

Research Project

Topic : Two main events in the shift from second wave of feminism to third wave of feminism

This project focuses on two main events which were crucial in the shift from the second wave of feminism to the third wave of feminism.

Feminism, as defined by Britannica, *"is the belief in social, economic, and political equality of the sexes"*.^[1]

Merriam-Webster defines it as *"the theory of the political, economic, and social equality of the sexes"* and as *"an organized activity on behalf of women's rights and interests"*^[2]

The definition given by IWDA is, *"feminism is about all genders having equal rights and opportunities"*^[3]

In my words, I would define feminism as, ***"All genders irrespective of caste, creed, religion, color, race and national origin should experience equal social, political and economic rights and opportunities"***

"In America, three out of every ten women dyed their hair blonde. They ate a chalk called Metrecal, instead of food, to shrink to the size of the thin young models. Department-store buyers reported that American women, since 1939, had become three and four sizes smaller. The suburban housewife was the dream image of the young American women and the envy, it was said, of women all over the world."^[16]

These housewives had completed their education and were excellent wives and mothers. They were smart, talented and beautiful, at least in the eyes of other women across the globe but the frustration of these housewives remained unknown in the 1960s.

After 1949, when the war ended and men returned home, all they hoped for was the comfort and warmth of home. Women were expected to make the returning soldiers feel better and happy. Men wanted to spend time with their wives and children and wanted to concentrate on their families. Hence came the need for security and togetherness. Women started leaving their jobs and started becoming housewives in the 1960s.

Second wave of feminism started in the 1960s, and lasted till the early 1980s. The book 'The Feminine Mystique' initiated the second wave. It raised consciousness among women and wanted them to realise "personal lives reflected sexist power structures"^[4]

This period focused on the issues of equality and discrimination and aimed at increasing equality for women.

After the Second World War, men started returning from war and thus women started losing jobs they had gotten when men were at the front. Women were expected to go back to being housewives and take care of children. They were given the responsibility of making men feel at

home and be comforted after the war. They were expected to make decisions related to housework and relieve that burden off of their husband's shoulders.

Men being the breadwinners of the family and women taking care of their household was considered to be equal responsibilities.

Women were back to being someone's wife or someone's mother. They were left with no identity of their own.

The first event which I consider is crucial is when the book 'The Feminine Mystique' by Betty Friedan was published in 1963.

Betty Friedan co-founded the National Organization for Women (NOW) in 1966. The agenda of NOW was "allow women's participation in all aspects and to gain all the rights enjoyed by men".^[15]

It stood against the idea that "women's fulfillment is achieved only through homemaking and bearing children".^[15]

The book raised consciousness among women that their fulfillment is not defined by being someone's wife or someone's mother. They deserved rights and opportunities equal to the ones given to men. They deserved to have an identity of their own.

The problem that had no name was dismissed by telling the housewife she doesn't realize how lucky she is - her own boss, no time clock, no junior executive gunning for her job.^[16]

They were not just someone's wife or mother, having an identity of their own is not against "the natural".

The second most important event is the Civil Rights Movement. This movement was to prohibit discrimination in employment on the basis of race, color, national origin, and religion.

In the Civil Rights Act of 1964, Title VII, discrimination on the basis of sex was also prohibited.

To enforce the new civil rights regulations, Executive Order 11246 was passed but later another order was passed since Executive Order 11246 did not prohibit discrimination against sex.

Reviews - Popular culture

Gone with the wind(1939)

Slavery and adultery were easily noticeable in this movie. The movie started with a conversation about a war between a woman and two brothers. While the brothers were excited to go to the front, the woman wasn't interested at all but rather she was interested in the barbeque that was going to take place where she could meet the man of her dreams.

In the afternoon, during the barbeque, women were expected to sleep whereas all the men gathered in the dining room and made decisions regarding the war.

The ladies were treated as young infants.

Just before the men left for war, they married their sweethearts and hence during that period early marriages were quite common.

A few dialogues which really showed how men and women were treated in the society are given below:

- “Why does a girl have to be so silly to catch a husband”
- “Bad enough for women to be in business”
- “Marriage is fun for men”
- “Never saw a man with such store for a child”

This movie was released before the second wave of feminism and hence would be expected to depict the position of women in society before the second wave of feminism and around the time of the second world war.

During the war, America started utilizing all of its assets including women.

To fill in for men out in the front, women started doing all sorts of jobs along with taking care of their homes. Many were reluctant to give up their jobs after the Second World War and become housewives.

“In 1939, the heroines of the women’s magazines were younger than their fictional counterparts in the 1960s. They were New Women, creating with a gay determination spirit a new identity for women - a life of their own. The majority of heroines in the four major women’s magazines were career women - happily, proudly, adventurously, attractively career women - who loved and were loved by men. These New Women were almost never housewives; in fact, the stories usually ended before they had children. They seemed much older, more mature than the childlike, kittenish young housewife heroines of today.”^[16]

A U.S government’s campaign called “Rosie the Riveter” was started to recruit female workers in the munitions industry.

“Between 1940 and 1945, the age of “Rosie the Riveter”, the female percentage of the U.S workforce increased from 27 percent to nearly 37 percent, and by 1945, nearly one out of every four married women worked outside the home. In addition to factory work and other home front jobs, approximately 350,000 women joined the Armed Services, serving at home and abroad. Before the war, 1 percent of the total workforce of the aviation industry represented the female workers and in 1943, 65 percent of the total workforce represented female workers.”^[5]

Before the war, women could only be seen as nurses and teachers. Aviation industry saw the greatest increase in female workers during the war. Even though women started entering the work life in such huge numbers being the most important asset of America they still “rarely earned more than 50 percent of male wages.”^[5]

Since women had to earn and also look after their children, new laws were passed to make child care services available. Communities where defense production was a major industry, The Lanham Act was passed in 1940 which granted childcare services^[6]. Also in 1942, the “Community Facilities Act was passed which led to the creation of the first U.S government-sponsored child care center.”^[5]

Second wave of feminism only spoke about the issue of the upper-class white women and did not consider women of color, other nationalities, race and caste and hence not every woman was treated equally.

“African American women found that white women were not always welcoming at work—if they were even granted the same job opportunities in the first place—and were paid less than their

white peers. Japanese American women fared even worse, as they were sent off to Japanese Internment Camps under Executive Order 9066.”^[5]

The Apartment(1959)

The scene starts with showing the employees of an insurance company and women as well as men in equal numbers could be seen working.

One of the characters when reading the staff turnover of the company for the year, the statistics were, “ 37% of females leave to get married and 22%...”

“The 1950s witnessed significant changes in patterns of sexual behavior, which would ultimately lead to the “sexual revolution” of the 1960s.”^[7]

A lot of women started dropping out of high schools and colleges to get married. They got into schools and colleges, in the first place, to find themselves a man in which they see their future husband. Due to such high dropout rates, the college professors decided to introduce courses that would help in better understanding of homemaking and finding themselves a man and so courses on family and marriages were introduced in colleges instead of motivating and encouraging women to continue with their education and look forward to a career. These professors later came to known as the sex-directed educators.

“The proportion of women attending college in comparison with men dropped from 47 percent in 1920 to 35 percent in 1958. A century earlier, women had fought for higher education; now girls went to college to get a husband. By the mid-fifties, 60 percent dropped out of college to marry, or because they were afraid too much education would be a marriage bar. A new degree was instituted for the wives - Ph.T. (Putting Husband Through)”^[16]

Due to the fear of war, many young couples started getting married and looked forward to having kids. That period is known as the baby boomers due to the significant increase in the birth rates. This eventually led women to become full-time housewives and did not have time for a job.“It was thought that women could do best by staying at home and taking care of her husband and children, and refusing to pursue a career. Thus a link was forged between traditional gender roles and national security.”^[7]

“Between 1946 and 1964, the largest generation of Americans, known as the baby boomers, was born. This demographic trend in turn reinforced women’s identities as wives and mothers. Despite societal norms that encouraged women to stay in the home and out of the workplace, approximately forty percent of women with young children, and at least half of women with older children, chose to remain in the workforce”^[7]

“Women played a crucial role in waging the cold war, by keeping the family unit strong and intact”

“Concerned over the Soviet Union’s lead in the space race, scientists noted that America’s greatest source of unused brain-power was women. But girls would not study physics; it was “unfeminine.” “^[16]

“Women, traditionally expected to do most of the shopping for the household, were encouraged to identify as patriotic Americans by being savvy consumers. The norms of consumer culture and domesticity were disseminated via new and popular forms of entertainment - not just television,

which became a fixture in middle-class American households during the 1950s, but also women's magazines, popular psychology, and cinema. Shows promoting the values of domesticity. These shows portrayed the primary roles of women as wives and mothers"^[7]

The image of woman that emerges from this big, pretty magazine is young and frivolous, almost childlike; fluffy and feminine; passive; gaily content in a world of bedroom and kitchen, sex, babies, and home. The magazine surely does not leave out sex; the only passion, the only pursuit, the only goal a woman is permitted is the pursuit of a man. These magazines contained almost no mention of the world beyond the home"

In 1958 and 1959, Betty Friedan went through "issue after issue" of the three major women's magazines without finding a single heroine who had a career, a commitment to any work, art, profession, or mission, in the world, other than "Occupation : housewife". These new happy housewife heroines seem to get younger all the time- in looks, and a childlike kind of dependence. They have no vision of the future, except to have a baby. They must keep on having babies, because the feminine mystique says there is no other way for a woman to be a heroine. They are forever young because their own image ends in childbirth."^[16]

The entertainment media generally showed women as unhappy when they chose their career over family. They showed how dissatisfied women were with their lives in their professional career and how happy and satisfied housewives were who took care of their husbands and children and believed her fulfillment and life's purpose was homemaking and bearing children, that is what defined her femininity. Those who felt discontent with their routine lives of homemaking and bearing children went to therapists and told them how frustrated they were of their routine lives. Many therapists called this situation 'penis envy'. This concept was put forward by Sigmund Freud.

"Freud believed to be biological was often a cultural reaction, one sees imply that Victorian culture gave women many reasons to envy men: the same conditions, in fact, that the feminists fought against. If a woman who was denied freedom, the status and the pleasures that men enjoyed wished secretly that she could have these things, in the shorthand of the dream. She might wish herself a man and see herself with that one thing which made men.

The concept "penis envy", which Freud coined to describe a phenomenon he observed in women- that is, in the middle-class women who were his patients in Vienna in the Victorian era- was seized in this country in the 1940s as the literal explanation of all that was wrong with American women. Many who preached the doctrine of endangered femininity, reversing the movement of American women toward independence and identity, never knew its Freudian origin. One needs only to know what Freud was describing, in those Victorian women, to see the fallacy in literally applying his theory of femininity to women today."^[16]

As Freud was creating a new framework for our culture, he could not escape the framework of his own.

Tootsie(1982)

In this movie I noticed that even though there were men who treated women as inferior, there also were women who could and would stand up for themselves and other women and did not tolerate being treated as inferior to men.

A few dialogues which show the relation between men and women are:

- “What is idiotic about power making a woman masculine”
- “How does a woman keep herself attractive and not starve”
- “I’ll be anything, I’ll be a wife”
- “I haven’t been so fortunate to get married”
- “Don’t you find being a woman in the ‘80s complicated?”
- “I’m all for equality, women ought to be entitled to everything and all etc except sometimes I think what they really want is to be man”
- “I’m a woman. Not Felicia’s mother. Not Kevin’s wife”
- “Years ago there was no talk about what a woman was or a man was, you just were what you were. Now they have all the other stuff about being like the other sex so you can all be the same. Well, I’m sorry, but we’re just not.”

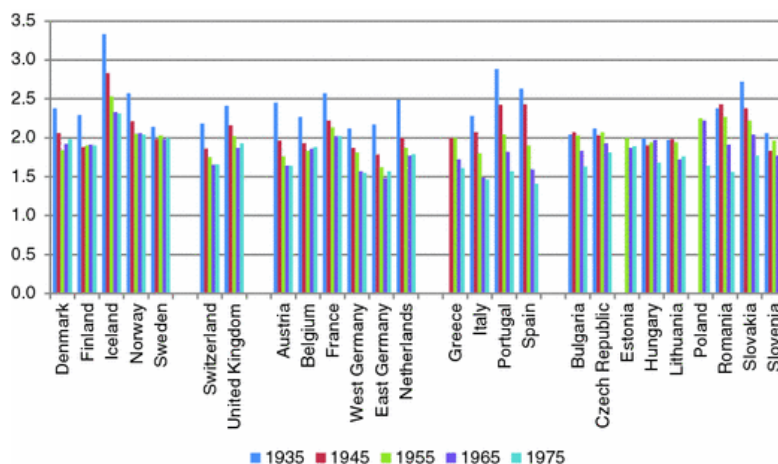
“The Equal Rights Amendment is a proposed amendment to the United States Constitution designed to guarantee equal legal rights for all American Citizens regardless of sex. It seeks to end the legal distinctions between men and women in terms of divorce, property, employment, and other matters. Equality of rights under the law shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any state on account of sex.”^[11]

The ERA was passed by Congress in 1972 and the deadline for the ratification was June 30th, 1982. The ERA could not be passed since it fell short of three states.

When there is no discrimination among women on the basis of race, class, ethnicity, religion, age, geography, sexual orientation and so forth, it is called sisterhood.

“The denial of sisterhood and its replacement with a recognition of difference (the diversity of women’s experiences, not their commonality), was well underway by the early 1980s. Difference has continued to be one of the most important organizing concepts of women’s history. No longer was it enough to say “women”—scholars had to make it clear which women they were talking about. Women were divided by a range of factors that included race, class, ethnicity, religion, geography, age, sexual orientation, and so forth.”^[16]

This movie was released towards the end of the second wave of feminism and talks about the position of women in the society by the end of the second wave of feminism.



The graph shows the total completed cohort fertility (average number of children per woman) of selected birth cohorts.

The Third wave of feminism started in the early 1990s and challenged the idea of feminism that “overemphasized experiences of upper middle-class white women”^[4] that is, it challenged the shortcomings of the second wave and gave rise to intersectional feminism which looks into discrimination against women on the basis of caste, creed, race, color and religion. This period greatly focused on the reproductive rights of women.

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