What does the ‘Fourth Wave’ mean for teaching feminism in 21st century social work?

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• To assess the current state of play for feminism as a theory and an approach in contemporary social work education.
• Using a form of self-reflexive analysis by us (the authors) as feminist researchers, teachers and scholars
• Drawing on our own ‘herstories’ and experience, we review some of the events and issues that have prompted us to reappraise feminist perspectives or feminist analyses of broader responses.
• Offer a version of what twenty-first century feminism and social work might look like in approaches to teaching about it.
• Not offered as a definitive perspective - our shared attempt to begin to articulate the continuing relevance of feminism, as a body of knowledge and thought, within our lives and our teaching practice.

Outline of Paper
Time to revisit the question of feminism and teaching social work, asking:

- what are the consequences of the presence and availability of feminist views, politics and identity in the ways that social work is taught?
- What is the ‘right kind’ of feminism for the ‘now’ in this context?
- How do we negotiate/navigate and present feminism to a new generation of social work students who have grown up with the relativism of postmodern values and who are likely to see feminism and the position of women and men very differently to their teachers who were likely to have been influenced by and/or were part of the second wave feminist movement?
- How do we best confront and challenge any essentialising and moralising tendencies within feminism?
- How does a global North feminism interact in a positive, non-patronising way with feminism in the global South?
- Put simply, how might we incorporate and come to terms with the characteristics of four waves of feminism to ensure that it is relevant to students today?
This paper assesses:
- the current state of play for feminism as a theory and an approach in contemporary social work education.
- by using a form of self-reflexive analysis by us (the authors) as feminist researchers, teachers and scholars.
- Drawing on our own ‘herstories’ and experience, we review some of the events and issues that have prompted us to reappraise feminist perspectives or feminist analyses of broader responses.
- We then offer a version of what twenty-first century feminism and social work might look like in approaches to teaching about it.
- not offered as a definitive perspective - should be seen as our shared attempt to begin to articulate the continuing relevance of feminism, as a body of knowledge and thought, within our lives and our teaching practice.
• Ruth’s story….how I became a second wave feminist…
• Asserting a personal narrative of the transformative and transforming nature of feminism
• From a twenty-first-century global perspective, gender equality has become a widespread social policy agenda item.
• Key factor in alleviating poverty, improving women’s health and as a key aspect of economic growth.
• The strength of global gender equality policies has bolstered various feminist agendas.
• However, the numerical majority women in the world continue to endure inequality when compared with their male counterparts.
  • Gender-based inequalities in decision-making power persist. Whether is the public or private sphere, from the highest levels of government decision-making to households, women continue to be denied equal opportunity with men to participate in decisions that affect their lives (U.N., 2013: 5).

Why the contemporary context still needs feminism.
Social Media has opened up significant spaces for the rebirth of feminist debates and resistance and it has been argued that this is the birthplace of ‘fourth wave’ feminism

Baumgardner (2011) proposes that the fourth wave evolved to take forward the agenda of third wave feminists, observing that ‘their experience of the online universe was that it was just part of life, not something that landed in their world like an alien spaceship….’; while zines’ and songs were innovations of the third wave, the fourth wavers introduced the use of blogs, Twitter campaigns and online media with names like Racialiscious and Feministing & Everyday Sexism.

They commented on the news, posted their most stylish plus-size fashion photos with info about where to shop, and tweeted that they, too, had had an abortion. “Reproductive justice,” coined by women of color in the 1990s, became the term of choice for young feminists. Transgenderism, male feminists, sex work, and complex relationships within the media characterized their feminism (Baumgardner, 20011).
Supporting this characterisation of the ‘fourth wave’, there have been several cases where social media such as ‘Twitter’, ‘Facebook’ or ‘blogs’ have become battlegrounds between feminists and others.

E.g. feminist activist Caroline Criado-Perez’s campaign to have a woman (Jane Austen) placed on the new release of the British ten-pound note, she received rape threats via ‘Twitter’ (Gold, 2013).

Gold (2013), observed that even though this is not necessarily a real threat of rape it has the desired effect of silencing women:

- For some women (the angrier, more talkative, more publicised and dangerous women) dodging rape threats online is a daily obstacle course. Rape, and the threat of rape, is a favoured weapon for men who hate women. It is an effective mode of decapitation, speaking - or rather shouting – only to the vagina, pretending the brain doesn’t exist (July, 2013).

Criado-Perez and Gold both argued that the threat of rape is not the same as actual rape and that rather than criminalising this kind of hate speech the offenders should be shamed (Gold, 2013).
• The production of feminisms or feminist debates in new media results in the presence of feminism is mainstream media.
• Eg. a recent issue of Cosmopolitan Magazine (aimed at an early 20s to an early 30s female market) Jamila Rizi (a self identified gen-Y, leg-shaving, owner of red lipstick and high heels feminist) wrote:
  • When I look to the women my age who are living in the public eye, it is difficult to find a feminist among them. That’s because being feminist has become associated with hating blokes, rather than being equal to them….increasingly feminism is dismissed as irrelevant, outdated and unnecessary to the lives of modern women. But let me tell you something, my friends, it isn’t. Because as far as we have come. There is till a huge way to go: Australian women still earn 80 cents for every dollar men earn; We’re almost 51 per cent of the population and yet we hold around 30 per cent of elected positions in federal parliament; Women still carry the burden of around two thirds of unpaid work; Nearly one in five of us will experience sexual assault and one in three women will experience some kind of family or domestic violence in our lifetimes’ (2013: 30).
Set amongst articles such as ‘What’s the Best Way to Find a Guy?’, “So You’re Thinking About a Threesome”, “What the 30 –Something Guy wants in Bed” – there is also very explicit heterosexual sex advice and the entire range of marketable products to make you look hot for men.

What is so striking is what appears to be a disconnection between the idea of equality or emancipation and the symbols of femininity as objectifications for the male gaze or men’s pleasure.

It is also observable that the powerful assertion of explicit knowledge about sex and sex as female pleasure as much as male pleasure, are a least in part as a result of the demands of the second wave feminists asserting women’s sexuality and women’s sexual pleasure.

Rachel Grate ‘a proud feminist wrote of Cosmo becoming feminist:

Other articles are downright progressive. The article teased on the cover about sex on the first date is actually more of a feminist manifesto than sex advice. The article begins, "we used to think that falling into bed with someone too soon would disqualify you from being considered girlfriend material. But welcome to 2013, when the world is a lot less sexist than it used to be." The article goes on to deconstruct the double-standard of the slut-stud dichotomy between men and women.

http://www.policymic.com/articles/53405/how-cosmo-is-becoming-feminist

Feminism in mainstream media
The Populists: Lena Dunham

Rising star, Lena Dunham, creator and star of HBO series, 'Girls' said:

“Do you believe that women should be paid the same for doing the same jobs? Do you believe that women should be allowed to leave the house? Do you think that women and men both deserve equal rights? Great, then you’re a feminist.”
The Glass-Ceiling Smashers: Karren Brady became the managing director of Birmingham City Football Club at the age of 23. Flouting any preconceptions about age and gender, she quickly turned around the club's fortunes, proving herself to be one of the most formidable businesswomen in the world.

A regular on 'The Apprentice', she is an inspiration to millions of women and a reminder that women really can have it all if they want it.
The Family Feminists: Beyoncé (aka Mrs Carter)

Beyoncé was derided by female critics when she announced she would be touring under her married name, Mrs Carter. But the star, who has made a name for herself singing about female empowerment, insists she is not compromising her feminist sensibilities.

She told Vogue in a recent interview: "I guess I am a modern-day feminist. I do believe in equality. Why do you have to choose what type of woman you are? Why do you have to label yourself anything? I’m just a woman and I love being a woman," she said.

"I do believe in equality and that we have a way to go and it’s something that’s pushed aside and something that we have been conditioned to accept."
As the purpose of this paper is not to thoroughly analyse the obvious tensions between being a feminist and wearing shoes that immobilize women, disabling a flight response to any given situation, but rather to grasp how young women might see and want to construct their own agency, it forces us to reflect on our own response to such contradictions.

Is this the dominant social context that our students emerge from or have to resist?

How do we accommodate these types of societal experiences and values?

How does a more aggressive sexualisation of the feminine affect young men’s views of women?

Is it really an uncomplicated assertion of the right to be sexualised by certain styles of dress and perspectives of sexual activity that is a natural outcome of the struggle for gender equality?

Fourth wave students?
• The historical and contemporary roles of feminism in social work are evident in three overlapping spheres.
  • in theory, demonstrated in all comprehensive texts on social work, where feminism is recognised as an important theoretical influence and as a specific theorisation for social work practice (Healy, 2000, 2005, 2012; Fook, 2002; Dominelli, 2002).
  • Feminism can thus be seen to have influenced social work theory as a partner or, indeed, a dominant framework in practice theories such as radical social work, anti-oppressive social work, empowerment social work, critical reflective practice, postmodern social work, social work ethics and in the ethics of care.
  • Second sphere is in practice, where the complexities of being women practitioners, working with men as clients and working with women and children directly affected by the abuses of masculine power have often been a focus (Cavanagh and Cree, 1996; Dominelli, 2002; White, 2006;).
  • Third sphere within social work literature is in research. Present since the 1970s, more recent studies have shown that feminism continues to be applied as a framework for teaching, research and practice in social work (Davis, 1987; Phillips, 2007; Gringeri et al, 2010; Barretti, 2011).
• We cannot entirely identify with the ‘fourth wave’ but we can understand it; we can be critical of it but not dismiss it.

• 4th Wave seems to be:
  • based on a selective diet of various feminist achievements and it involves dropping parts of the diet regime constantly, in order to accept a highly commodified feminine identity that is ideologically inconsistent.
  • Good elements – it is more ‘men friendly’ and is still about equality.
  • Most importantly, however, it has placed key feminist debates back on the public agenda and to a public that is far more comprehensive that any time before.

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**Summary of ‘4th Wave’ Feminism**
• Establishing that yes there are tensions between the politics of the 2nd wave and the politics of the 4th but to communicate a feminist pedagogy to young people we must find a way of comprehending the feminist identity of the ‘now’, this means:
  • Allowing a drift from epistemological foundations that are at the core of the apparent contradictions
  • Recognise that a softer, inclusive approach is required
  • Allow evidence of inequality/human rights to replace feminist ‘rhetoric’ as a pathway to theoretical explanations
  • Establish safe pathways towards identity as a feminist/feminist supporter

Summary of strategies