Making sense of the waves: Wipeout or still riding high?

Abstract

This paper argues for feminism's enduring importance in light of social workers' daily experience of women's abuse and oppression. While cognisant of the many ways feminist theories can be understood, we examine the successive waves of feminism and apply Fraser's (1995, 2000) theory of recognition and redistribution to examine contemporary feminist movements and point to future directions for feminist social work. We argue that postcolonial feminism, with its awareness of culture and context, has most usefulness for social work. We see new forms of third-way/ve feminism, including integrative and postfeminism, as fuelling neoliberal consumerist inequality, intensifying the need for feminist social work critique, scholarship, and activism.

Keywords: Feminism, postfeminism, recognition and difference

While feminism can be broadly characterized by a concern with the systematic disadvantage of women and the means through which equitable outcomes can be achieved, it has never had one distinct set of beliefs or a unified position. Feminists differ widely on the causes of and solutions for women's subordination or, as some feminists prefer, men's superordination. The diversity of opinions surrounding feminism and its many forms has weakened the feminist movement. This has been compounded by the rise of postmodern feminism with its central mission of deconstructing grand narratives, including the grand narrative of feminism. This abstract theorizing about difference and diversity, identity and recognition, and so on – though always a part of feminist discourse – has seen the ascendance of academic feminism and the disappearance of feminist political action.

Nevertheless, feminists have achieved much in the Western world. They have fought for women's suffrage and reproductive rights. They have challenged employment

discrimination, promoted equitable wages and affirmative action initiatives, and sought rights to property ownership and university education. They have drawn attention to issues neglected by male researchers and theorists, particularly in their contribution to critical social theory (Agger, 1998). However, for the most part, feminist theory and politics has remained outside of mainstream political theory until, according to McRobbie (2009), it was mainstreamed in Western third way policies of freedom and choice. Though the language is hardly recognizable as feminist discourse, its mainstreaming has led some to suggest that feminism is a completed project and thus no longer needed (Faludi, 1992).

There is no denying the success of many women and the changing attitudes towards women in society, but there are huge pockets where this middle-class ideal does not pertain, where women are still oppressed and unequal because of their gender, class, sexuality, race, and disability, particularly in the developing contexts of the world and in marginalized communities in Western countries. It seems to us as social workers that we are still in the 'third world' and it is this discourse that most resonates with the daily experience of social workers. This is our position as we try to make sense of the contemporary discourse on feminism and highlight future directions for feminist social work. In retracing the history of feminism, we begin with first-wave feminism, where many of the earliest 'mothers of social work', such as Jane Addams, Mary Richmond, and Octavia Hill, played a key role.

First-wave feminism

Beginning with Mary Wollstonecraft's *Vindication of the Rights of Women* (1792), early - first-wave - feminists were liberal - naturalistic - feminists for whom the pressing socio-political agenda was suffrage for women. As shown in Table 1, the key project of which was the individualist and reformist attack to dismantle discriminatory laws and gender-based exclusionary social norms. They were primarily concerned with establishing in policy that women are human beings in their own right and not the property of men. They

campaigned for women's suffrage and, as was the case for subsequent second-wave feminism, they fought against the subordination and exploitation of women.

Table 1: First-wave feminism

PERIOD	FIRST WAVE
Type	Early liberal – naturalistic – feminism
Key project or argument	Individualist and reformist attack to dismantle discriminatory laws and exclusionary social norms
Key concern – rallying cry	*Rights and Representation* of women as human beings not to be treated as the property of men
Campaigning platform	Suffrage for women
Proffered solution	Women's legitimate place in social and political life
Main programs	Voting rights

Second-wave feminism

In contrast to first-wave feminists, second-wave feminism, which emerged in the wake of World War II when many women entered the labourforce, took many forms (as shown in Table 2). Second-wave feminists challenged prevailing notions of the women's role in the family, workplace, and society. They highlighted the sexual division of labour and were instrumental in promoting women's equality in the labour market. Second-wave feminists sought to address diverse issues, relating to *inter alia* access to childcare, equal pay, employment and education opportunities, reproductive rights, and women and children's safety. There was a focus on structural change and a critique of psychoanalytic theory – and the psychodynamic approach in social work – 'on the grounds that it is biologically essentialist' (Phoca & Wright, 1999, p. 11). In the early stages of second-wave feminism, issues of race and class were secondary concerns to gender, women's wellbeing was prioritized, and gender binaries prevailed: 'there are two sorts of people in the world, the superior and inferior, or in terms of power relations, the dominant and the subordinate. We are all equal irrespective of our gender. Social relations that obliterate this fact must therefore be transformed and recreated in ways that reflect equality in terms of gender' (Dominelli &

McCleod, 1989, p. 1). Hence second-wave feminists were centrally concerned with the elimination of gender inequality.

Liberal –equal opportunity – feminism

As shown in Table 2, second-wave liberal feminists continued the work of their predecessors by fighting for women's liberation through *rights and recognition* in freedom of expression and choice, and equal rights, treatment, and opportunities for women. They sought to break through, what they termed 'the glass ceiling', that is, the barriers preventing women from obtaining high-ranking positions in government, business and industry. For example, in social work, Lambert (in Saulnier, 1996) argued that women receive more education and training to help them advance to administrative positions in the profession.

Liberal feminists were reformists who sought to work via juridical means for the introduction of women-friendly legislation. They lobbied for legal and civil reforms through affirmative action and anti-discrimination campaigns. Their strategies were democratic engagement, reasoned argument and peaceful campaigning so as not to upset the capitalist status quo. They argued that women were 'oppressed' before capitalism (Rowbotham, 1973), thus ignoring non- white, middle-class, heterosexual women. Liberal feminists sought to promote women's interests and protect them from exploitation, abuse, and sexual harassment. They believed in women's autonomy and right to self-determination and assumed the right of women to participate in the economy even though many were not in a position to do so. Few social workers were at odds with liberal feminism though some were more aligned with critical second-wave feminism.

Table 2: Some forms of second-wave feminism

Type	Liberal – equal-opportunity – feminism	Socialist (Marxist) (UK) and radical (US) – feminism	Cultural – difference – feminism	Social-welfare feminism – shares much with liberal feminism	Black and lesbian feminism	Postmodern – academic – difference-recognition feminism	Post-colonial – Third World - feminism
Key project or argument	Promote women's rights, equal opportunity for and equal treatment of women while not upsetting the capitalist status quo - ignore non 'white, middle-class, heterosexual women' Argues women should have the *same* opportunities as men even though they're *different* – see differences between the sexes as complementary	Collective and revolutionary stance to attack subordination, exploitation and abuse of women as a product of the inequalities caused and maintained by capitalism Sought to uncover the root causes of female oppression and revolutionize consciousness by arguing that women were equal to men	Argues that women have innate, ethical characteristics and values that are superior to men's. Hence cultural feminists sought to reclaim women's roles, especially motherhood, with pride highlighting the way they were devalued by men	Rallies state to compensate for the inequities generated by the capitalist market system Reinstates 'working class' women Highlights the way in which welfare creates an underclass of women Contradicts the stereotype of the no-good welfare queen	*Black feminism* pushes social-welfare feminist perspective Highlights the exclusionary nature of most 'white, middle-class' feminist discourse *Lesbian feminism* highlights dominance of heterosexuality	Creates a discourse which re-writes (re-rights) feminism in response to its past failures, thus making feminism plural or all-encompassing by questioning Western universalisms	Dominant feminist discourse presumes a white, middle-class woman who has made some gains in the equality war and overlooks the fact that many women in poor and marginalized communities remain oppressed
Key concern – rallying cry	*Rights and representation* Choice and right to participate in the economy Work in the public sphere was seen as an add-on to women's work in the home Freedom of expression hence tendency to take a permissive line on pornography	*Redistribution* Criticized patriarchy, gendered division of labour, care as unpaid women's work Sought distance from male-dominated Left/Marxism Sought to socialize domestic labour by removing it from its naturalized – by liberals – association with women's work in the home	*Reconfiguring* women's difference by highlighting, indeed celebrating, the virtues of women See sex as a biological fact and gender as socially constructed but counter androgynies and complementary differences. Hence run the risk of essentialism – women as nurturers. Gave rise to ethic of care	*Reform* Government should provide resources and opportunities for women Questions the liberal, socialist and radical ideas modelled on the middle-class woman championing those unable to participate in the labour market who, therefore, were suffering from shrinking welfare benefits	*Reimagining (equality)* Challenged the hegemony of the white middle-class heterosexual woman Caught between this and the male-dominated civil rights movement	*'Re-writing'* Initially, most academic feminist were socialist or radical feminists who came from the educated, white, middle class in its formative years Has extended critiques of capitalism from class and production to racial difference, homophobia, sexuality, ideology, and culture	*Repositioning* Postcolonial feminism, for example, critiques Western imperialism and its subordination of whole peoples, races and ethnic groups. It draws attention to the importance of Indigenous and local cultures and argues from their standpoint or perspective against Western hegemony
Campaigning platform	Juridical reform Affirmative action and anti-discrimination campaigns. Peaceful protest	For radicals all women were part of the oppressed underclass Politicized personal and private	Theories which proclaim the power of women from strong CF visible in Daly's Gyn/Ecology and Collard's ecofeminism and weak CF in Gilligan's ethic of care	Better conditions for women on welfare and working class women	Relations of domination and white – heterosexual – privilege which disempower black – and lesbian – women	Pluralism and difference Undermining 'othering' by reclaiming woman as subject	Feminization of poverty – the bulk of the world's poor are women and poverty affects women disproportionately
Proffered solution	Equal rights and freedoms for women in democratic society Pro-women and pro-family legislation	Capitalist restructuring and redistribution	Different voice feminism – women's voice must be heard, cultural spaces for women created	Better childcare Liveable welfare benefits Opportunities for work	Education and organizing of black and lesbian women and advocacy for their rights	Deconstruction of discourses to show they contribute to women's oppression by promoting male-dominated discourses	Organization and empowerment of women in poor communities
Main programs	Abortion rights – Pro-Choice; affirmative action campaigns; measures to deal with sexual harassment in the workplace	Rape Crisis movement, women's shelters, domestic violence and sexual assault services; 'pro-sex' sex education; and an end to sterilization abuse	Women's virtue and value of women's contribution *vis a vis* ethic of care	Focus on work-family agenda, and calls for expanded state programs	Moves focus on racism beyond (white) self-examination Organization and education of black women	Women's studies programs Feminist journals Feminist literature	Critique programs that continue to disempower women, especially in NGOs controlled by men and overseas Western-based - organizations

Critical second-wave feminism

Critical second wave feminists moved away from many of the ideas espoused by liberal feminists, particularly those relating to working within the capitalist status quo. Characteristic of critical feminism is a questioning of commonly held assumptions, beliefs and behaviours. Critical second-wave feminism takes several forms, including socialist and radical feminism, cultural feminism, social-welfare feminism, postmodern feminism, and postcolonial - Third World - feminism.

Socialist and radical feminism

Though there are differences between socialist and radical feminism, both took a collective and revolutionary stance to attack the subordination, exploitation, and abuse of women, viewing it as a product of the structural inequalities caused and maintained by patriarchy and capitalism (Brenner, 1993). Radical and socialist feminists criticized the dominant patriarchal view of the nuclear family ideal and sought to raise awareness of non-traditional family forms. They engaged in political activism promoting reproductive rights and choices. Certain notions from radical and socialist feminism became part of mainstream feminist thinking, particularly resistance to patriarchy and male dominance in the private and public spheres as the accepted norm in Western society.

Socialist and radical feminism has been central to feminist social work practice in the UK, Canada, and Australia. For Dominelli (2002), feminist social work 'takes women's experience of the world as a starting point of its analysis and by focusing on the links between a woman's position in society and her individual predicament, responds to her specific needs, creates egalitarian relations in client-worker interactions and addresses structural inequalities' (p. 7). Problems are seen as resulting from structural and systemic causes, with solutions found beyond individual interventions. Thus, feminist social workers have sought to empower clients and politicize personal issues – by making them shared problems that require social

solutions – while personalizing social structures (Baines, 1997; Morrell, 1987). Consciousness-raising with groups was employed as a tool to mobilize people for political action and allow women in "relatively 'powerless' positions to reflect on and interpret the social dimensions of their personal problems … [and] plan for social change" (Summerson Carr, 2003, p. 19).

Radical feminism

Radical feminists made inroads in promoting women's health, and taking a stand against pornography and sexual violence. They favoured a cultural focus on women's personal lives, personal stories and narratives, 'using writing as a vehicle to communicate their own narratives of pain' (Whelehan, 1995, p. 70; see also, Roche & Goldberg Wood, 2005). European radical feminists, such as Irigaray, Kristeva, and Cixous, were critical of Western thought's dualism of man/woman that resulted in unequal relationships: 'The superiority of the male half of the equation is predicated upon the subordination of the female half, which is thus exiled from the value paradigm' (Cixous in Gamble, 2001, p. 189). As a result, radical feminists sought to develop their own totalizing discourse as a way of supplanting the dominant male discourse (Millett, 1971) and thus they re-enforced gender binaries. They created separate structures and services for women, such as domestic violence and sexual assault counselling services. Their anti-pornography stance tended to essentialize men as aggressive and women as passive victims. All men were seen as complicit in subordinating women whether or not they were active agents of abuse. Thus, radical feminist social workers historically viewed men with suspicion and their work with men was focused on getting them to see 'the "true" reason for their behaviour' (Featherstone, 2001, unpaginated). They made the personal political by 'questioning notions that a woman's place is primarily in the home; that women should take the main responsibility for child-rearing; and that women are naturally suited to low-paid and low-status caring work' (Reynolds, 1997,

p. 74). They saw this patriarchal ordering of social relations as the means by which women were oppressed by men. However, the separatist interests and essentialist arguments of some radical feminists - and social workers - were seen as anti-men, leading to connections between radical and lesbian feminism and criticisms that women were recast as passive victims of men's biological impulses.

While radical feminism has been central to social work practice in the UK, Australia, and Canada, it has also been heavily critiqued by those who believe that transformation requires that we recognize that men can take a profeminist standpoint (Pease, 2001), partner with men to find solutions to men's violence (Flood, 2005; Ruxton, 2004), and acknowledge men's diversity (see for example, Featherstone, Rivett, & Scourfield., 2007). Further, Molyneux (2000) has highlighted how women's activism in Latin America has, unlike feminism in the USA and Europe, never fully embraced equality feminism, but has sought rather to examine 'how citizenship can be reformulated to encompass gender difference without at the same time signifying inequality' (p. 36).

Socialist feminism

While radical feminists focused on patriarchal structures and women's personal experiences, Marxist-oriented socialist feminists focused on the political economy, particularly social inequalities resulting from capitalism. They sought to revolutionize consciousness by critiquing the 'ideological frameworks of contemporary social formations' (Whelehan, 1995, p. 61), especially capitalism, and were centrally concerned with *redistribution* (see also Fraser, 1995, 2000). Unlike the positive, affirmative action stance of liberal feminism, its negative view - first of male and then all forms of oppression - led, in social work, to anti-oppressive and anti-discriminatory practice. In time, feminists attacked all 'isms', starting with sexism and racism (see Baines, 1997; Dominelli, 1988; Featherstone & Fawcett, 1995) and extending to ethnocentrism in its postmodern reincarnation. A product of

left-wing radicalism in the UK, socialist and Marxist feminists distanced themselves from male-dominated Left-wing Marxism. They organized decentralized and localized women's groups whose major goal was consciousness-raising to help women realize the extent to which they were subordinate to and oppressed by men in capitalistic societies. This caused problems for women who did not perceive their situation in this way and were perceived to have false consciousness or to, in some way, be complicit in their own oppression.

Socialist feminists, with their focus on the political economy, sought to highlight how reproduction and unpaid work within the family was a key factor in the exploitation of women, benefiting both men and capitalism. They sought to expose domestic - women's - work as *work*: 'Socialist feminists persuasively argue[d] that capitalism requires … hidden unwaged labour [mostly that of women] in order to function' (Agger, 1998, p. 112). Feminist social workers highlighted how this patriarchal view of family accepted in welfare policy overlooked women's interests and, as a consequence, care was undervalued. Thus they sought to socialize domestic labour by removing it from its naturalized association with women's work in the home (Daly & Lewis, 2003; Orme, 2002). As an increasing number of women entered the job market, care became a shrinking commodity, forcing governments to turn to the market for care provision (Daly & Lewis, 2003). The legacy of socialist feminism is its perspective that class concerns can also be part of women's oppression. However, the socialist focus on class interests and exploitation, which gives rise to arguments for *redistribution*, shifted to a focus on cultural domination in cultural feminism, with *recognition* being the main remedy against injustice.

Cultural – difference – feminism

Cultural feminism, which views women's ways as different to men's, may be seen as a variant of radical feminism divested of its redistributive aspirations and replaced with a desire for *recognition* of women's innate difference while, at the same time, seeking to destabilize

the 'binary model inscribed in the masculine/feminine' (Phoca, in Gamble, 2001, p. 55). Simone de Beauvoir in the *Second Sex* (1949) highlighted the patriarchal tendency to position women as different and lesser, or as *Other* juxtaposed against the male claim to Self. She viewed the explanations of biologists, Freudian psychoanalysts and Marxists as unacceptably deterministic casting women as subordinate to the masculine norm. Picking up on de Beauvoir's cultural *Other*, Betty Friedan called 'for a drastic reshaping of the cultural image of femininity' (in Gamble, 2001, p. 35). European feminists, such as Irigaray, Kristeva, and Cixous, drew attention to the way in which women develop distinctive feminine and feminist cultures and discourses (Agger, 1998; Phoca & Wright, 1999) but, being anti-essentialists, they 'do not refer to the female body in biological terms, but only in so far as it is enveloped, produced and made meaningful by language' (Gamble, 2001, p. 222). Drawing on Derrida, European feminists challenged the 'binary opposition which situates the male as the legitimating principle and the standard against which truth and value are measured: a process he labels phallogocentric' (Gamble, 2001, p. 215). Thus arose 'the complex and multifaceted theoretical debates springing from postmodernism, poststructuralism and psychoanalysis' (p. 245). Hence cultural feminists are sometimes positioned as postmodernists.

Evans (1995) distinguished between strong and weak cultural feminism with the former characterized by its 'insistence that women's characteristics and values are for the good, indeed are superior and ethically prior to men's, and should be upheld' (p. 76). The latter is exemplified by the work of Gilligan (1982), who discerned that, while men tended to be rational, women tended to be emotionally connected and nurturing. Gilligan's work is reflected in social work practice where there has been a strong association between social work, care giving and femininity (Orme, 2002). Further, social work literature still largely portrays women as caretakers (Barretti, 2001) and interventions are often based on traditional understandings of gender and femininity (Hanmer and Statham, 1999). For example, many

social work interventions focus 'on achieving a self that is connected to others rather than separate or autonomous' (Greene, 2008, p. 270).

Gilligan's work was criticized for its essentialistic focus on the biological determination of men and women as fundamentally different. Gilligan's research emerged during a time of 'backlash' (Faludi, 1992) against feminism as terms like 'women's ways', 'women's special nature', and 'feminine caring' entered popular works as did attacks on 'equal opportunity feminists' who were criticized for encouraging women to 'devalue caring work' (Faludi, 1992, p. 359). However, Faludi claims that most feminist scholars had 'hoped to find in women's "difference" a more humane model for public life – one that both men and women might adopt' (p. 359). But *recognition* of difference 'defuse[d] the feminist campaign for equality' (p. 360) and gave anti-feminists harmful ammunition against women (Faludi, 1992). Women turned to the 'revolution from within' (Steinem, 1992) consuming books on building self-esteem, self-help and New Age spirituality, thus seriously diminishing the personal is political ethos of radical second-wave feminism (Evans, 1995; Whelehan, 1995).

Social welfare feminism

Social welfare feminism sought to highlight not only how mainstream feminism overlooked women of colour, but also low-income women, especially those on welfare. It draws attention to how social and economic inequality constrains women's choices (Brenner, 1993). It highlights the relationship between neoliberalism and welfare reform and the adverse impact on low-income women (Abramovitz, 2006). It questions liberal, socialist, and radical ideas modelled on the middle-class white woman. It seeks to reinstate 'working class' women and argues for social – and welfare – *reform*. It champions those unable to participate in the labour market, as it rallies the state to compensate for the inequities generated by the capitalist market system, and thus underpins much social work practice. Social welfare feminist social workers argue that the government should provide resources for women and protection from discrimination. They seek liveable welfare benefits, better conditions for

working class women, and better childcare. Social welfare feminists call for expanded state programs and the movement has seen a shift from organizing to advocacy, from getting something from the state *for* women to encouraging the self-organization *of* women (Brenner, 1993). Recently, social welfare feminist - and social worker - Mimi Abramovitz drew attention to the effects of the global economic crisis on women, particularly those on low incomes. She challenged the ideologies which 'bailout' corporate Americans, who are mostly men, while 'steadfastly rejecting the same for women in need ... who are raising families on too little income to keep a roof over their heads' (Abramovitz, 2009, p.106).

Lesbian feminism

Lesbian feminists – like social welfare and black feminists (see below) – were critical of the exclusionary tendency within liberal, radical, and socialist feminism to see the white middle-class woman as the central figure of womanhood. Lesbian feminism takes this further highlighting the dominance of heterosexuality in feminist discourse. Both lesbian and black feminism seek a *reimagining of equality* by challenging the hegemony of the white middle-class heterosexual woman.

In social work, they draw attention to the heteronormative discourses, which govern social work practice (Hicks, 2000), and the privilege blindness of many heterosexual social workers who see lesbian clients as no different to non-lesbian clients (Cosis Brown, 1992; Hardman, 1997). Lesbian feminism requires heterosexual social workers to examine their own homophobia (Spaulding, 1993), move away from heterosexist assumptions, appreciate lesbian women's diversity, and critique literature through a lesbian feminist lens (Hardman, 1997). They have called for education about the oppression experienced by lesbian women (Cosis Brown, 1992; Hardman, 1997).

However, many early second-wave feminists sought to distance themselves from lesbian feminists seeing them as an embarrassment to the movement, who were using the

feminist movement to promote their own particular 'sexual politics' (Millett, 1971). This stance was typified in Betty Friedan's reference to the 'lavender menace', alluding to what she considered the harmful perception that feminists are lesbians. Whelehan (1995) believes that although lesbian feminists appear to have been more visible as activists and contributors to second-wave writing, and it is still commonplace to associate radical politics with lesbian feminists rather than black feminists, this has scarcely been the case.

Black feminism

Black feminists, like bell hooks, argued that white feminists had only paid lip service to the diversity of women's experience, noting that their reticence to 'speak for' black women perpetuated racism and effectively takes 'the burden of accountability away from white women and places it solely onto women of color' (hooks, 1989, p. 47). At the same time, radical, socialist, and black feminists found themselves hemmed in by male-dominated left-wing or civil rights movements, finding it necessary to adopt a separatist stance to highlight the exploitation and abuse of – working class and black – women (Collins, 1990; Zinn, 1990). Angela Davis' *Women, race and class* (1981), a classic of black feminism, argued, from a Marxist perspective, that sexism and racism would not be eradicated until the capitalist economic system that produced them had been erased. Thus black feminists organized black women and advocated for their rights to overcome relations of domination and white privilege and move the focus of racism beyond (white) self-examination and. To make their differences with mainstream feminism overt, black feminists referred to their stance as 'womenist'. Social workers, working with black clients and adopting a black feminist stance, sought to meaningfully highlight the diversity of women's experience and argued that sex, race, and class create a hierarchical structure of power relations among women despite their commonalities of experience (Baines, 1997; Bryan, 1992).

Postmodern – academic – feminism

Postmodern feminism appreciates the diversity of women's experiences and rejects the notion of grand narratives, binaries, and totalizing discourses, which it seeks to deconstruct through discursive practices. It highlights how problems are constructed through language and can be uncovered through the deconstruction of discourses about women in order to destabilize conventions and give voice to alternative interpretations (Featherstone, 2001; Sands & Nuccio, 1992; Weedon, 1987). In contrast to previous feminist accounts of women's oppression, postmodern feminism takes apart all-encompassing understandings of human experiences. It shows how identity is constructed through everyday gendered experience, as opposed to a product of nature or biology, and it sees the construction of gender as fluid and unstable. Postmodern feminism develops Foucault's idea of governmentality, where he theorizes on how society creates obedient subjects and examines social relations of surveillance and discipline. Like Foucault, postmodern feminism interrogates categories and substitutes ideology that connotes the natural order of things with the notion of discourse that signals their socially constructed nature. Postmodern feminism promotes cultural pluralism, is visible in the women's spirituality movement and shares much with cultural eco-feminism (see for example, Coholic, 2003; Tangenberg, 2003).

The social work variant of postmodern feminism draws heavily from social constructivism seeing women's liberation being achieved through narrative or storytelling whereby a unique feminist identity and culture is created and knowledge is constructed 'locally' in partnership with others (Wendt & Boylan, 2008). Many feminist social workers have moved towards postmodern and poststructural understandings of feminism. They criticize second-wave strands for their universalisms – that are not relevant to all women, children and men (Featherstone, 2001) – and for their homogenous view of gender and oppression (Dietz, 2000; Johnson-Bailey, 2003; Samuels & Ross-Sheriff, 2008). This has

resulted in greater emphasis in social work on issues of power and oppression as they relate to social identities, such as race, class, disability, sexuality, and so on (Gentlewarrior, Martin-Jearld, Skok, & Sweetsert, 2008). Further, it has led to greater appreciation of difference and diversity (Featherstone, 2001), freedom from either-or choices (Pennell & Ristock, 1999), emphasis on self-reflexive practice (Fawcett, Featherstone, Fook, & Rossiter, 2000), and attention to deconstructing *both* femininity and masculinity (Featherstone, 2001).

Academic feminism combines a postmodern appreciation of difference, diversity, and deconstruction, with other forms of feminism, such as postcolonial – Third World – feminism. It makes feminism plural by questioning Western universalism and creates a discourse which *re-writes (re-rights)* feminism in response to its failures. Initially, most academic feminists were socialist or radical feminists who came from the educated, white, middle class (Arneil, 1999). Academic feminists have extended critiques of capitalism from class and production to racial difference, homophobia, sexuality, ideology, and culture. Postcolonial feminism, for example, embodies two central aspects of academic feminism: (i) the feminization of poverty and (ii) pluralism and difference. Academic feminism is present in women's studies programs, feminist journals, and feminist literature. However, in recent years, social work programs have been criticised for overlooking gender and no longer offering courses on women's studies (see for example Bolzen, Heycox, & Hughes, 2001; Leung, 2007; for a review of social work education see White, 2006).

Postcolonial – Third World – feminism

Postcolonial feminism highlights how western feminisms generally create homogenous and universalistic discursive categories that overlook the real experiences of many women in the 'third world'[1] and in poor and marginalized communities in the

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[1] We acknowledge that the terms 'third' and 'first' world are problematic as they reinforce oppressive economic, social, cultural, and ideological hierarchies, and make unwarranted generalizations about countries.

developed world. Postcolonial feminism critiques Western imperialism and its subordination of whole peoples, races, and ethnic groups. It draws attention to the importance of Indigenous and local cultures (see for example, Amos & Parmer, 2005; Azim, Menon, & Siddiqi, 2009; Minh-ha, 1987; Mohanty, 1988; Mohanty, Russo, & Torres, 1991) and argues from their standpoint or perspective against Western hegemony. Postcolonial feminists like Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, Sara Ahmed, Trinh Thi Minh-ha, and Chandra Talpade Mohanty drew attention to constructions by white, middle-class Western women, as the collective 'we' of feminist experience, which effectively discards women's experience that does not match this stereotype. This is particularly evident in Gail Lewis' push for black women social worker's experiences to be seen, not only as unified - through commonalities of experiences - but also as shifting and multiple. Such experiences, according to Lewis (1996), should be analyzed in the wider context 'around numerous axes of power and differentiation' (p. 50). This type of analysis has been achieved, in social work, through ethnographic field research where contextual diversity – i.e., emphasis on multiple voices and context – is valued (see Archer, 2009).

Influenced by postmodernism, particularly its adoption of Foucault's ideas regarding the decentralization of power and narrative, postcolonial feminism is more concerned with dispersed sites of power, influence, and experience than with centralized notions of state, law, and patriarchy. It favours 'instances of power conceptualized as flows and specific convergences and consolidations of talk, discourse, [and] attentions' (McRobbie, 2009, p. 13). More than just a theory, however, postcolonial feminism is a form of activism, which works against social injustices that still form part of the everyday experience of many women (see Azim et al., 2009).

Thus, we have mostly used the term postcolonial feminism, but we acknowledge that at times we have used first and third world to describe regions as is commonly understood in the literature.

Feminism's redistribution and recognition dilemma

Redistribution and recognition of difference feature prominently in all forms of feminism. Though she later rethought her theorization of these concepts, Fraser (1995, 2000) provides a useful framework for their analysis, as she seeks to uncover the circumstances in which the politics of recognition are compatible with transformative approaches to social injustices. While Fraser (1995) is concerned with what she terms the 'central [redistribution-recognition] dilemma of our age', we use her analysis to understand the interplay between 'redistribution' and 'recognition' in various waves of feminist discourse (see Figure 1).
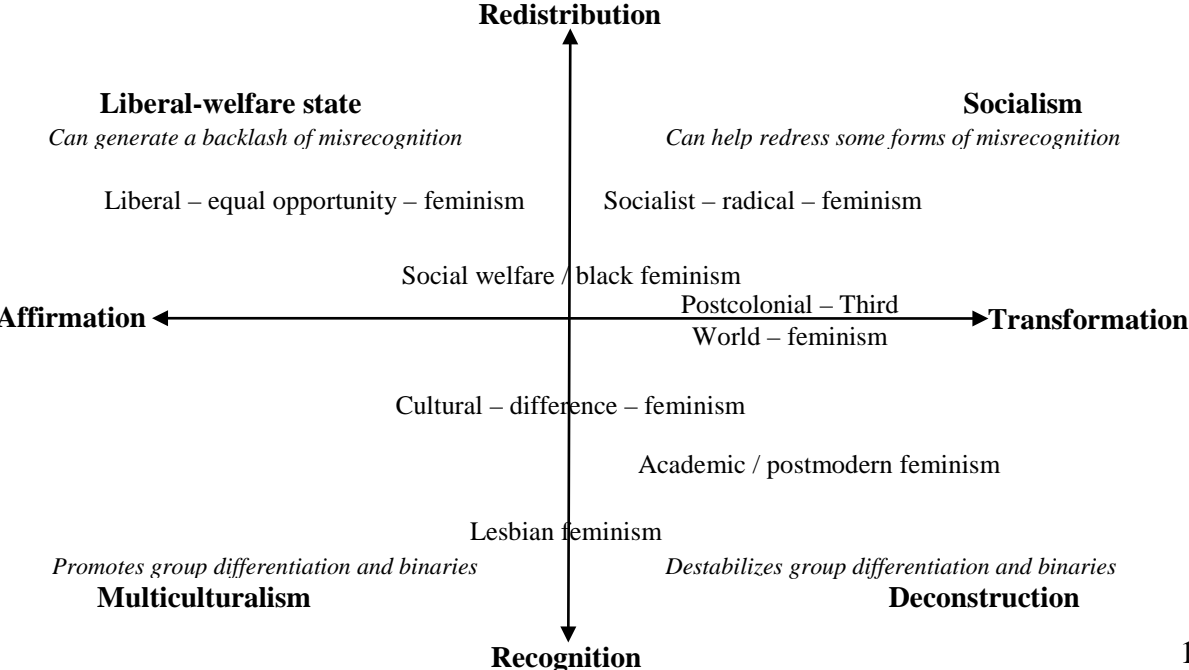
As shown in Figure 1, Fraser (1995) sees *affirmation* as remedies that aim to support group differentiation - and gender binaries - and correct inequitable outcomes of social arrangements. *Transformation* includes remedies that aim to blur group differentiation - and gender binaries - and restructure the underlying social fabric that generates inequalities. The liberal-welfare state is a model of *affirmative-redistribution* as it seeks to reallocate existing goods to existing groups. According to Fraser (1995), it can result in misrecognition, that is, 'a form of oppression, imprisoning someone in a false, distorted, reduced mode of being' (p. 71). Multiculturalism exemplifies *affirmative-recognition* and shows a likeness to the liberal-welfare state in its support of group differentiation, but it is concerned with the reallocation of respect to the identities of existing groups. Fraser (1995) suggests that privileging social groups, as these approaches do:

> Fuel[s] [the] struggles of groups mobilized under the banners of nationality, ethnicity, 'race', gender, and sexuality. … [G]roup identity supplants class interest as the chief medium of political mobilization, [c]ultural domination supplants exploitation as the fundamental injustice, [a]nd cultural recognition displaces socioeconomic redistribution as the remedy for injustice and the goal of political struggle (p. 68).

Socialism, in contrast, is aligned with *transformative-redistribution* as it seeks to restructure relations of production and breakdown group differentiation. According to Fraser (1995), it can help address misrecognition generated by the liberal-welfare state. *Transformative-recognition* is aligned with Deconstruction and, like socialism, group differentiation is blurred, but relations of recognition are also deconstructed.

Fraser (1995) acknowledges that both redistribution and recognition exist in most approaches as many 'redistributive remedies generally presuppose an underlying conception of recognition' (p. 73) and vice versa. This is evident in liberal and socialist feminism. Liberal feminists argued for *recognition* based on the equal moral worth of women as persons in their own right, while socialist feminists argued for *redistribution* of wealth based on a just distribution of resources in the interests of greater social equality. These approaches are antithetical to one another with claims for *recognition* founded on group differentiation - and gender binaries - and claims for *redistribution* resting on the need to abolish lines of differentiation between classes and binary oppositions. Thus built into liberal and socialist feminist discourses is what Fraser (1995) terms 'the redistribution-recognition dilemma' (p. 74).

Figure 1: Fraser's (1995) theorization of difference and recognition

Redistribution

Liberal-welfare state
Can generate a backlash of misrecognition

Socialism
Can help redress some forms of misrecognition

Liberal – equal opportunity – feminism

Socialist – radical – feminism

Social welfare / black feminism

Affirmation

Postcolonial – Third World – feminism

Transformation

Cultural – difference – feminism

Academic / postmodern feminism

Lesbian feminism

Promotes group differentiation and binaries

Destabilizes group differentiation and binaries

Multiculturalism

Deconstruction

Recognition

18

Cultural feminism falls predominantly in the transformative-recognition quadrant as it is a variant of socialist feminism divested of its redistributive aspirations and replaced with a desire for *recognition.* However, as shown in Figure 1, there are aspects of cultural feminism which seek to solidify difference and others that seek to destabilize fixed binaries of man or woman, thus crossing into the affirmative-recognition quadrant. Social welfare and black feminism both seek affirmation and transformation by improving and restructuring the social and political arrangements which lead to inequitable outcomes in wealth, opportunities, and privilege. Both fall across the affirmation-redistribution and the transformation-redistribution quadrants. In contrast, lesbian feminism and cultural – difference – feminism seek recognition of difference and can be found across the affirmative-recognition and transformative-recognition quadrants. Post-colonial and postmodern feminisms destabilize group differentiation and fall within the transformation-recognition quadrant associated with deconstruction. However, postcolonial feminism takes this further with its political-activist stance and also falls into the transformation-redistribution quadrant.

Some theorists have been critical of Fraser's conceptualisation of recognition and redistribution. Swanson (2005) and Young (1997) argue that the binary between recognition and redistribution, while used by Fraser only to make analytical distinctions, is overly simplistic. Butler (1998) is critical of Fraser's distinction between the political economy and cultural sphere, arguing for a more inclusive conception of the "'production of human beings themselves," according to norms that reproduced the heterosexually normative family' (p. 40). Young (1997) argues that a 'better theoretical approach is to pluralize concepts of injustice and oppression so that culture becomes one of several sites of struggle interacting with others' (p. 160). Swanson (2005) takes this further suggesting that Gramsci's theory of hegemony is useful as it recognizes the diversity in economic practices in every part of society that create economic, political and cultural injustices. Young (1997) also points out

that Fraser's suggestion that group distinctions are 'divisive or merely reformist' (p. 160) dismisses the importance and power of group solidarity in addressing group struggles. Despite the criticisms made by Butler (1998), Young (1997), and Swanson (2005), their frameworks share many similarities as they all believe that justice is not solely reducible to economics and that it is important to overcome the injustices of capitalism and sexism. Despite their sentiments there has been a move in third-wave feminism that gives priority to neoliberal economics and dismisses the existence or extent of oppression and sexism.

Third-way/ve feminism

Rebecca Walker, daughter of feminist Alice Walker who argued that motherhood was a form of servitude, first coined the term 'third-wave feminism' in a 1992 essay. She typifies the third-wave feminist who has been brought up within competing feminist structures and does not share the views or experience of her second-wave feminist mother. Most typically, third-wave feminists accept contradiction, pluralism, and hybridity as givens (Gamble, 2001, p. 52), since no account of oppression is true for all women in all situations all of the time. Though Gamble (2001) believes that it takes a number of different forms – some more dominant than others – and it achieves change in diverse ways, for the most part third-wave feminism is a product of the popular media and academic cultural studies programs (see also Genz, 2006). For the purposes of this discussion, we see it as taking two forms: Postfeminism and integrative feminism, both of which are essentially neoliberal in nature (see Table 3).

Table 3: Third-wave integrative and post-feminism

	Integrative feminism	Cultural (post) feminism
Key project or argument	Liberal feminism has entered a new stage	Liberal feminism is a completed project, mainstreamed, no longer needed.
Key concern – rallying cry	'*Reinvisioning*' feminism so that businesses are feminized and transformed to be socially responsible, where profit works with and alongside care and service to others	'*Wronging*' feminism, i.e., dismissing it as outmoded and *reinscribing* femininity as power
Campaigning platform	Reinscribes it as having entered a new era for men and women alike in integrative feminism	Generationalizes and historicizes feminism as past
Proffered solution	The combining of feminine care with the masculine economy	Girl and woman power OR achievement of work-life balance and better quality of life for men and women
Main programs	The self-help and wellbeing movement, social responsibility and green politics and new consumerism of personal growth and environmental sustainability	Postfeminist popular culture where women are comfortable about their femininity and sexuality

Integrative feminism

Liberal integrative feminism is mindful of the extent to which the escalation of identity politics – or the politics of recognition – 'threatens to turn feminist theory into a highly individualized, introverted and necessarily fragmented political stance' (Whelehan, 1995, p. 196). It reinscribes feminism as having entered a new era for men and women alike (Matthaei, 2001). It is concerned with *re-invisioning* feminism by combining 'feminine care' with the 'masculine economy' (Matthaei, 2001, p. 461):

> … individuals are beginning to redefine and 'feminize' entrepreneurship by transforming it into 'socially responsible business', in which the masculine profit motive coexists with or occasionally is even replaced by the new feminine goals of service to others: consumers, workers, and the larger community (p. 488).

Postfeminism

Taking the achievements of earlier feminists for granted, postfeminists seek to divorce themselves from the image of the unfeminine woman and anti-men sentiments. Thus, they are distinguishable by their anti-feminist sentiment, which appear as a 'backlash' against second-wave feminism (Faludi, 1992). It appeals mostly to 'post-baby-boom women who were not politically and culturally formed in the 1960s' (Agger, 1998, p. 121; see also Braithwaite, 2002; Hall & Salupo Rodriguez, 2003). Postfeminism lauds 'the pastness of feminism' (Tasker & Negra, 2007, p. 8), believes second-wave feminists have gone 'too far', and 'constructs feminism as other' (Tasker & Negra, 2007, p. 19). It thus disempowers feminism by historicizing and generationalizing it.

Postfeminists value liberalizing processes connected to choice and diversity in domestic, sexual, and kinship relations. They embrace their sexuality – mistaking sexual freedom as sexual power – and they introduce the white, middle-class heterosexual woman as their symbol, poking fun at straight masculinity. Postfeminists accept gay men, especially

those who seek to be more like women. Sexuality appears as a choice and lesbianism becomes accepted in 'its most guy-friendly forms, that is, divested of potentially feminist associations and invested with sexualized glamour' (Tasker & Negra, 2007, p. 21). Of particular concern to second-wave feminists is the conservative backlash in post-9/11 US and Third Way UK politics, seen in postfeminism, which heralds a return to family values and gendered assumptions about women's place in society (Sturkin, cited in Tasker & Negra, 2007).

While the increasing intrusion of the media into the life-world, opening up private spaces for intense observation and analysis through reality TV, glossy magazines and contemporary cinema has contributed to the cultural turn into postfeminism, we must be careful not to overgeneralize for, as Barns (2003) notes, "young women's stories pave the way for a new reading of the feminine text—one that highlights the positive and powerful capacity of young women to negotiate and re-create representations of femininity" (p. 162). Further, Aronson (2003) found in her attitudinal study, many young women are aware of gender inequalities and discrimination and support many feminist goals. This is supported by the number of young feminist organizations, such as the Young Feminist Task Force and The Toujours RebELLEs, as well as young feminist programs within larger organizations, such as the AVID Young Feminist Activism Program and the NOW's Young Feminist Taskforce, which actively campaign for women's rights and social justice initiatives.

Critiques of third-way/ve feminism

Third-wave, or third-way, feminists, are being shaped, as Cruikshank (1999) notes, by a consumer culture and increasingly neoliberal social policies centred round self-responsibility, active citizenship, freedom, and choice, while welfare dependence is met with increasing conditions tied to work. Thus, there is relationship between post - and integrative - feminism and neoliberalism with its consumerist culture. As neoliberal and Third Way policy mainstreams feminism, it undermines it. It uses the language of *individual* freedom and

choice to deflect attention from broader structural injustices and original feminist arguments about the need for redistribution and restructuring in the interests of *social* justice. It replaces feminist emancipatory politics with life(style) politics and collectivism with 'female individualism' (McRobbie, in Tasker & Negra, 2007, p. 32). It turns the self into a project of self-actualization, making the right choices, finding its own way, writing its own life story, choosing friends and associates carefully, and designing a life in which maximum potential will be realized. It thus fits well with social work's 'strengths perspective' (Author, forthcoming), Giddens' (1991) individualistic life-planning model, and Beck's (1998) notions of youthful anti-politics or sub-politics, where the politics of single interest groups eschews traditional engagement with party politics for social movements. It is akin to reflexive postmodernity where individual taste and lifestyle preferences are seen to have assumed greater importance in the construction of individual identities than earlier feminist categories, like ethnicity, race, class, sexuality, and so on (Gilroy, cited in Tasker & Negra, 2007). Further, the ethic of care approach, and social responsibility and social wellbeing 'movements', adopted in integrative feminism, weaken feminist arguments about persistent inequality for women in many contexts while promoting a mixed bag of individualistic self-help and wellbeing, social responsibility and green politics, and new forms of happiness-seeking consumerism.

Post- and integrative feminism is prey to the same problems as liberal feminism which excludes revolutionary visions merely because it is blind to white privilege and the struggles of women who are denied the opportunities average white, middle-class heterosexual women enjoy. It has meant that women's studies in social work have failed to attract students since the mid 1990s (Bolzen et al., 2001). Feminist service models, particularly evident in the domestic violence services established by radical feminists, have been displaced and neoliberal ideologies have pathologized and individualized domestic violence and other

public issues (McDonald, 2005). Further, the mainstreaming of feminism has enabled Western governments to extol gender and sexual freedom as a mark of the 'modernness' of Western society and juxtaposes this against the backwardness of societies – and cultures – where women remain overtly subordinate to men (McRobbie, 2009). Even though popular culture portrays gender equality as a given, there are many contexts – in both the first and third worlds – where women are oppressed and remain unequal to men, and to one another, such that the feminist 'we' becomes highly questionable.

Implications for social work practice

Social work is traditionally more familiar with the scholarly academic discourse of the second wave, such as liberal, radical, and postmodernist categories of feminism (see Baines, 1997; Barnoff & Moffatt, 2007; Black, 2003; Christie, 2006; Featherstone, 2001; Featherstone & Fawcett, 1995; Orme, 2009; Sands & Nuccio, 1992) than with the cultural studies discourse of postfeminism and postcolonial feminist theory. Yet both raise important questions for the future of feminist social work. For example: How do social workers keep issues of race and class, gender and generation, firmly on the socio-political agenda in this postfeminist cultural milieu which passes over social differences? How does social work – following its sojourn into postmodernism which dismantles feminism with questions about foundationalism and universalism – rediscover political and moral certainty? How does it take a stand and make a commitment that is meaningful in today's postmodern – or reflexive or late-modern – world? How does it continue to challenge and critique power relations and to imagine a better world, to conceive of different, more just and equal patterns of life, work and leisure in a postfeminist world? How does it work against oppressive social relations when consumption and aspiration – rather than equality and rights – become markers of liberation? How does it retain its critique of capitalism so pivotal to socialist or radical feminist scholarship within social work? How does one reposition social work's new left-feminist

social democratic politics in a social milieu dominated by neoliberal – and new public management – ideas about service efficiency and consumer choice?

As already noted, our position is that the cultural politics of postfeminism has not removed the necessity for feminist scholarship and critique, especially for social work with its enduring concern for women who are poor, oppressed, abused, and marginalized. Given social work's everyday encounters with women and their material realities, social work has an opportunity to highlight these experiences and contribute to an understanding of women's real, as opposed to their discursive, positions. Social work can study the positions of women empirically and highlight their experiences and situations and the way in which they manage their daily lives. They can do this without essentializing men or women, subordination or superordination, first world or third world, victims or perpetrators, and so on. However, there has been a lack of contemporary feminist scholarship in social work practice. Social workers deliver innovative services in their daily work, and are uniquely positioned to disseminate valuable practice experience, but this expertise is seldom disseminated publicly. Social work would do well to engage in more practice-based research examining effective feminist approaches to social work practice.

Social work should reinvigorate its active – political – elements, drawing on postcolonial feminism, to actively work against injustices experienced by many women, particularly those in poverty, and racial and ethnic minorities. Postcolonial – Third World – feminism, which combines socialist economics with deconstructive cultural politics, is well situated to provide social work with a model that addresses the dilemmas between social groups and overcomes the redistribution-recognition divide. It coheres with poststructural influences in social work relating to local knowledge and experiences, rendering 'the local into something workable' (Wendt & Boylan, 2005, p. 607). It moves feminist social work beyond its Anglo- or Western-dominated focus to highlight comparative developments. This

25

is essential in this era of globalization. Its discourse can only be enriched by understandings of culturally different practices in diverse ethnic and racial communities. This will take social work beyond postmodern cultural competency frameworks (Dean, 2001; Gentlewarrior et al., 2008) to recognize that the needs, wants, and rights of marginalized peoples and communities should be recognized. What is needed is not necessarily a thorough knowledge of the other culture but a deep understanding of one's own to expose ways in which our position of power and privilege puts us in an unequal relationship with culturally different others (Gray, Coates & Yellow Bird, 2008).

For the most part, feminism has lost its political edge in the quagmire of postmodern identity politics (see Fraser, 2009) The early second-wave feminist demand for gender equality has gone, with socialist feminism losing its revolutionary origins for its current focus on modifying liberal democratic forms rather than fighting injustice (Evans, 1995; see also Cruikshank, 1999; Vazquez-Arroyo, 2004). A program of action, which looks outwards towards oppressive structural conditions, does not get bogged down in discursive traps, remains grounded in the concrete experience of women, and takes up their political struggles is needed. Anglo-feminist social work must also contend with postfeminism by engaging in consciousness-raising. As Whelehan (1995) notes:

> …if young women are internalizing the post-feminist ideal and the assumption that feminist politics are therefore redundant, then 'consciousness raising' is again one of the most vital feminist activities – a consciousness raising that appeals to all women, whatever their background, but which avoids the pitfalls of divisive feminism (p. 241).

While radical feminists worked largely with individuals to raise consciousness, social workers need to take a more active role in government and policy. However, by being radical in the sense of 'going back to its roots', feminist social work would run the risk of alienating

young postfeminists and of being accused of running an outmoded line, making it no longer relevant or attractive to them.

Social work would do well to counter anti-feminist elements by making overt connections between postfeminism and the resurgent valuing of individual self-responsibility – and self-interest – in contemporary neoliberal political culture (Gill, 2006; McRobbie, 2009). Tinkering at the edges of capitalism and welfare restructuring will not produce the fundamental change or the redistribution of social resources that radical feminists of the 1970s and 1980s sought, especially when many young women believe that liberal feminism's fight for women's equality, independence, and freedom is now a finished project. To counter the neoliberal and Third Way mainstreaming of feminist calls for freedom and choice, a scholarship is needed within social work to expose this modern and enlightened gender-aware veneer for what it is, a new form of governmentality which transforms independent young women into free-spending consumers and self-interested citizens. This scholarship needs to be brought to the attention of policy makers in meaningful ways.

Conclusion

Feminism is far from a finished project. Women world-wide are oppressed, marginalized, abused, and disadvantaged because of their gender. Neoconservative values have undermined feminism. If we are to offset anti-feminist movements, we must keep social work critique, scholarship, and activism alive. While cognisant of the need for a unified feminist project, across generations and aspirations, we argue that postcolonial feminism best reflects the challenges faced by social workers in their daily practice, has the most realistic grasp of the 'work to be done' and, hence, is ideally suited to social work practice.

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