she encourages people to gain power in their lives and lift themselves from subordinate positions.”¹³³ First, Madonna constructs her own identity instead of giving into the identity society expected her to have. She changes her image constantly and does not stay confined into the image of a traditional woman that society wants her to have. For example, even as she ages she continues to be as sexually explorative as she was when she was young which is rejected by society because the expectation is that she should become more conservative as she ages. She encourages diversity in terms of race, gender, and sexual preference through her racially inclusive music videos and her book *Sex* that

¹³² Ibid.

¹³³ Audra Gaugler, "Madonna, an American pop icon of feminism and counter-hegemony: blurring the boundaries of race, gender, and sexuality by Audra Gaugler." (2000). 1.Theses and Dissertations. . Paper 662.

encourages embracing your sexuality and being proud of it.¹³⁴ Despite Madonna's achievements in her music and movies and promotion of sexual freedom, there are critics who try to criticize her contribution to feminism. bell hooks first praised Madonna for being a feminist revolutionary saying:

Her image, like that of the black Madonna, evoked a sense of promise and possibility, a vision of freedom; feminist in that she was daring to transgress sexist boundaries; Bohemian in that she was an adventurer, a risk taker; daring in that she presented a complex non-static ever changing subjectivity.¹³⁵

Madonna came about at a conservative time when women were desperate to overcome the patriarchal society. As Madonna took more risk in her work, she received criticism from the same academic feminists who praised her. bell hooks censored her for pushing the same boundaries she had before saying that, when Madonna started getting older, she should have toned down her sexuality, but since she is becoming more controversial she must be doing it to stay popular not for feminism.¹³⁶ Another critic Douglas Rushkuff agrees that Madonna's success stems from her ability to market herself, not from any personal convictions she might have.¹³⁷ Critics like Jean Baudrillard ask whether Madonna is authentic based on how she reinvents herself. However, Gaugler continues to push the argument that Madonna should receive praise because she blurs boundaries and debunks societal restrictions. She can appear masculine when wearing a suit and grabbing her crotch or feminine in a pink dress.¹³⁸ She does this to prove that anyone can be who they want to be. It is society's expectations that keep a person limited, not themselves. She urges people not to label because labeling divides people like

¹³⁴ Gaugler, Audra, "Madonna, an American pop icon of feminism and counter-hegemony: blurring the boundaries of race, gender, and sexuality" 1-2.

¹³⁵ Ibid, 4.

¹³⁶ Ibid.

¹³⁷ Ibid, 5.

¹³⁸ Ibid, 9.

labeling people as male, female, gay, and straight automatically puts a person in a specific group which can make them feel trapped within that particular classification.

Secondly, she promotes power in her music videos like “Express Yourself” which are designed to help all kinds of individuals gain control.¹³⁹ She also goes against the white majority by promoting Hispanic and African Americans, which she did in her 1984 video *Borderline*.¹⁴⁰ In the video, she is in a multicultural environment with multiple races. She also, in *Like a Prayer*, depicts an interracial relationship and the consequences of that from racial intolerance, which gets criticism from hooks, who says that a white person cannot pretend to define the black or Hispanic experience.¹⁴¹ Overall, Gaugler argues that despite her critics Madonna tackles sexual and racial boundaries and blurs them to bring people of all walks of life together.

Academic Jacqueline Warwick describes the impact that girl groups played on feminism from the 1950s to 1980’s highlighting that the change was made in the 1960s and continued through the 1980s and today.¹⁴² Warwick looks at the girl groups from this time in bands like the Shangri-las, the Shirelles, the Crystals, and the Marvelettes and explains how girls both black and white from suburban and inner-city neighborhoods came together under the control of white men. As well as how that would influence future female groups in today’s age because even today like back then female girl groups specifically black ones are not always taken seriously by scholars.¹⁴³ The girl group has been at the forefront of popular music in two eras late 1950s and early 1960s and 1990s. In between these times, there were other manifestations in women’s

¹³⁹ Ibid, 10.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid, 13.

¹⁴¹ Ibid, 16.

¹⁴² Jacqueline C. Warwick. *Girl Groups, Girl Culture: Popular Music and Identity in the 1960s*. (New York: Rutledge), 2008. 9.

¹⁴³ Warwick, *Girl Groups, Girl Culture*, 8.

music that came into being from the girl group and defined feminism. Examples like Joni Mitchell, Missy Elliot, and Riot Grrls front woman Kathleen Hanna have little to do with girl groups but represent the in-between time of the types of feminism that occurs within music. Girl groups like the Supremes influenced young black girls to follow their dreams and would go on to affect other women in music to be a symbol for girls and women. Which would vary depending on what type of music they played and what their message was. ¹⁴⁴

A founding member of The Supremes, the most successful and most well known female vocal group of all time, Mary Wilson wrote a book that detailed an event that happened when the group was at an all-time high. They started to receive criticism from white music critics saying they lost their black roots because they didn't sound like Aretha Franklin or Otis Redding. The choice to sing differently made the Supremes corrupt in some way. The Supremes also commented that they were not just singing this music because the Motown sound pressured them, but that they composed the music they loved.¹⁴⁵ Diana Ross and The Supremes along with other girl bands broke down barriers of sexism and racism and explained the black feminists' culture that came out of girl bands which were the freedom to take the musical roots of blues, jazz, and Motown funk or classical music and form it into anything they wanted. The Supremes made black girl groups feel free to produce whatever type of music they wanted. Diana Ross's daughter Tracee Ellis Ross is a symbol for black feminism today as an actress and comedian explaining the black experience to the public.

Feminist scholar Ashanka Kumari discusses how Lady Gaga and Beyoncé present new symbolism for feminism with sexual power. She uses the example of 2011 MTV Video Music

¹⁴⁴ Ibid.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid, 9.

awards for her hit of “You and I.” When Lady Gaga came out on stage, audience members were surprised to see a man with dark hair and a suit and t-shirt stepped on stage in her place.¹⁴⁶ Then this individual began a monologue saying that he was Lady Gaga’s ex-lover, and he was an a-hole. He was Lady Gaga in drag. This makes people think deeply about gender performances, and how they connect to naming practices, cultural identity, and rhetorical constructs.¹⁴⁷

Lady Gaga and Beyoncé both do this with their alter egos. Artist other than Beyoncé and Lady Gaga that do this are Madonna, Kesha, Pink, and Lorde.¹⁴⁸ They do this for the service of feminism. For Beyoncé, creating her alter ego started as a personality and confidence boost because she wanted to portray an image she did not feel. Beyoncé claims her alter egos are strictly for her performances, but to feminists, they represent the multiplicity of a single person in the sense that her alter egos do not perform by themselves.¹⁴⁹ Early in her singing career when she was with the band Destiny’s Child, Beyoncé maintained both her first and last name in performances.¹⁵⁰ At this stage, her name was mixed in with the group, but when she went solo, she dropped her last name. This single name rejects the traditional naming conventions of black female singers such as Aretha Franklin, Whitney Houston, and Janet Jackson.¹⁵¹ With pushing the naming traditions of the black artist and going with a white artist move like Madonna and Cher, she forwards her black perspective with a name that stands on its own.¹⁵² When she started her solo career, she felt she did not have the aggressive personality she needed. Therefore she

¹⁴⁶ Ashanka Kumari. ““Yoü and I””: Identity and the Performance of Self in Lady Gaga and Beyoncé.” *The Journal of Popular Culture* 49, no. 2 (2016): 403. Doi: 10.1111/jpcu.12405.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid, 406.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid.

¹⁵¹ Ibid.

¹⁵² Ibid.

invented Sasha Fierce in 2008 during an Oprah Winfrey interview. She explained that her album “I am Sasha Fierce” had two sides, just like she did. The “I am” side had her vulnerable, sensitive songs and “Sasha Fierce” has her aggressive, sexy, and provocative side.¹⁵³ Beyoncé has multiple personas such as Yonce and Ms. Carter, which show different sides of her. In 2010, Beyoncé killed off Sasha Fierce saying she could finally merge the two. Ms. Carter represents her strong, sexy, mother and wife status with her marriage to Jay Z. However, now she says all her alter egos are her; she does not separate the two.

However, Stefani Joanne Angelina Germanotta, aka Lady Gaga, maintains her alter-egos separately.¹⁵⁴ Unlike Beyoncé, Gaga as a white, female performer did not have to work against the same historical stereotypes.¹⁵⁵ Lady Gaga felt her name change would help her embody multiple cultural forms that her Italian name would not. She has dropped her birth name and even her friends and family call her Gaga, but she finds family important.¹⁵⁶ With Lady Gaga’s constant change of image, she wants the world to know that there is not just one Lady Gaga and that Lady Gaga is made up of everything.¹⁵⁷ Gaga uses her disguise as a man named Jo Claderone as a way to show that gender is fiction and can be altered based on perspective.¹⁵⁸ Beyoncé and Lady Gaga challenge traditional gender norms by showing that identities can alter. Beyoncé used her alter ego to give herself traits she did not feel she had and got rid of the alter ego when she felt comfortable whereas Lady Gaga uses hers as a way to show people that one

¹⁵³ Ibid, 407.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid, 409.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid, 410.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid, 413.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid.

can change everything about his or herself, so gender expectations and the lines that society makes for people are fake.

Conclusion

In the 1980s, white academic feminists like Kessler-Harris and Rosenberg were divided over the issues of class and sexism in their individual work environments. They were criticized by black feminists like Collins, Davis, and hooks for neglecting the impact of race on women and for not allowing minority women to have central positions in the movement. By contrast, millennial feminists like Kumari, Warwick, Gaugler, Hobson, and Marshall took racial diversity for granted, while exploring sexual preference and sexual identity in ways feminists had not before.

Third-and Fourth-Wave feminism are movements exemplified by celebrities and mass media that have been used to include diverse voices including different races and sexual orientations. However, if third- and fourth-wave academic feminists want to achieve what their predecessors could not, which is to give an equal amount of representation to other groups besides white feminists, they have more work to do. Millennial academic feminists still have a long way to go because they have ignored class issues, and sexism within the workplace, which second-wave feminists constantly mentioned. Millennial feminism have helped create movements such as Black Lives Matter and the #MeTooMovement, which are holding the powers in charge, especially white males in Hollywood and law enforcement, responsible for their abuse. This has caused a rift between second-and-third and fourth-wave feminists. As a millennial academic feminist, I think millennial feminists have different ideas concerning

#MeTooMovement and Black Lives Matter because they live in different circumstances. Across the United States, even in the most conservative places, schools and colleges welcome people of diverse races, classes, and sexual orientations. Social media allows people to be in touch with others with similar or vastly different opinions than their own, and this communication spreads knowledge about various issues widely. In the past—before social media—individuals had to rely mostly on people in their area for information about social issues, which typically resulted in people holding common viewpoints. Now that people can communicate with a wide range of people in different places, they speak about their private problems, such as racial discrimination or sexual harassment, on a larger platform, which millennial feminists embrace as a positive development for feminism.

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