

# Feminism is so 70s, we're all Postfeminists now

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Bachelor of Arts

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## Abstract

Postfeminism could be considered an ongoing development in the history of feminism. Alternatively, it can be seen as a form of antifeminism or *faux feminism*. The following thesis is a reaction against the postfeminist sentiment which argues that feminism is an ideology of the past, or in need of significant reconfiguration. Rather, I argue that feminism continues to be an exciting movement capable of bettering the lives of Australian women. Feminism is an emancipatory ideology which seeks to free women from patriarchy by employing strategies such as protest and consciousness raising. Feminist activism has brought many changes to women's lives, including woman suffrage, workplace reform, and the institution of equal opportunity and anti-discrimination legislature. Such achievements show that feminism is worthwhile, despite the criticism of authors such as Naomi Wolf, Christina Hoff Sommers, and Camile Paglia who suggest that today's feminism ought to move in a different direction from that of the Second Wave. However, women continue to experience injustices similar to those identified by feminists of the 70s, such as the existence of informal barriers which negatively impact women's political participation, the lack of women in decision making positions in business, and the physical violence that women are subjected to. Modern day women ought to embrace feminism and seek to achieve the goals such as those laid out by Aune and Redfern in *Reclaiming the F-Word: The New Feminist Movement* – liberating women's bodies; ending violence against women; transforming politics and work; and reclaiming feminism.

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## INTRODUCTION

Given its revolutionary objectives and its challenge to patriarchy, feminism has always come under attack from those who feel threatened by its desire to redistribute power. Currently, those critical of feminism debate its continuing relevance, asking simplistic questions such as: how can feminism still be relevant when women have gained so much? Aren't we all post-feminist now? Surely feminism is now nothing but a 70's relic? This thesis will argue that the answer to these questions remains a resounding no. Feminism is far from irrelevant. Though feminism has made significant gains in areas such as the workplace, politics, and sexuality, there remains much more to do. As Murphy notes, "while women have had the vote in Australia since 1902, their concerns are still inadequately represented" (Murphy, 2002, page 2). These concerns are both numerous and varied: women still earn less than men and are more likely to be in part time or casual work (Burrow, 2004), men continue to hold the majority of power positions in politics and academia (White, 2001, page 1), and violence against women continues to be an issue of significance (Amnesty International, 2009). Though women have gained many formal rights, such as suffrage and the introduction of equal opportunity legislation, the male experience continues to be the norm. Pettersson argues that in the binary relationship between male and female, characteristics considered masculine continue to be viewed as superior to those labelled feminine (Pettersson, 2007, page 11). This thesis shall discuss such concerns, and why they matter, as well as exploring feminist thought more broadly and providing a critical analysis of postfeminism.

In order to conduct an informed and meaningful discussion, I must first explore what is meant by the term feminism. A standard dictionary definition suggests that feminism is a "doctrine that advocates equal rights for women" (Princeton University, 2011). While obtaining equal rights is an aim of feminism, this definition is inadequate. Though feminism is in part a set of ideas, it is also a social and political movement which aims to emancipate women from patriarchy (Gamble,

2001, page vii). Because of this aim of emancipation, feminism is the ideal ideology for bringing women change. Though many ideologies may aim to achieve societal change, feminism is the one school of thought which focuses on the experiences of women and sex based inequalities. There also exists an intimate relationship between the two sides of feminism, for theoretical debate and practical feminist activity inform one another in an iterative fashion. Feminism is also diverse in its aims and goals, thus there have come to exist a number of different strands of feminist thought. At the core of feminism is the aim of eliminating inequality, yet there is much contestation over why such inequality exists and how best to address it (Van Acker, 1999, page 6). Liberal feminists suggest that institutional change is needed to end discrimination, Marxist feminists blame capitalism for inequalities between the sexes, and radical feminists argue that patriarchy and the sociology of gender are the roots of the problem (Wearing, 1996, pages 9 – 14). It is also notable that the concept of patriarchy is not unique to radical feminism; patriarchy is discussed throughout feminist thought. In its most early sense, the term patriarchy refers to a family situation, in which a male leader (the father of his people) has control over the dependent female members of his household (Wearing, 1996, page 21). Feminists have reworked this definition and related it to society as a whole, arguing that men have control over economics, society, and politics. A patriarchal society is also designed to reproduce itself through culture, norms, and institutions, thus ensuring patriarchy continues to last.

Postfeminism is a most slippery term which has a variety of different meanings. It can be a form of antifeminism which argues that women have abandoned feminism and have turned instead to “dressing like bimbos, yet claiming male privileges and attitudes” (Gamble, 2001, page 43). Or, postfeminism may be *faux feminism*, claiming to celebrate women whilst reducing them to sex objects. Newer feminist writings have also been described as postfeminist simply because they were written after the Second Wave. This type of postfeminism may challenge,



but does not necessarily reject, earlier feminisms (Brooks, 1997, page 4). McRobbie describes yet another style of postfeminism as “a process in which feminist gains of the 1970s and 1980s are actively and relentlessly undermined” (McRobbie, 2009, page 11). Debate within such postfeminist circles tends to centre on “issues of victimisation, autonomy and responsibility” (Gamble, 2001, page 43). This diversity of postfeminist thought allows for some postfeminisms to be more valid than others. It is the nature of the feminist project to reassess traditional understandings of a variety of concepts, however, postfeminist arguments that suggest feminism is irrelevant or that earlier forms of feminism are to ‘blame’ for current dilemmas of women are, in my view, inconsistent with the broader aims of feminism.

The setting for this discussion on the continuing relevance of feminism is modern day Australia. Feminism has sometimes been criticised for not paying enough attention to race and class issues (Vernon, 2003, page 1). However, the experiences of minority groups are so complex and unique that to speak about them in a generalised manner and place them alongside other groups would not allow for much detail or sensitivity, it is for that reason that they are not a focus of this particular study. It is also notable that those who present post-feminist arguments do not tend to focus on minority groups. For example, well known postfeminist Naomi Wolf identifies the beauty industry as a key source of tyranny within women’s lives and argues that women are negatively affected by their desire to adhere to traditional stereotypes of Western beauty (Whelehan, 1995, page 217). For migrant women, who face issues such as language barriers and racism (Kirner, 1995, page 1), Wolf’s preoccupation with beauty may seem petty. Thus, in order to criticize postfeminism, I must focus on the same groups that postfeminists write about.

In researching the relevance of feminism to modern day Australia, I have looked primarily at secondary sources. This has involved consulting a vast number of feminist texts. The work I have found most influential is Dux and Simic’s *The Great Feminist Denial* (Dux and Simic, 2008). This Australian piece of writing presents

a similar, though not identical, argument to my own. The authors suggest that feminism has come to be wrongly blamed for a number of societal ills now facing women. Such ills include parenting issues, the difficulty of balancing home and work life, and women's increased involvement in hyper sexualised activities such as pole dancing. Dux and Simic defend feminism against such accusations whilst pondering why feminism has come to have such a negative image. Like Dux and Simic, I wish to defend feminism against its detractors, though I also argue in this thesis that feminism is not the cause of such problems, but rather, the solution. Another work I have found to be influential is Aune and Redfern's *Reclaiming the F Word: The New Feminist Movement* (Aune and Redfern, 2010). Aune and Redfern argue against the concept of postfeminism and suggest that while feminism may be *portrayed* as unattractive, it remains highly relevant. What is particularly significant about this work was the way in which the authors set an agenda for what feminism's next goals should be. Aune and Redfern state that today's feminists should be concerned with liberating their bodies, gaining equality in the workplace and the home, eradicating sexism in popular culture and finding a way to end violence against women (Aune and Redfern, 2010, page 17). Though this work is written in relation to Britain, much of what it says can be applied to the Australian context.

It has also been necessary for me to study a number of texts labelled as postfeminist. I focused my research on works by Naomi Wolf, Katie Roiphe, Christina Hoff Sommers and Camille Paglia, the latter of which famously stated that 'if civilization had been left in female hands, we would still be living in grass huts' (Whelehan, 1995, page 235). Wolf has written on subjects such as the beauty industry and adolescent sexuality (Mears, 2011) and theorises that earlier feminisms constructed women as victims (Wolf, 1993, page xvii). Hoff Summers is highly critical of modern feminism, and offers up her own brand of ideology – "equity feminism" which does not see sociological gender constructs as inherently problematic (London, 2011). Roiphe came to prominence by asserting that rape was

not as rampant or as traumatic as earlier feminists had suggested (Traister, 2007). Like the previously mentioned authors, Paglia questions the feminism of the past few decades and aims to reshape current feminist thought, asserting that gender differences arise solely from our biological sex (Whelehan, 1995, page 235). The works of such post-feminists will be discussed and criticised in greater detail in Chapter 3.

In researching, I have also accessed much online material, and have paid particular attention to news media and the feminist blogosphere. I have found the news media, in both print and digital form, to have a confused attitude toward feminism. For example, in most instances the Western Australian publication *The Sunday Times* has adopted the post-feminist line of attack by criticising 1970's feminism, recently publishing an opinion piece which labelled iconic 1970s feminist Germaine Greer a "publicity seeking hound" who created a career out of "men-hating, mudslinging that was meant to change the world" (Bartlett, 2011, page 57). The author of the article did not seem particularly well versed in feminism, misspelling the surname of Naomi Wolf in his piece. Although the attack on Greer was not unexpected given the vast amounts of both positive and negative attention she receives, I was surprised to find that only two months earlier *The Sunday Times* had published an article with distinct feminist leanings. The article lamented the high incidence of sex based discrimination in the workplace and provided statistics which supported the need for greater awareness about harassment (Phillips, 2011). Examples such as these have led me to believe that while the media appears to be supportive of feminist aims, such as equality in the workplace, it is critical of women who openly identify themselves as feminists. By identifying Greer (a controversial figure who is far from universally accepted by feminists) as the face of feminism, a caricature is created. Feminism is not presented as a diverse ideology - its aims and ideas are ignored. Instead, the attention is placed on one individual woman who has been the focus of a fair amount of criticism, controversy and even hate. This is a

classic attempt to undermine feminism by focusing on the alleged misbehaviour of an individual rather than the movement as a collective whole. Throughout my thesis I have drawn on the media and treated it as both a reflection of popular thought and an opinion maker.

The feminist blogosphere has also proved to be a useful online source of information and opinion. Feminist blogging features elements of both activism and consciousness raising (Dux and Simic, 2008, page 66). Some blogs are highly interactive, allowing users to comment on posts and thus engage in discussion with one another. Consequently, a thriving, online feminist community has emerged. Feminist bloggers debate a variety of topics, such as the entertainment industry, ideological differences between various schools of feminism, the phenomenon of *SlutWalk*, and even advertisements featuring talking vaginas (Angyal, 2011). However, I am aware that blogs are not an academic space inhabited by experts within the field of feminism, yet, they are at the least a very useful starting point. Blogs give angry, passionate women a forum in which to express their discontent with the patriarchy and their hope for what it may transform into. Blogs are a breeding ground for discussion and new ideas, whilst also being a place in which laypeople may come to learn more without being intimidated. The fact that so many feminist blogs exist, and that they are actively used, also aids in countering the argument that women have lost interest in feminism. Clearly, a number of people are still interested excited by feminism and are keeping up with its new forms and manifestations.

This thesis is organised into three chapters and also contains an introduction and conclusion. The first chapter, entitled *The Nature of Feminism*, provides an introduction to feminist thought and activity. Though I have already summarised the term, I aim to take this further and explore feminism as both an emancipatory ideology and a political and social project. This will necessitate further discussion on patriarchy and other elements of feminist theory. I will also look at feminist ideas

and arguments. Thus, different schools of feminist thought shall be discussed, with particular attention paid to more dominant ideological strands such as liberal, socialist, Marxist and radical Feminism. The strategies employed by feminists in order to further their cause will also be considered. Feminist activism may come in many forms, such as consciousness raising and protest. Throughout Chapter 1 I wish to emphasise that there is a certain relationship between the practical and theoretical sides of feminism. While feminist action is informed by ideology, such action also helps the academic world to better understand feminism.

Chapter 2, *The Achievements of Feminism* is a discussion of feminist history. By looking at how much feminism has achieved in the past I aim to argue that it is a potent force capable of going on to accomplish much more in the future. Looking at the history also aids in providing a more comprehensive understanding of feminism itself. In discussing feminism's past successes I shall pay particular attention the 19<sup>th</sup> century movement and feminism of the 1970's and 1990's. 19<sup>th</sup> century feminism, sometimes known as the First Wave, was a time in which women stepped forward and demanded their political rights - the most prominent of which was the vote. The 1970's, or the Second Wave, was a time of great social, economic and political change. The decade also spawned a vast amount of feminist literature. The 1990's were also an interesting time for feminism, for while phrases such as 'empowerment' and 'girl power' entered the vocabularies of many women, a rise in antifeminist sentiment also took place. The decade was also neoliberal in nature, with women focusing on personal growth and individualism rather than a social or collective movement.

The third chapter of this thesis – *Why We Still Need Feminism* focuses on the crux of my argument. Its first half shall be dedicated to exploring postfeminist arguments and different styles of postfeminism. The second part of the chapter argues that whilst women have made many gains as a result of the First and Second Waves, we still need feminism because women continue to remain unequal in a

number of areas. These areas can be categorised under business and the workplace, politics, and the body / sexuality. Feminism has achieved much in the past, and has proven itself capable of making more gains for women in the future. Thus I argue that in order to better their lives, present day women should utilise the tool of feminism, drawing upon both modern and traditional forms of feminist argument and activity. I aim to explore not only what still needs to be done, but also how change should occur.

Thus concludes the introduction of this thesis. The core argument of the following chapters is that feminism remains not only highly relevant to modern women, but is necessary for achieving change. Though women have come a long way since the inception of feminism, there is still much to be done. While some may suggest that feminism has already achieved its goals and that women have come far enough, I argue that while formal equality has been mostly achieved, substantive equality has not. Institutional barriers that, in the past, stopped women from achieving in their careers or pursuing the same freedoms as men have been outlawed, yet patriarchy remains deeply ingrained in our culture. Although feminism, in its modern form, has been around for over a hundred years, patriarchy has existed for thousands. Thus it cannot be simply eradicated in only a few decades. Though Australian society is accepting toward the idea that the sexes should be equal, women are not being treated equally in practice. Women continue to experience discrimination, objectification and violence, because of their gender. This does not mean the women of Australia are doomed to drown in masculine culture, rather it means that we must continue to work toward creating a more egalitarian society. Feminism can aid in doing this, helping men and women alike to understand the nature of oppression and how best its effects can be minimized.

## CHAPTER ONE: THE NATURE OF FEMINISM

Whilst at its core feminism is about emancipation from dominance, there is a diverse range of analyses and programs on how to best achieve change. Feminism is a critical project, a movement, an ideology, and it includes a number of unique traditions within a larger undertaking (Boles and Hoeveller, 2006, page 1). Individuals may also hold their own unique ideas about what exactly the term feminism refers to. Yet, in order to better understand feminism, it is important to move beyond the notion that it can be explained in a singular definition. As Saul pointed out, it is more useful to “give the reader a sense of the breadth of the issues that concern feminists and the range of views that feminists take on these issues” (Saul, 2003, page 1), rather than attempt to quickly define something as complex and ever evolving as feminism. Thus, in an attempt to describe its nature, this chapter shall discuss elements of both the practical and theoretical sides of feminism. In order to clarify feminism as a social and political movement, I will illuminate the strategies and aims of earlier feminists. Understanding feminist ideology will involve looking at a number of key concepts within feminism such as patriarchy, gender, and androcentrism. It will also entail discussing the various types of feminist thought - including socialist feminism, radical feminism, liberal feminism and Marxist feminism. However, it is first necessary to emphasise the duality of feminism, the trait which allows it to be both a social and political movement and an ideology.

Central to feminism is the concept of praxis. The term praxis originated within Marxism and refers to the iterative relationship between theory and practice. Marx argued that theory cannot be separated from practice, rather, theory “arises out of practice, and is developed and modified by it” (Bullock, Stallybrass, and Trombley, 1988, page 676). Thus, in practical terms, “there can be no revolution without theory, but theory isn’t likely to be very good if nobody ever tries anything. Activism improves theory, and theory improves activism” (Texas Communist Party,

2009). Neither theory nor practice can stand alone, they must relate to one another and inform each other. Hence, in order for feminist activism to be meaningful and capable of achieving real change, it must be informed by theoretical understandings. Theory benefits from practice, for feminist activism gives theorists something more to ponder over. And while theory is highly important, it can only go so far in creating change. Thus, feminists must utilise both theory and practice. Both sides of feminism will be discussed in this chapter.

Since feminism's beginnings in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, feminists have employed a variety of practical strategies including consciousness raising and protest. Such activities aid in shaping feminism into a critical project capable of undermining patriarchal elements within society. Consciousness raising was particularly popular in the 1970's women's liberation movement, and consisted of group meetings in which women would discuss their experiences with oppression (Boles and Hoeveler, 2006, page 88). Such gatherings are informal in nature and allow women to express their feelings on matters which are important to them, whilst they learn more about feminist philosophy (Lake, 1999, page 233). In sharing individual experiences, women are encouraged to take note of universal issues and commonalities between their situations, thus creating a sense of sisterhood and community (National Women's Liberation, 2011). In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, consciousness raising tends to take place online, through feminist websites and blogs (Boles and Heveler, 2006, page 88). Another popular feminist strategy is protesting, or rallying. Such events involve feminists taking to the streets in organised waves and demanding change. Throughout the history of feminism, feminists have protested on topics such as woman suffrage, pacifism, abortion rights, and health issues (Cherie, 2010, page 1). The annual *Take Back the Night* (sometimes called *Reclaim the Night*) march is an example of a popular protest with Australia; the annual rally aims to raise awareness of rape and sexual violence (Take Back the Night, 2009). Recently, women and empathetic men have taken to the streets as part of the *SlutWalk* protests. The



protests began in 2010 after a Canadian police officer claimed that “women should avoid dressing like sluts in order not to be victimized” (Winnipeg Sun, 2011). Women reacted angrily against this statement and the sentiments behind it, thus they took to protesting in order to question such sexist attitudes toward rape. More instances of feminist protest shall be discussed in the following chapter.

Feminism is not a late 20<sup>th</sup> century development, it has deep roots which reach back into a time well before Australia’s federation. In the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, Australian feminism was heavily influenced by the independence movements of Europe and the United States; migrants brought with them liberal thought ingrained with ideas of individual rights and greater political freedoms (Oldfield, 1992, page 4). The 1970’s saw a strong resurgence of feminist thought, in which women sought to lessen the effects of political, legal, economic, sexual, and social oppression. Since then, Australia has absorbed a number of different influences and feminist thought has continued to develop. Such influences have come from a variety of academic fields, including political science, literary criticism, sociology and psychology. As described by Beasley, feminist thought and writing can be said to have the following traits: a central critique of misogyny and sexual hierarchy; a focus on women as the subject of analysis; a prescription for change; a diversity of perspectives, an emphasis on collectivism over individualism; a challenging attitude toward social and cultural norms; and the view that feminism is especially relevant for women, though men can also be involved with, and benefit from, feminism (Beasley, 1999, page 36). Central to feminism are the key concepts of patriarchy and gender.

As was noted in the introductory section of this thesis, a society can be described as patriarchal when its male members are in control, thus casting women as subservient. This control may be political, economic, institutional, or familial. It was also stated that patriarchy reproduces itself through norms and culture, thus continuing its existence throughout generations. The patriarchy’s subordination of

women has been described as “the oldest, and even the most profound form of inequality” (Beasley, 1999, page 54). Women within patriarchal societies are disadvantaged, having fewer freedoms than their male counterparts (London Feminist Network, 2011). Feminists see patriarchy as much stronger than other institutions and argue that in order to create a more egalitarian society a restructuring of the family and work environments must occur (Saul, 2003, page 3). However, feminist theorising does not suggest that *all* men have control over *all* women, only that within an individual patriarchal society, men are the dominant group. Within a patriarchal society, some groups of men may in fact be disadvantaged due to factors such as class or race. However, within their own socially subordinate group, it is likely that men will still dominate over women (TigTog, 2007). Feminist discussion of patriarchy may be historical, materialist, or psychological. Historical analysis focuses on the origins of patriarchy and sexual inequality, materialist considerations centre on physical and cultural aspects, whilst psychological debates question whether male dominance is rooted in the mind (Beasley, 1999, page 55). Often, feminist theory discusses all three elements of patriarchy.

Gender is another concept which is central to feminism. Though the two terms are often used synonymously in the natural sciences and popular discourses, feminists tend to identify sex and gender as unique concepts (Boles and Hoeweler, 2006, page 148). The term sex is biological and based on one’s genitalia; whether a person is male or female arises purely from anatomy. Gender, however, is a social construct rather something defined by one’s physicality and refers to qualities socially associated with maleness and femaleness. Feminism argues that inequalities between men and women cannot be solely a result of biological sex. Power relations between men and women are highly complicated and cannot be explained so simply: few would suggest that women are abundantly poorer than men (UN Women, 2010) just because they lack penises! Even fewer would suggest that

ownership of a penis automatically entitles one access to greater social and political power. It is clear that something more than biology is at play within female / male relationships. Thus, the construct of gender helps us to better understand the dichotomy of male and female, and the hierarchical relationship of power between the two. There are a number of qualities which can be described as stereotypically either male or female. Wearing identifies that masculinity is associated with aggression, dominance, a lack of emotion, and ambition (Wearing, 1996, page 5). In contrast, femininity is linked to being emotional, passive, submissive, home oriented, having an interest in physical appearance and gentleness (Wearing, 1996, page 5). Feminists believe that such characteristics do not arise from sex, but from socialisation. Traditionally, children learn about the different roles of men and women through infant socialisation (a time in which boys are called big and strong, whilst girls are remarked upon for their delicate softness) and watching their parents (noticing that mothers engage in the majority of housework, whereas men engage in outdoors tasks such as gardening) (Saul, 2003, pages 20 – 22). However, feminism has questioned dominant notions concerning gender roles, and in many societies parents and educational institutions are deliberately attempting to avoid gendering children (Associated Press, 2011, page 46). Gender helps feminists to explain inequality: we are able to better articulate that it is not simply ownership of male genitalia that means a man is more easily able to attain access to social and political power, but that society values his ‘maleness’; rationalising that he is associated with strength, power and ambition.

Associated with the concept of gender is the notion of *male as norm*, sometimes known as androcentrism. An androcentric society is one in which male identities and values are normative and women are seen as “other” (Gamble, 2001, page 188). The term androcentrism can also connote a societal preference for masculinity over femininity (Wade, 2011). Similar to the concept of gender, the emphasis here is on socially constructed traits rather than biology. Androcentrism

can be found in literature, academic writings, popular culture, education, religion and language. In English speaking nations, such as Australia, it was once common to affix a gendered term when describing an individual who is in a non-traditional occupation for their sex (Gershaw, 1997), such as “male nurse”, “stay at home dad”, “working mother” or “female police officer.” Another example of androcentrism can be found in clothing style: while a woman can wear almost virtually anything a man can without ridicule, with some professions even calling for female staff members to wear ties and vests, it is highly uncommon to see a man wearing a skirt or dress. If a man were to do such things he would likely be teased and made a spectacle of. This example of clothing further illustrates that it is not biological sex that causes sexual inequalities: after all, men would likely be just as physically comfortable as women whilst wearing a skirt - take for example the Scottish kilt, a garment traditionally worn by men. Instead, it is the socially constructed concept of gender which assigns characteristics, hobbies, and clothing as being either masculine or feminine. While some might suggest that these examples of androcentricism are unimportant in comparison to other feminist concerns such as achieving equal pay, or lessening violence against women, I argue that instances of gendered language and clothing style show us how patriarchy reproduces itself. Language and dress are prominent features in our culture and are passed through to future generations. When a parent dresses their daughter in pants, but refuses to allow their son to wear a skirt, they are passing on the idea that male is norm; it is acceptable for girls to dress in what would historically be seen as boys clothing, but it is not acceptable for a boy to wear a feminine garment. Thus the child is initiated into patriarchal society: learning that male behaviour is normative, and all that is female is deviant.

The last key concept of feminism to be discussed is that of the public / private dichotomy. As was mentioned earlier, a number of characteristics are attributed to men and women. Men are thought to be aggressive and dominant, while women are expected to be passive and docile (though such stereotypes continue to be actively

challenged). The public and private spheres of society are also linked to gender. Traditionally, men in patriarchal society have dominated the public domain, engaging in activities such as politics and business. Women, in contrast, are assigned responsibility of the private (or domestic) sphere, engaging in housework and child rearing. Traditionally, the public sphere was the domain of men, for they were thought to be naturally better suited to working in arenas such as politics and business, than women, who were said to be irrational (van Acker, 1999, page 25). This changed in the late 19th and early 20th centuries when women sought to become more active members of public life and obtain the rights of citizens, primarily the vote (DFAT, 2011). Suffrage and an increase in other legal and political rights gave women a greater say in the public realm, however, in the 1970s the public/private issue arose again when feminists wished to break down the dichotomy, arguing that “the personal is political” (van Acker, 1999, page 25). Feminists suggested that matters which had previously been seen as irrelevant to public life, such as marriage, sexuality and family were in fact politically relevant. Through protest and rallying, women brought public attention to issues that were important to them, such as rape and abortion (van Acker, 1999, page 26). Since then, much has changed, with the politicisation of various feminist issues, yet 21<sup>st</sup> century feminists are continuing to engage in some similar acts to those of their 1970’s counterparts. A recent example of this is the *SlutWalk* phenomenon. 2011 has seen women in capital cities across Australia take to the streets with placards in hands in an attempt highlight the way in which victims are often seen as being at fault for their own rape (O’Brien, 2011). Participants of *SlutWalk* suggest that rape victims are too often labelled as having provoked the rape because of their behaviour or sexualised manner of dress. Though legal changes have been made in regards to rape in marriage, social perceptions remain unchanged. Thus they, like earlier feminists, continue to bring issues traditionally seen as private into the public sphere. Though it could be argued that barriers between the public and private spheres are significantly less firm today than they were fifty years ago, the

dichotomy of the two realms remains useful in understanding and expressing feminist analysis.

Within feminist thought there are a number of schools which have different views on the origins of inequality and the nature of change. The different strands of feminism can be loosely categorised into radical, socialist, liberal and Marxist feminism, though a number of newer forms are continuing to gain attention. These schools (aside from radical feminism) take their names and core principles from existing branches of political thought, altering the traditional analyses by placing a greater emphasis on women. Radical feminism differs in that it moves beyond the “add women and stir” formula. This school of thought emerged in the 1960’s and seeks to understand and eventually put an end to the oppression of women (Boles and Hoeveler, 2006, page 274). Unlike other schools, radical feminism does not wish to incorporate women into the current social structure, but rather wants to see a revolutionary overhaul of the current hierarchical system (Beasley, 1999, page 54). This is because radical feminists see the cause of inequality not to be economic or institutional, but instead based in the construct of gender and patriarchy (Wearing, 1996, page 14). In order to lessen the effects of patriarchy, radical feminists place a large amount of emphasis on the positive qualities of women and sisterhood (Beasley, 1999, page 54). Among the most well-known works of radical feminism is Kate Millet’s *Sexual Politics*, which passionately argues that women should overthrow the patriarchy through revolution (Wearing, 1996, page 15). Millett also discusses the way in which power relationships between men and women are often expressed through coitus, arguing that male dominance is reasserted during sex acts (Wearing, 1996, page 15). Though the revolutionary elements of radical feminism have since waned, it remains particularly relevant to issues such as pornography, prostitution and other sexual matters (Boles and Hoeveler, 2006, page 274).

Liberal feminism espouses the liberal values of equality, justice and individual rights (Boles and Hoeveler, 2006, page 194). This school of feminism has

its origins in 19<sup>th</sup> century liberalism and the early feminist thought of figures such as Mary Wollstonecraft and John Stuart Mill (Wearing, 1996, page 9). Liberal feminism is reformist in the sense that it does not seek a complete overhaul of the current system as radical feminists do, instead wishing to improve the position of women within the current system principally through increasing educational and work opportunities for women (Wearing, 1996, page 9). Leading liberal feminist of the 1960s Betty Friedan argues in her seminal work, *The Feminist Mystique*, that education and work help to free women from their oppressive home lives (Gamble, 2001, page 264). Liberal Feminists argue that the causes of inequality include the gendered socialisation of children, the sexual division of labour, and the formal and informal restrictions that stop women from entering into high powered positions – sometimes known as the glass ceiling effect (Boles and Hoeweler, 2006, page 154). Like liberalism, liberal feminism places a high value on personal autonomy. Hence, liberal feminists wish women to experience the maximum amount of freedom possible and minimise the capability of negative forces such as rape and harassment to affect women (Baehr, 2007). Thus, whilst liberal feminists acknowledge the significance of rape and harassment, they differ from radical feminists in the priority they assign to these issues, focusing instead on increasing individual freedoms. For example, some liberal feminists are not against prostitution, viewing it as a “private business transaction” between consenting adults, whereas radical feminists view the sex industry as a source of oppression (Feminist Issues, 1997). This emphasis on change, tolerance, and individual rights rather than revolution has led liberal feminism to be branded the most moderate school of feminist thought, arguably leading to its popularity (Beasley, 1999, page 51).

Marxist feminism began on university campuses of the 1960s, growing out of the human rights movement (Wearing, 1996, page 11). This strand of feminism attempts to analyse and explain the relationship between gender inequalities and capitalist society, and in doing so draws strongly upon the theories of Karl Marx

(Boles and Hoeveler, 2006, page 207). Though Marx did not dwell on feminist issues in his writings, he did note that women are oppressed due to the class system (Gamble, 2001, page 269). However, Marx's colleague, Friedrich Engels had more to say on the subject of gender inequality. Engels argued that class divisions are also evident within the family unit, with wives (of Engels' time - the 1800s) being in servitude to their husbands and excluded from public life (Wearing, 1996, page 12). Thus Marxist feminism pays much more attention to class issues and is critical of Liberal Feminism's theory that if more women were in high powered positions, then the lives of women in general would improve. According to Marxist feminists, this would merely lead to powerful women exploiting lower classes of women, such as wage labour earners (Gamble, 2001, page 270). For Marxist feminists, the only way toward achieving true gender equality is worldwide socialism (Gilbert, 2011).

Socialist feminism is a combination of radical and Marxist feminism in that it views both class and sex as reasons for women's oppression (Boles and Hoeveler, 2006, page 306). However, socialist feminist theory disagrees with its predecessors on some key points. Socialist feminism argues that radical feminism treats all women to be the same, which is insensitive to women of third world countries who experience patriarchy differently to the first world; Marxism's lack of attention to gender and patriarchy are also criticised by socialist feminism (Wearing, 1996, page 18). Unlike liberal feminism, socialist feminism values collectivism and community over individual rights (Boles and Hoeveler, page 306). Alison Jaggar introduced the key concept of alienation to socialist feminism in the 1980's, arguing that relationships that should be interdependent, or connected, are separated artificially by the patriarchy (Gamble, 2001, page 317). Gamble outlines Jaggar's concept of alienation through the following example: "when a woman may say she controls her personal appearance for herself, she is more often than not influenced by dominant beliefs concerning beauty, and thus alienated from that appearance" (Gamble, 2001, page 317). Whilst radical and Marxist feminism contribute much to socialist feminist



thought, alienation is a concept unique to socialist feminism. Socialist feminists also argue that revolution is the way to eliminate sexual and economic inequality, suggesting that the capitalist system ought to be replaced with socialism (Freedom Socialist Party, 2011). However, the fall of Eastern European communism in the 1980's was a great setback for socialist feminism as a project of action, arguably compromising its credibility (and that of Socialism itself), however, as an analytical approach, it remains important (Boles and Hoeverler, 2006, page 306).

Though the four previously mentioned strands of feminism are the arguably the most influential, a number of other important or popular schools exist, these include black feminism (or African American feminism), ecofeminism (or environmental feminism) and lesbian feminism. Each are examples of feminism attempting to interact with more mainstream ideologies, fusing multiple movements together. Black feminism uses African American women as a unit of analysis and focuses on the intersecting issues of class, race, and gender (Boles and Hoeverler, 2006, page 31). Particular attention is paid to experiences of racism, thereby infusing feminism with the black rights movement. Ecofeminism is a relatively new tradition, beginning in the 1980s, it seeks to explore the commonalities between feminism and environmentalism (Boles and Hoeverler, 2006, page 111). Ecofeminists are also concerned with Western domination and pacifism (Twine, 2001, page 1). Lesbian feminism began in the 1970's, growing out of the idea that heterosexual relationships were another site of women's oppression (Gamble, 2001, 263). Lesbian feminists view heterosexuality as a social construct and focus their research on the differing experiences of homosexual and heterosexual women (Boles and Hoeverler, 2006, page 192). There also exists a vast array of other types of feminism, with new forms continuing to emerge.

Feminism is often attacked by a variety of opponents, particularly when it comes to the role of men. Those against feminism attempt to attack and marginalise the broader role of feminism by focusing on men, thereby caricaturing feminists as

*“man haters”* or lesbians. However, this is a wilful misunderstanding, though women are primarily the object of analysis with feminist ideology, that does not mean that men do not benefit from feminism, or that they cannot be involved. As Scolari points out “it is important to remember that the terms ‘feminist’ and ‘woman’ are not synonymous” (Scolari, 2011). Thus men too can be feminists. This quote not only illuminates the potential of men’s involvement, but also points that not all women agree with the aims of feminism. And while many men also disagree with feminism, some have come to realise that they agree with concepts of ending sexism, misogyny and inequality (Scolari, 2011). It is also notable that as feminism seeks to dismantle traditional gender roles, men too may be granted greater freedoms. Like women, men would be free to dress how they choose without fear of ridicule, or be employed in non-traditional areas without concerns about whether their gender affects their performance. For instance, currently, there are very few male primary school teachers; some have argued that this is in part due to accusations of paedophilia (de Brito, 2007). If gender roles were obsolete, it would be realised that women too are capable of sexual aggression and acts of violence, as is evident in the recent rises in women binge drinking and taking part in associated violence (Hartlepool Mail, 2011), and the view that men are potential predators may begin to wane. Unfortunately, it does not seem that many men are interested in the feminist cause, hopefully, this could be changed through education and greater awareness of feminism (Garcha, 2003).

Throughout this chapter, I have aimed to impress that feminism is both an emancipatory ideology and a critical project. It is a movement, seeking to bring women change and empowerment through strategies such as protest and consciousness raising. Yet it is also a complex ideology and an academic discipline. There exists a wide body of feminist thought, with influences ranging from enlightenment era liberalism to the feisty demands for equality found in university campuses of the 1970s. The goals of feminism may be equally diverse, yet all

feminists wish to understand and help to eliminate inequality between men and women. Feminism also encompasses an array of concepts, such as patriarchy and gender, whilst at its core, feminism is about economic, political, social, and sexual issues. I argue that feminism, as both a movement and an ideology, is highly capable of achieving its objectives. In part, this is because feminism has proved itself many times in the past, achieving much societal change and greatly improving the lives of women. The achievements of feminism shall continue to be explored in the following chapter.

## **CHAPTER TWO: THE ACHIEVEMENTS OF FEMINISM**

Throughout its history feminism has proved itself to be a powerful force capable of achieving great social, political, and economic change. When the Australian feminist movement began in the late 1800s, women held few rights, with married women being unable to own property, receive inheritance or claim custody rights for their children (Lake, 1999, page 2). Thus, feminism sought to achieve greater equality between the sexes. After over a century of feminist activity, women have advanced significantly in society. Feminism has won women the vote, legislative protection, and a vast array of greater opportunities. The gains of feminism continue to benefit women of today, who ought to be better informed about how their feminist foremothers fought for the freedoms they currently enjoy. In discussing all feminism has achieved in the past, I hope to illustrate that feminism has already proved itself highly capable of achieving great change. Thus, I argue, that feminism is of great worth and should continue to be utilised by present day women who wish to see changes in their lives.

### **THE LATE 19<sup>TH</sup> AND EARLY 20<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY**

For Australia, feminist activity began in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century in the decades prior to federation. This time period is often referred to as the First Wave of feminism. Among the first great aim of the feminist movement was suffrage, for the right to vote was seen as a way to enter the political world. This desire for the vote was influenced by classical liberalism and the writings of women such as Mary Wollstonecraft, who argued against patriarchy and pointed out the many inequalities that existed in the lives of men and women (Oldfield, 1992, page 4). John Stuart Mill also inspired the suffrage movement with his claim that the formal barriers that prevent women from obtaining equality should be removed (Gamble, 2001, page 273). Women of the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century were also concerned with industrial changes, seeking to increase protective legislation.

## The Right to Vote

Prior to the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, Australian women were unable to participate in local, state, or federal elections. Being unable to vote, and denied any kind of political voice, women had little say in the issues that affected them, such as education, property law and workplace grievances. Thus, suffrage had been identified as the number one goal of the women's movement of the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. Given that Australia had yet to reach federation, the suffrage movements were largely state based, though the various campaigns had much in common. Women from the colonies argued that they should be granted the vote to make for a more reflective parliament; because of natural justice and rationality; and because women too were affected by the law, thus should have some say in its creation (Oldfield, 1992, page 188). Such arguments were made through feminist literature; speeches; and public meetings. There were also many arguments made against suffrage, some viewed women as less intelligent than men and therefore less capable of voting wisely; others suggested that women did not have to go to war, therefore they were not full citizens and did not have any inherent political rights (Oldfield, 1992, page 189). Despite this opposition, suffrage societies grew popular throughout the late 1800s, notable groups include the Women's Christian Temperance Union (the organisation had an extensive agenda outside the area of suffrage, but were nonetheless vocal throughout the campaigns) and the Women's Suffrage League. Both organisations fought against traditional stereotypes which suggested women were best left to their domesticity and protested hard for their rights.

After much debate on the specifics of female suffrage, South Australia became the first state to give women the vote in 1894 (Oldfield, 1992, page 22). The delicate balance of power between the Liberal and Labor parties and the desire of the state to adhere to a moral image were deciding factors in the suffrage bill passing (Oldfield, 1992, page 22). In 1899, Western Australia was the next state to win the vote (Oldfield, 1992, page 45). In this state the WCTU and the League were highly

influential and are credited as a significant force in obtaining the vote for women. Parliamentary debates also suggest that women were given the vote in part to take power away from the goldfields area (Oldfield, 1992, page 53). Just over a decade later, the colonies of Australia came together to form a federation. From the point of the nation's formation, suffrage was an issue. After only a year or so of debate, Australian women won the vote on a national level in 1902 (Oldfield, 1992, page 63). This was in part due to the fact that the women of South Australia and Western Australia were already enfranchised. These two states were adamant that in order for them to join the federation, their women must maintain possession of the vote. Thus, in the interest of creating a unified nation, women across Australia won suffrage. Within four years, all the states in Australia had won the vote for *most* women. In Tasmania this happened in 1903, Queensland in 1904, and Victoria in 1908 (Oldfield, 1992, pages 103 – 131). Democratic debate had continued to spread, and words such as 'justice', 'fairness' and 'egalitarianism' were thrown around freely in discussions on suffrage. Yet, while all white women had the vote by this point, the Aboriginal people of Western Australia and Queensland were still unable to vote in state elections. This is due to a racist attitude which equated the Aboriginal people with animals, and the belief that they were dying out (Oldfield, 1992, page 65). Thus while the women gaining the vote was a great achievement, Australia still did not have universal suffrage.

### **Legislative Change**

Early feminists also achieved a variety of legislative changes such as raising the age of consent and making improvements in the lives of married women (Lake, 1999, page 40). Much early feminist action was protective in nature, focusing on keeping women safe from men and other external forces – an example of this can be seen in women's desire to raise the age of consent. Feminists argued that children were inherently innocent and thus were incapable of deciding to engage in sexual activity, hence they campaigned for the age of consent for heterosexual sex to be

raised to 16, or 17 in South Australia and Tasmania (Figgis and Simpson, 1997, page 1). Consequently, each state adopted age of consent legislation in the early 1900s, thus making it a crime for those under age to engage in sexual activity, or for adults to engage in sex with those under 17, or 16, depending on one's state (Figgis and Simpson, 1997, page 4). Change came for married women in the forms of the Divorce Amendment and Passage Act and the Married Women's Property Act (Lake, 1999, page 39). Divorce laws of the late 19<sup>th</sup> century were highly biased in the favour of men: whilst a man needed only prove that his wife committed one act of adultery to obtain a divorce, a woman needed to show that her husband had engaged in adultery on a number of occasions, or had been involved in sodomy, bestiality, or incest, in order to end her marriage (Oldfield, 1992, page 6). The divorce Amendment and Passage Act of 1892 made the process fairer, with women obtaining easier access to divorce. The passage of the Married Women's Property Act was also a great achievement, for it gave wives the ability to own property without interference from their husbands, thus improving their economic standing and independence (Boles and Hoeveller, 2006, page 206).

### **BETWEEN THE FIRST AND SECOND WAVE**

It is a common misconception that there was not much feminist activism occurring in the time between the first and second waves of feminism. Though feminists were less active during World Wars One and Two (both in Australia and abroad) due to their attempts to assist in the war effort, whilst protesting against fascism and for peace, the interwar years did see a variety of feminist campaigns (Martin, 2009, page 1). In 1923, the National Council of Women and hundreds of their supporters protested in Melbourne against the federal government's plan to cut the five pound maternity allowance (Lake, 1999, page 10). Working class women were particularly industrious in the 1940s, forming and joining a number of unions to advocate for women's rights in the workplace (Connell, 2006). It is also notable that during the world wars, a large number of women entered the workforce to

replace men serving in the army. Although this was temporary, women entered a number of new areas of employment such as engineering which had hitherto been the domain of men. Though working women during World War 1 received only 54% of what a man would have been paid, this increased in World War 2 with women earning 75% of the male wage (Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, 2011). Throughout the 1950s and 60s, women successfully lobbied for the right to sit on juries and an end to the marriage bar, which prevented married women from joining the public service (Lake, 1999, page 10). Thus, the period between the first and second waves of feminism was far from a lull, with women progressing and continuing to create a more egalitarian society.

### **LATE 20<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY FEMINISM**

Throughout the 1970's, a vast array of social and political change occurred. In Australia and other Western nations, women saw much transformation in their lives, roles, and statuses. This was due largely to the growth of feminism and its proliferation into popular thought and debate. Though feminism had existed in a variety of forms for many decades, the 70's saw an explosion of feminist ideas, literature, and action. Feminist writers were heavily active during this period, with works of great significance such as *Sexual Politics*, *The Female Eunuch*, and *Sisterhood is Powerful* all being published in the year of 1970 (Boles and Hoeverler, 2006, page xxvii). Betty Friedan's *The Feminist Mystique*, published in 1963, was also highly influential for feminists of the 1970s, raising questions about issues of domesticity and the role of women (Boles and Hoeveller, 2006, page 145) Feminism also gained popularity amongst the masses, who were concerned with a vast array of issues that affected them, including sexual freedom, workplace rights and education. All the while, feminists continued to strive for the overarching goal of equality between the sexes and the elimination of the patriarchy.

### **Consciousness Raising**



Overall, women wished to improve their position in society. Thus, an initial aim of 70s feminism was raising awareness about women's oppression (Van Acker, 1999, page 53). In order to raise consciousness and promote the notion of solidarity, a number of women's liberation groups were formed. The idea of consciousness raising groups is often associated with Mao Tse-tung's Communist China, in which peasants met regularly to criticise their superiors (Levy, 2005, page 49). However, consciousness raising strategies have been adopted by many progressive and socialist organised movements. For example South American educator Paulo Freire wrote about what he termed *conscientize*, a process in which one developed a certain understanding of the world through education (Bolt, 1999). By 1971, consciousness raising groups existed in every capital city of Australia (Van Acker, 1999, page 53). The groups were independent of political allegiances and egalitarian in nature, avoiding hierarchical forms of organisation, which were seen as masculine and not cohesive with promoting equality (Van Ecker, 1999, page 53). Consciousness raising groups continued to grow, actively recruiting large numbers of women and educating them about the liberation movement and feminist theory (Lake, 1999, page 233). The women involved in such groups bonded over similar experiences with male oppression and placed much value on the notion of sisterhood. Feminist thought had grown and expanded in such a way that it connected with vast numbers of women, and these women were interested in and excited by the movement, helping to spread the word of feminism and gaining personal fulfilment by engaging in group activities. Consciousness raising remains an important strategy of feminism today, though it takes place largely online (Boles and Hoeveler, 2006, page 88).

### **Legislative Change**

In the 1970s and 1980s, feminists sought to offer greater protection for women from discrimination, harassment, and violence. This was achieved in a number of ways, including the criminalisation of rape in marriage and the institution of the Sex

Discrimination Act of 1984. At the dawn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, women were seen to be the property of men - young women were under the control of their fathers and husbands were the owners of their wives. This ownership was seen to extend to a woman's body, a husband was legally entitled to do as he liked to his wife (Jones, 1997). Hence, in common law, rape was not considered a crime when it occurred within marriage (Australian National University, 2011). Feminists of the 1970s campaigned against the assumption that a woman was the property of her husband, echoing arguments John Stuart Mill had made over a century ago when he described a wife's relationship to her husband as being comparable to a "personal body-servant of a despot" (Bourke, 2007, page 1). Though South Australia declared marital rape to be a crime in 1975, it was not illegal on a national level till 1991 (Bourke, 2007, page 1). The Sex Discrimination Act of 1984 was another important piece of legislation achieved through feminism. It aimed to eliminate discrimination on the basis of sex, marital status, or pregnancy, in a variety of arenas such as the workplace, business, and education (Australian Government Com Law, 1991). The Act was updated in 2011 in attempt to provide greater protection for students and workers and to illuminate issues of familial responsibility (Attorney General's Department, 2011).

### **Industrial Relations**

Women also made much headway in the workplace, achieving change in the form of the 1969 and 1972 Equal Pay rulings and the removal of the marriage bar in public service. Improvements also came in other areas, with the Labor Party instituting a women's quota and Catholics campaigning for the ordination of women. In 1907, the Harvester Judgement established the minimum wage for both men and women. This wage was determined on how much it would cost for a working class family to live frugally for a week and was based on the notion of a male breadwinner and a dependent spouse (Robbins, 2007, page 2). As women were seen to be dependent on their husbands their basic wage was determined to be

significantly less than their male counterparts. Feminists and unionists of the 1960s campaigned for the overturn of the Harvester Judgement, demanding equal pay. Thus after many strikes and stop-work meetings in 1969 came the Equal Pay for Equal Work Case which decreed that women who performed the same jobs as men would receive the same pay (Labour Information Network, 1997). However, this decision was found to benefit only 18% of working women, primarily those in the teaching field (Fieldes, 1999). Thus in 1972, the Australian Council of Trade Unions returned to the Arbitration Commission with further demands. It was then decided in the 1972 Equal Pay for Work of Equal Value Case that jobs of comparable value deserved the same basic wage (Labour Information Network, 1997).

### **Education**

The standard of education for women and girls also improved dramatically as a result of the second wave of feminism. At the beginning of the 1970s, education was highly gendered. Girls were encouraged to study subjects such as home economics, whilst avoiding mathematics and science, whilst female teachers were not allowed to wear pants in the classroom and were scrutinised about their marital status (Gaskell and Taylor, 2003, page 4). The election of the left leaning, progressive Whitlam Government in 1972 led to an increased visibility for women's issues, though Whitlam was prime minister for only a short amount of time, his government targeted and sought to improve education for women (Gaskell and Taylor, 2003, page 7). Among his most significant acts was the abolition of university fees, which made it possible for many working class Australians to obtain a university education (Ferrari, 2011). As women were economically disadvantaged, they benefitted greatly from this scheme, which made it possible for them to obtain an education and thereby greater career opportunities. At the same time, the Australian Women's Education Coalition was lobbying to make curriculums more relevant to girls (Gaskell and Taylor, 2003, page 7). Another educational event of significance was the introduction of women's studies courses to universities (Rockel,

1999, page 2). Such courses are interdisciplinary in nature and teach students about the experiences, histories, and sociology of women. Sadly, in the 1990s many of these courses either ceased to exist or were “restructured” into gender studies.

### **Sexuality and the Body**

One much discussed aim of feminism was that of increasing women’s sexual freedom. In order to obtain sexual freedom, it was believed that women required access to birth control and safe, legal abortions. Women argued that in order to become equal with men and have the same level of sexual freedom, they too should be able to lead active sex lives without being encumbered by the possibility of having to have children (Lake, 1999, page 223). It was also argued that women should have sovereignty over their own bodies, thus if they did not wish to carry a child, they should be allowed the option of terminating their pregnancy (Shrage, 1994, page 55). However, not all women held such views, abortion was (and remains) arguably one of the most controversial issues in feminism (Van Acker, 1999, page 58). While the issue of legal abortion was most discussed in the 70’s, it remains a controversy today, with Australian law still being somewhat confusing on the matter; while abortion is not technically legal, anti-abortion laws are not enforced and women are able to terminate their pregnancies in both public and private hospitals (Van Acker, 1999, page 59). Like abortion, birth control was seen as a means to increasing women’s sexual freedom. The contraceptive pill, which was approved in the US in 1960, allowed women to become increasingly sexually active (Levy, 2005, page 53). The increased availability of the contraceptive pill also led women into discussion about female sexuality; women challenged the notion that they were but receptacles for the pleasure of men and went on to actively pursue their own gratification with enhanced knowledge about their bodies and its abilities (Sjoberg, 1991, page 1).

## THE 1990S

The 1990s were a most interesting time for feminism, as the decade saw both setbacks and growth for the movement. Due to an increasingly globalised world, women related less to the communalism offered by feminism (Kaplan, 1996, page 153) and instead focused on neo-liberal notions of individualism and personal growth. Whilst Generation X was lambasted for its apathy toward social issues, popular culture celebrated tough, independent female characters such as television's Buffy the Vampire Slayer, a teenage girl intent on saving the world from supernatural forces, or Tank Girl, an iconic action hero of comic books and film (Siegal, 2007, page 124). Though the 90s saw the birth of the Riot Grrrl movement (Siegal, 2007, page 146), the decade also witnessed postfeminist critiques on icons of feminist history, as postfeminists failed to acknowledge the achievements of their 70s foremothers (Bennett, 2006, page 165). The 90s were certainly a paradoxical time for feminism, while Time Magazine published an article entitled *Is Feminism Dead?* claiming that young women cared about nothing but themselves (Siegal, 2007, page 125), Rebecca Walker of Ms Magazine made the bold proclamation "I am not a postfeminist feminist. I am the Third Wave" (Siegal, 2007, page 128). However, as this is a chapter on the achievements of feminism, not the setbacks it has encountered, I wish to focus on the positive elements of 90s feminism, for the decade did indeed have its successes.

### Riot Grrrl Culture

Whilst the 19<sup>th</sup> century had its suffragettes, and the 70s had women's liberation, the 90s had the Riot Grrrl movement. This movement was both musical and political, those involved preached messages of female empowerment through punk rock music and writings in feminist publications (Benfer, 2010). Riot Grrrls of the 90s were primarily young women who would "use their sexiness, assertiveness, and loudness to debunk the notions of women as dumb, inferior, or bad", notable

musicians associated with the scene include Huggy Bear and Bikini Kill (Boles and Hoeveller, 2006, page 282). Though the movement had a political flavour, it did not formulate policy, but focused instead on consciousness raising (Hanna, 2003, page 134). Riot Grrrl's often focused on issues such as sexism, rape and harassment. The Riot Grrrl movement dispersed somewhat in the late 90s as many of the leading bands broke up, however it did not die out, but rather moved online, spawning what has come to be known as *modern post-feminist grrrl culture* (Siegel, 2007, page 146). Though less popular than it once was, Riot Grrrl continues to exist today (True, 2009). Whilst the Riot Grrrl movement did not achieve actual political change, it did positively influence the lives of many women who were able to learn about feminism and female empowerment through music. It is also notable that the majority of those involved on the movement were young women, aged approximately 14 – 25 (Boles and Hoeveller, 2006, page 282). Thus, while young women today are “portrayed as more obsessed with lip gloss, Manolo Blahniks, and “hotness” than liberation, critical mass, and social change” (Siegel, 2007, page 6), Riot Grrrl serves as proof that up until quite recently young women still found feminism appealing.

### **Political and Legal Changes**

Through-out the 90s women also made a number of political and legal advances, particularly in the United States. After Bill Clinton's election, five women entered cabinet (at that point the largest number in US history); Janet Reno was appointed as the first female attorney general; and Judge Ruth Bader Ginsburg became the second woman (and first feminist) to join the Supreme Court (Siegel, 2007, page 118). Other achievements of 90s feminism in the US include increased funding being awarded to sexual assault programs and organisation Planned Parenthood successfully campaigning for the Food and Drug Administration to approve the contraceptive known as Depo-Provera (Siegel, 2007, page 129). In Australia, women were continuing to reap the benefits of the Sex Discrimination Act

of 1984, which made discrimination on the basis of gender, marital status or pregnancy and sexual harassment illegal (Australian Government Com Law, 2011). Such positive legislative change also brought about improvements in attitudes toward women, young couples in the 90s were more likely to share domestic responsibilities than before, women athletes were gaining media attention and divorce was less stigmatised (Kaplan, 1996, page 161). Another legal gain came for women in the form of the Equal Opportunity for Women in the Workplace Act of 1999, which was aimed at increasing gender equality across all fields of employment (Australian Government ComLaw, 1999).

### **THE EXPERIENCE OF ABORIGINAL WOMEN**

Throughout Australian history, there have also been many changes made in the lives and rights of Aboriginal women. Though many white feminists have often strived to include aboriginal women in the movement (others however, thought the aboriginal population to be dying out, or just did not think to include them), this has sometimes been problematic due to a lack of understanding of race issues (Kaplan, 2007, page 145). For instance, while white women campaigned for greater access to abortion, aboriginal women took a very different stance on the issue. As the aboriginal population was on the decline, aboriginal women were not generally interested in abortion, but instead sought ways to increase their number (Kaplan, 2007, page 146). However, white feminists have often attempted to be supportive of their aboriginal sisters while remaining sensitive to racial issues. Such an example of this can be found in Mary Montgomerie Bennett, who was a teacher and campaigned for aboriginal rights. Bennet and her colleagues campaigned throughout the 1930s for harsher rape penalties for white men who raped aboriginal women, for a greater number of women to be involved in the protection of the aboriginal people (male police protectors were sometimes sexually abusive), greater educational opportunities, and custody rights for aboriginal women (Lake, 1999, page 118). Though feminism has been able to remain somewhat relevant to aboriginal women,

the greater priority has long been on recovering and restoring aboriginal culture after its destruction at the hands of white men (Lake, 1999, page 249).

## CONCLUSION

Feminism has a long and proud history dotted with a variety of achievements. Women have gained much from feminism, benefitting economically, socially, politically, and personally. Little over a century ago, women possessed not even the right to vote or claim an inheritance, today women have the same formal rights as men do (thanks, in part, to feminism). The first wave of feminism brought women the right to vote, and attend universities, whilst the interwar years saw women demanding better rights in the workplace. In the 1970s women continued their attempt to better their lives, achieving legislative change which aided in protecting them from harassment and discrimination. Later, in the 1990s, feminists fought against the notion of postfeminism whilst making important segues into the political arena. However, that feminism has achieved so much does not mean that its job is over. Worldwide, women experience a vast array of disadvantages. In Australia, these disadvantages take the forms of unequal pay, sexual harassment, and a lack of women in power positions, among other things. To list feminisms achievements is not to suggest that feminism has run its course, or that it is no longer needed. On the contrary, understanding feminisms many gains proves how powerful and capable the movement can be, whilst suggesting what help it may continue to offer women of the future: as Michelle Wallace of The Feminist Memoir Project once stated "I continue to believe that feminism, in all its myriad and contentious incarnations will always be part of, although not the only, prescription, until somebody comes up with a cure" (Siegel, 2007, vi).



### CHAPTER THREE: WHY WE STILL NEED FEMINISM

Feminism has always been criticised. As feminism seeks to eliminate inequality by redistributing power more evenly between the sexes, those who benefit from the current patriarchal arrangement of society are highly wary of feminism, being unwilling to relinquish their influence. Hence, they are highly critical of feminism. In the late 1980s to the modern day, this criticism has come in the form of the assertion that feminism is no longer needed. In the early 90s, media outlets such as *Time Magazine* began asking readers if feminism was still relevant to modern women (Bellafante, 1998, page 2), whilst conservative politicians claimed the feminist cause was over and women now possessed all the social and political rights they needed (Bulbeck, 2011). At the same time, some young writers took to criticising earlier feminists, claiming that their predecessors were prudish and unnatural, blaming the second wave for the existence of a variety of challenges that women were now facing (Siegel, 2007, page 101). This new generation of women came to question a number of key feminist assumptions, with Karen Lehrman proclaiming that the personal is no longer political (Lehrman, 1997, page 5), thereby creating a distinct rift between feminist thought of the 60s and 70s, and that of the 90s. The notion that feminism was an ideology of the past, or at the very least in need reconsideration became popular, thus the term “postfeminism” re-emerged to describe the current state of the women’s movement (Boles and Hoeveller, 2006, page 266). Postfeminism continued to grow in strength and influence into the new millennium, yet, it also attracted much criticism. Though many had declared feminism “dead”, women continued to engage in “exciting, creative, and uncompromising activism every day” (Dicker and Piepmeier, 2003, page 36). Groups such as the Guerrilla Girls were creating feminist inspired artworks, and the Lesbian Avengers spread messages of empowerment for gay women through lively street theatre (Dicker and Piepmeier, 2003, page 34). The existence of such activism led many to question whether feminism was indeed a movement of the past. Despite arguments that equality has

been realised, gender based injustices are still evident in the workplace, business, politics, and the way in which women's bodies are treated. The first part of this chapter will discuss the nature of postfeminism, while the latter half argues that despite claims to the contrary, feminism is far from irrelevant: it continues to be a lively movement necessary for achieving improvement in the lives of Australian women.

Though the term postfeminism has been around for much longer, its current forms have their ideological roots in the late 1980s (Boles and Hoeveller, 2006, page 266). Postfeminism has since become an umbrella term which applies to a number of different styles of thought regarding feminism. From a critical perspective, some types of postfeminism are simply antifeminism in disguise. Postfeminism as antifeminism suggests that feminism is no longer necessary, and that earlier feminists did women of today a great disservice, leaving them divided into three groups: "selfish younger ones with delusions of empowerment; barren thirty- and forty- somethings; and an embittered coterie of baby-boomer feminists stupidly wondering what went wrong" (Dux and Simic, 2008, page 19). There are also those who suggest that feminism has achieved its objectives and is no longer needed, leaving in its wake an egalitarian society full of strong, empowered women, capable of making their own choices (Dux and Simic, 2008, page 19). This suggestion has led to a sort of *faux feminist* environment in which women celebrate their freedom from many of barriers that hindered their success in the past, yet they remain unknowingly subject to patriarchal norms and assumptions. The term postfeminism is also sometimes applied to modern feminist works that appear to offer new perspectives on old problems. The final type of postfeminism is that which effectively undermines older feminist thought, suggesting a new direction is needed in order for feminism to remain relevant (Gamble, 2001, page 298). Such postfeminism is espoused by the likes of Katie Rophie, Camille Paglia, Rene Denfeld, and Christina Hoff Sommers (Siegel, 2007, pages 97 - 104). In summary, I will discuss

four types of postfeminism – postfeminism as antifeminism, postfeminism as *faux feminism*, postfeminism as modern feminist thought, and postfeminism as a school of thought which seeks to criticise earlier feminists and reconfigure current feminism.

Antifeminism styled as postfeminism found an Australian champion in former Prime Minister John Howard, who claimed that feminism is no longer necessary (Bulbeck, 2011). Howard was not the only member of his government to speak out against feminism, for instance Peter Costello has commented that he finds the works of Andrea Dworkin to be too “extreme” (Baird, 2006), whilst current Liberal Party leader Tony Abbott has met much opposition from feminists due to his traditional Catholic stance on issues such as contraceptives and abortion (Das, 2010). Bulbeck argues that the Howard government undermined the gains of the women’s movement by privatising childcare, introducing benefits which unfairly favoured stay at home mothers, and dismantling departments which concerned women’s policies (Bulbeck, 2011). This postfeminism suggests that feminism was an experiment that ultimately ended in failure, and blames the women’s movement for today’s hyper sexualised youth culture, overworked mothers, and even difficulties in heterosexual romantic relationships (Asher, 2010). However, such arguments are overly simplistic, identifying feminism as a sole cause of discontent in women’s lives, ignoring other social, economic, and political factors that have led to change. The antifeminist line of thought makes two highly questionable assumptions - firstly, it assumes that feminism is no longer active; secondly, it suggests that young women are vehemently opposed to feminism and feminist prescriptions. However, the notion that feminist activism has decreased significantly seems somewhat hard to believe when Melbourne’s inaugural *SlutWalk* attracted thousands of men and women (AFP, 2011), who protested against victim blaming and questioned societal norms regarding sex. The idea that young women do not support feminism is also questionable. Although polls suggest that only a quarter of women actively describe themselves as feminists, many are in support of feminist aims such as equal pay and

access to politics and education (Aune and Redfern, 2010, page 5). This is evident in a 2006 survey of 1000 British women conducted in *Cosmopolitan Magazine* which found that 96% of those surveyed supported equal pay and 85% believed women should have the right to terminate their pregnancies (Aune and Redfern, 2010, page 4). *Time Magazine* made similar findings in a 1992 poll, in which only 33% of women described themselves as feminists, but 77% agreed that feminism had made life better (Siegel, 2007, page 115). Thus, many women may hold feminist beliefs, but, perhaps, because of media caricatures and misrepresentation, may not equate their personal feelings with the ideology of feminism (Wolf, 1993, page 60). This means many women may in fact be “feminists without realising it” (Aune and Redfern, 2010, page 4-5).

Like antifeminism, *faux feminism* is a form of postfeminism which suggests that feminism is no longer necessary. Unlike antifeminism, however, *faux feminism* believes feminism achieved its ends - leaving in its wake empowered women capable of exercising control over their own lives, thus feminism is “simultaneously taken for granted and dismissed” (Aune and Redfern, 2010, page 177). The problem with *faux feminism* is that some of this power is little more than an illusion. Examples of *faux feminism* are rampant in popular culture, for instance, pop singer Katy Perry describes herself as a “strong elephant of a woman” (Ninemsn, 2010), and is generally depicted as successful, and sexually confident - characteristics most feminists would happily endorse, yet I would argue many of her lyrics and actions have strong patriarchal undertones. Such undertones are particularly evident in the bi-curious romp which brought Perry to fame, ‘*I Kissed a Girl*’, in which Perry (a heterosexual woman) speaks of kissing other women. Some argue that Perry describes such acts not because she is a frivolous woman out to seek personal pleasure, but because she wishes to titillate men (Lewinger, 2009). Thus, for Egan, the sexual confidence Perry is famous for is merely conformity, for Perry embraces the type of sexuality derived from pornography and strip clubs which suggests it is a

modern woman's job to perform for men (Egan, 2005). While the *faux feminist* notion that a woman ought to enjoy performing for her lover may appear to be relatively harmless, the dominance of this one, specific type of sexuality identity is highly constrictive, for it is questionable whether women actually find pleasure in adhering to such as image, or whether they do so in order to gain acceptance (Aune and Redfern, 2010, page 53). As Levy points out, "looking like a stripper or a Hooters waitress or a Playboy bunny is only one, very specific kind of sexual expression. Is it one that turns us – or men – on the most? We would have to stop endlessly enacting this raunchy script in order to find out" (Levy, 2005, page 198).

At times, the term postfeminism is simply applied to modern feminist works. The "post" prefix seems to have been added to imply that such works were created after the second wave of feminism. This does not necessarily mean that more current writings are disparate from the works of earlier feminists. For example, Ariel Levy is often identified as postfeminist, for she discusses relatively recent cultural developments, though on closer inspection her work has many parallels with those produced by earlier waves, and has been described as "radical feminism with a makeover" (Dux and Simic, 2008, page 39). Levy also differs from other writers described as postfeminist in that she has expressed distaste for the way in which older feminists are frequently criticised, arguing that they are due respect (Bulbeck, 2011). Though works such as Levy's are frequently described as postfeminist, the term seems quite inappropriate given the author does not suggest feminism is over, perhaps such writings would be better viewed as part of a third wave of feminism rather than a separate movement.

Arguably the most recognisable form of postfeminism is that which sometimes calls itself feminist, or at least promotes the notion of power and equality for women, yet criticizes the current state of feminism and the actions of ideas of 70s feminists. Authors such as Katie Roiphe, Christina Hoff Sommers, Camille Paglia, and in her later works, Naomi Wolf, have made names for themselves by criticising

feminists of the second wave and seeking to undermine their findings (McRobbie, 2009, page 11). Roiphe, daughter of notable feminist Anne Roiphe, gained attention in the early 90s with her assertion that rape is perhaps not so harrowing, or as prevalent as older feminists had suggested (Miller, 1997). Siegel argues that Roiphe's assertion that rape is a problem that existed largely in women's heads spits in the face of earlier feminists who had worked hard for the issue of rape to be taken seriously (Siegel, 2007, page 97). Hoff Sommers argues that certain types of feminism have gone too far and that men are on the path to becoming the second sex (Hoff Sommers, 2000, page 207), she also criticises the research methods of earlier feminists such as Carol Gilligan (Hoff Sommers, 2000, pages 17). Paglia refutes 70s feminist arguments that gender relations must change, whilst she "defends pornography, insists that rape is a type of sex, not violence, and champions motherhood as the most important role a woman can have" (Boles and Hoeveller, 2006, page 251). The works of Paglia and Roiphe have also been described as "regressive, poorly researched polemics" (Dickers and Piepmeier, 2003, page 33). Wolf suggests that a rift has developed between feminism and the "average woman", because of bad habits in the feminist movement that have created a negative image in which feminists are depicted as "antifamily, antimale, exclusively white, and middle class" (Wolf, 1993, page xvii). Wolf suggests modern women should reject the victimisation of women and embrace what she terms as power feminism (Wolf, 1993, page xvii).

Though such arguments have garnered attention, they have also led to notoriety, with many placing their arguments under close scrutiny. For instance, Pollitt argues that Roiphe's assertion that what women describe as rape is just "bad sex" is highly offensive to both those who have experienced sexual assault, and earlier feminists who sought to raise awareness of the high instance of sexual crimes against women (Pollitt, 1993). Roiphe also makes a number of displays of ignorance, asking readers "If 25% of my women friends were being raped – wouldn't I know?" (Roiphe, 1993). It seems surprising that Roiphe did not realise that rape victims

certainly do not enjoy talking about their experiences - given that only 40% of victims report their assault to the police (RAINN, 2009), it is doubtful that the same victims would want to spread news of their experience to all their friends.

Hoff Sommers makes similarly questionable assumptions in her discussion of the way girls and boys are treated in the education system, for though she discusses childhood, she does not go on to speak of the university or graduate experiences, marking her work as too narrow. Though Hoff Sommers comments that more women than men are accepted to universities, she does not note that fewer women go onto higher levels of study, or that male graduates are going onto to earn significantly more than their female counterparts at an increasing rate (Niagra, 2009, page 1). Though Paglia has won herself much attention, she has also attracted much criticism from within the feminist movement, perhaps as a result of her attacks on leading feminists of the 70s, for example, Paglia once stated that Kate Millet's approach to feminism was of a "repressive, Stalinist style" (Crawford, 1999). Such attacks have lead Gloria Steinem to comment that Paglia "calling herself a feminist, is sort of like a Nazi saying they're not anti-Semitic" (Fields, 1992, page 16). Wolf has also met much criticism, with fellow postfeminist Hoff Sommers accusing Wolf of misinterpreting and exaggerating statistics (Wattenberg, 1997). However, Wolf *has* stated that gender equality has yet to be realised, and that feminism is "the only movement that can win it for us" (Wolf, 1993, page xix).

Though many postfeminists argue that feminism is no longer active and that gender equality has been achieved, this is unsupported by data. Women still experience inequality in the workplace, business, the home, politics and sexuality. Though equal pay has been on the feminist agenda for decades, it has yet to be realised, and in recent years the pay gap has actually begun to widen (Women's Electoral Lobby, 2009, page 1), with women earning on average \$2 less than men for every hour they work (ABS, 2006). In the home, women continue to do the majority of housework and child rearing, whilst finding high quality, affordable childcare

remains a challenge (Vanessa M, 2008). Leadership positions remain dominated by men, with only 25% of managers and less than 3% of CEOs being women (Vanessa M, 2008). The male / female divide is felt particularly strongly in the lack of women in ASX200 companies, in which women make up only 10% of senior managers (Braund, 2011). Though Australia has its first female Prime Minister in Julia Gillard, there remain fewer women than men in politics, and female politicians continue to be placed under scrutiny for irrelevant matters such as their clothing, hairstyles and relationship status (Dux and Simic, 2008, page 205). Women also continue to experience rape, sexual harassment, and objectification (Wager, 2007). Thus, despite the wishful thinking of many women, and comments critical of feminism, women are far from achieving true equality. In order for women to continue to advance and claim greater rights, feminism is necessary: the feminist movement has helped women make many gains in the past, and can continue to do so today.

Though many formal barriers that would stop women from achieving equality in the workplace have been removed (courtesy of feminism), women continue to earn less, be more likely to engage in casual or part time work, struggle with childcare, and are under represented at the decision making levels of business. In the 2010 – 2011 financial year, women earned 82.5 cents for every dollar men were paid - this is the lowest figure in twenty three years (Johnstone, 2011, page 1). Women are also more likely to engage in casual work, making up 56% of all casual workers (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2009). Unions are lamenting the increased casualization of the Australian workplace, as casuals are less likely to be protected from unfair dismissal laws, are often unaware of the rights they possess, and are more likely to work irregular hours and weekends (Gale, 2004, page 20). Women in casual work are also less likely to take maternity leave (Adonis, 2011). Parental leave and childcare tend to be significant issues for women, and are thereby problems feminism seeks to address. Childcare has experienced many changes in recent years, moving from community based service to privately owned businesses (Women's



Electoral Lobby, 2010). This has not led to improvements in the childcare services offered, with parents still concerned with issues of quality, availability, and affordability (Cassells, Harding, Lloyd, and McNamara, 2007, page 123). The lack of women in power positions in business is also of concern to feminism. Though some progress has been made in the past few years, women still only make up 12.7% of members on ASX200 boards (Green, 2011). It is also notable that while 65% of the top 200 companies within Australia have a female director, only 23% have two or more (Green, 2011). Though this collection of data may seem like an exercise in pessimism, it is important to note that improvements are slowly being made in some areas of significance, such as women on boards. This progress is in part due to the feminist activity of the Women on Boards organisation, which, since its inception in 2006 has helped almost 1,000 women to gain positions on boards through events, consulting, and coaching (WoB, 2011). Yeatman argues that in order for women to progress in business, barriers which disadvantage women must be removed; childcare must be publicly provided; and the nature of employment itself must be redesigned to allow for feminine traits to be valued (Yeatman, 1990, page 77)

The greater political participation of women has always been an issue for feminism, it is a struggle that began with winning female suffrage, and continues today with the attempt to encourage more women to enter parliament. Despite examples such as Prime Minister Julia Gillard, it appears that a large number of women do not want to participate in traditional politics, viewing the party politics as a man's world and preferring to participate in "cause oriented activity" such as signing petitions and boycotting products (Brogan, 2004). Perhaps the problem is that patriarchy is deeply embedded in the traditional political model, for there continues to exist a number of informal barriers to women's political participation - women are often not given party support; or encouraged to take part in leadership programs; and women in politics are often portrayed negatively (Shvedova, 2002, page 8). Socio economic factors play also play a part, given that women are on the

whole, poorer than men and continue to have primary responsibilities for child rearing. In Australian politics, however, the levels of female participation vary significantly from party to party. In the Australian Labor Party, 37% of parliamentarians are women, as compared to only 23% of those in the Liberal Party (Burgmann, 2010). This is because of the quota system in which the ALP pre-select a number of women for election to winnable seats; arguably, if other parties were to adopt a similar system, the political environment would become a much more woman friendly place. However, many members of the Liberal Party oppose the idea of adopting quotas, believing them to be unnecessary and a potential hindrance to the success of the party (Bevege, 2010).

Though getting into politics is an extremely difficult job for women, the hardships do not end with election, for female politicians are treated to a type of media scrutiny which borders on bullying (Cadwalladr, 2010). For Julia Gillard, such treatment began early in her career, as Dux and Simic noticed: “the national fascination with Deputy Prime Minister Julia Gillard’s hair is depressingly predictable. By contrast, Prime Minister Kevin Rudd has the hair of a plastic action figure, yet you’ll never find a comment on that in our nation’s broadsheets” (Dux and Simic, 2008, page 206). The fixation on Gillard’s personal life and appearance only increased when she became Prime Minister. Although satire of politicians is highly common in Australia, parody reached a new extreme when the ABC began broadcasting a television series entitled *At Home With Julia*, the first program to satirise a sitting Prime Minister (Egan, 2011). The comedy show depicts Gillard (played by Amanda Bishop) at home and at work, and has recently aroused distaste for a scene in which Gillard and her partner Tim Mathieson lie naked but for being wrapped in the Australian flag in a post-coital embrace (Quinn, 2011). Given that political satire of politicians is somewhat of an Australian tradition, there is some debate over whether the depictions of Gillard as ignorant and domineering, and Mathieson as effeminate and ignored are indeed sexist or simply affectionate satire

(Jones, 2011). Some have suggested that the depiction of Gillard and her partner reflect “misogynistic resentment toward a woman who has stepped way outside the lounge room and into the public sphere” (Donnelly, 2011). Others view the show as harmless, stating that it is “nothing more than a comedic fantasy of what life at the Lodge might be like” (Quinn, 2011). However, even if we were to accept the series as light poking fun of Gillard, we must also note that the show depicts some of the sexism she faces in reality, as can be seen merely minutes into the first episode when a female journalist hounding Gillard begs the question “who are you wearing?”, thus maintaining the focus on Gillard as a woman, rather than paying attention to her policies or party platform.

Feminism also continues to be necessary for the advancement of Australian women due to the large amount of both sexual and non-sexual violence that occurs. A recent survey suggests that 1 in 6 Australian university students are raped, while 67% have had “an unwanted sexual experience of some kind”, including harassment and assault (AFP, 2011). Feminists also remain concerned with the way in which victims are still blamed for violent crimes, particularly rape, challenging the assertion that a woman can “ask for” sexual violence through her clothing and demeanour by pointing to psychological studies which suggest that rapists do not discriminate when it comes to what their victim wears (Ross, 2011). Feminists are not only interested in the way women’s bodies are treated by men, but also the way in which women view their own bodies. Hence feminists are also concerned with body image issues and eating disorders. In Australia, 2% of the population suffers from eating disorders, with 90% of those affected being women (Mindframe National Media Initiative, 2011). That such problems are on the rise deeply worries feminists, who lament the perceived link between thinness and happiness (Boles and Hoeveller, 2006, page 110). Feminists are also concerned with the way popular culture has become increasingly sexualised, with young women displaying sexual behaviour that was previously associated with men, such as “going to strip clubs,

watching porn, and buying Playboy merchandise” (Levy in Aune and Redfern, 2010, page 53). Feminists such as Ariel Levy and Rosalind Gill are concerned with this development (sometimes called the rise of raunch culture) because it promotes a rigid form of sexuality with origins in performance and exhibitionism, which some argue is embraced by women because they perceive that it is what men (rather than they, themselves) desire (Aune and Redfern, 2010, page 53). Young women are also coming to view hyper sexualised behaviour as normative, with many appearing to believe that the ideal image must be as “lewd as possible” (Levy, 2005, page 168).

In short, feminism remains relevant because women still experience an array of difficulties within their lives which need to be addressed. Postfeminists may suggest that feminism has ceased to be relevant, but as long as the patriarchy survives, this cannot be true (Boles and Hoeveller, 2006, page 266). Evidence that the patriarchy continues to thrive is everywhere: in politics, the workplace, and in the way women’s bodies are treated. In order to lessen the effects of patriarchy, feminism must continue its work, embracing both modern and traditional goals, such as those laid out by Aune and Redfern: consciousness raising; greater sexual freedom and choice; the liberation of women’s bodies; an end to violence against women; equality at work and home; politics and religion transformed; the freedom of popular culture and sexism; and the reclaiming of feminism as both a strong movement and a worthwhile ideology (Aune and Redfern, 2010, page 17). In order for such aims to be achieved, the public first need to be educated about feminism, for while the statistics postfeminists present are questionable, it is true that many women have turned away from feminism. What postfeminists do not fully comprehend, however, is that much of this distaste women hold is not in fact for feminism itself, but what they perceive feminism to be. When young women think of feminism, they do not appear to think of a vibrant and exciting movement that brought them the rights they have today, but instead they imagine media caricatures designed to stigmatise feminists and protect the status quo. However, this is not the fault of the young women, they are simply believing the words of those who would uphold the patriarchy in order to maintain their own power. In order for feminism to gain in strength, women must learn the truth about the movement, its ideas, aims and achievements, and in doing so, some will come to realise that feminism alone is the ideology that can help them build a better future for women.

## CONCLUSION

When I began this thesis, I knew little to nothing about feminism. I had read a few pages on the subject in my international relations and political theory textbooks, and I had heard my mother reminisce about attending *Take Back the Night* marches, but on the whole, I was ignorant. Yet, from what I did know, I was interested. I found concepts such as sisterhood and equality appealing, and I enjoyed the feminist styling of musicians such as Bikini Kill and Kate Nash. Thus, I chose to study feminism purely out of curiosity and interest – it was a topic I wished to learn more about. Being influenced by media perceptions and popular discussion, I decided to focus my study on how relevant feminism is to the women of modern day Australia. I held a vague belief that feminism was indeed still relevant, but I was not particularly sure why that was so, or how feminism could be utilised to help women. Upon beginning my research, it did not take long for me to become convinced that feminism remains not only relevant, but entirely necessary. When I learned that female university graduates go on to earn significantly less than their male counterparts (Collins, 2010), women make up less than 40% of parliament (Burgmann, 2010), and young women were viewing raunch culture as normative (Levy, 2005, page 168), I was thoroughly persuaded that the work of feminism is far from done. Women still experience many difficulties in their lives as a result of patriarchy, and feminism is the ideal tool to address such problems, given its focus on women, desire for emancipation, and proven credentials.

Among the first things I learned in my research is that feminism is both a socio political movement, and an ideology which analyses the positions of women globally and seeks to explain why gender inequalities exist, and how best they can be addressed (Boles and Hoeveller, 2006, page 1). As was discussed in Chapter One, the aim of both the theoretical and practical sides of feminism is to emancipate women from patriarchy (Gamble, 2001, page vii). Though there are a number of schools of feminist thought, such as radical, liberal, Marxist, and socialist feminism,

the various feminisms are unified by this overarching goal of achieving equality through minimizing the influence of patriarchal control. In order to create change, feminists use a variety of methods, including consciousness raising and protest. Consciousness raising involves teaching women about feminism through group meetings and online activities such as blogging and forum discussions (Boles and Hoeveller, 2006, page 88). Protest continues to be a popular activity, with events such as *Take Back the Night* and *SlutWalk* attracting thousands of women (AFP, 2011). Throughout this thesis I have argued that women have yet to achieve equality, and that the means to creating change is feminism. The reason why feminism remains the best solution for women lies embedded in its very nature. Feminism is the greatest option for women because it is the only ideology / movement that is tailored specifically for their needs. Thus, while other branches of thought such as socialism, Marxism, and liberalism may also be concerned with achieving societal change, feminism is focused specifically on improving life for women and putting an end to sex based injustices.

I also argue that feminism is the ideal movement to achieve change for modern women because it has already proved itself capable of creating a more egalitarian society. Prior to feminism, women had very few rights and freedoms. Before the First Wave, women were unable to vote (Oldfield, 1992, page 189), or gain divorce without proving their husband had engaged in multiple acts of adultery, sodomy, bestiality, or incest (Oldfield, 1992, page 6). In the 1970s and 80s, feminists achieved even more change, with the institution of anti-discrimination legislature (Australian Government Com Law, 1991). Women also won greater equality in the workplace, with the 1969 Equal Pay for Equal Work, and 1972 Equal Pay for Work of Comparable Value rulings (Labour Information Network, 1997). Feminists also created more educational opportunities for women, helping them to attend university and making school curriculums less gendered (Gaskell and Taylor, 2003, page 7). Women of the 1990s continued the feminist tradition, making many changes

to society, including winning legislative change in the form of the Equal Opportunity for Women in the Workplace Act of 1999 (Australian Government ComLaw, 1999). Feminist activity and thought has aided in bringing about all these changes, thus I argue that a strong and thriving feminist movement could continue to build on such accomplishments, creating a fairer society. Feminist achievements should also be better understood by modern women - perhaps if younger women were more aware of the way past feminist gains have positively impacted their lives, they would have a more positive view of feminism.

When reading about feminism, I also realised that it attracts much criticism. As feminism aims to alter existing power structures, it has often been met by criticism from those who benefit from patriarchy and do not wish to lose their clout to the creation of greater equality. Thus, postfeminism is not particularly original, but merely the latest incarnation of an ongoing backlash seeking to discredit and effectively undermine feminism. That which is labelled postfeminism comes in multiple forms – antifeminism, *faux feminism*, modern feminism, and criticism of earlier movements. Within the sub strands of postfeminist thought, there are a number of refutable arguments. Many postfeminists argue that feminism has achieved its aims and is no longer necessary. Given that the pay gap between men and women in Australia is widening (Women's Electoral Lobby, 2009, page 1), women still struggle to balance work and family – in part because of a lack of quality and affordable childcare (Cassells, Harding, Lloyd, and McNamara, 2007, page 123), and patriarchal norms continue to negatively impact rape victims (Ross, 2011) the feminist project is far from complete. Inequality is not limited to the aforementioned areas, but instead encompasses a vast array of arenas as women continue to be disadvantaged in their work lives, politics, and in the way their bodies are treated.

After determining that gender based inequality still exists, and that feminism is needed to address such problems, the next step is to determine what the new feminist agenda should be. I argue that feminists should adopt the prescriptions laid

out by Aune and Redfern in *Reclaiming the F Word: The New Feminist Movement*, whilst keeping in mind the traditional goals of feminism as described by earlier feminists of the 1800s and 1970s in particular. Aune and Redfern argue that feminists should aim to do the following – liberate women’s bodies; allow for greater sexual freedom and choice; end violence against women; create a more equal work and home environment; transform politics and popular culture; and reclaim feminism (Aune and Redfern, 2010, page v). Achieving such goals will involve utilising classic feminist techniques such as consciousness raising and protest, whilst working with governments and non-governmental organisations. Aune and Redfern also encourage women to work on their individual feminist growth by reading about feminist issues; taking part in activist groups; and reclaiming “the word ‘feminist’ as a badge of honour” (Aune and Redfern, 2010, page 220).

A number of the goals described by Aune and Redfern, such as liberating women’s bodies; creating greater sexual freedom; and freeing popular culture from sexism, concern the body and sexuality, thus they will be discussed in unison. Women’s bodies are placed under an enormous amount of scrutiny, and much of this concern comes from women themselves. A 2006 *Grazia Magazine* survey of 2000 British women found that on average, respondents worried about their physical appearances every fifteen minutes (Aune and Redfern, 2010, page 21). Meanwhile, American women are exposed to approximately three thousand advertisements per day, in which women are depicted as “younger, more silent and (more likely to) occupy domestic roles” (Aune and Redfern, 2010, pages 175 – 176). I argue that in order to address the difficulties women have in relating to their bodies and sexualities, feminists must begin by lobbying for better sex education in schools. Given the growing phenomenon of raunch culture, young women and men are learning about sex primarily through pornography, (and the kind of soft core pornography found in popular magazines and music videos) and are consequently relating to their bodies in potentially harmful ways – often harbouring unrealistic



expectations about their abilities and appearances (Aune and Redfern, 2010, page 58). A 2008 study found many Australian teenagers to be ignorant in many matters regarding safe sex practices – 30% of respondents were “not sure” if they could contract a sexually transmitted infection from oral sex, whilst 52% believed they could not catch herpes if they used a condom during sex (Esteinweg, 2009). The same survey found that 69% of teenagers felt that they received inadequate sex education (Esteinweg, 2009). This is unsurprising, given that teenagers are constantly bombarded with sexual imagery, whilst many schools still preach a message of abstinence, not teaching pupils about contraceptives, abortion or sexual orientation (Levy, 2005, page 157). Esteinweg points out that “Sex education means a lot more than just explaining where babies come from. It can involve information about safe sex practices, different sorts of STI’s, male and female anatomy, and legal issues surrounding consent and abuse. Sex education can also involve more general discussion about relationships. While sex is a physical act, there are emotional and psychological factors to consider” (Esteinweg, 2009). If young people started their sex lives being fully informed about such matters, they may arguably go on to have better relationships with their own bodies, thus allowing them greater sexually freedom, and perhaps the ability to negate sexist media images they encounter.

Similarly, greater education may help to lessen violence against women. As a third of women will be “beaten, coerced into sex, or otherwise abused” at some point in their lives, violence remains an issue of great significance (Aune and Redfern, 2010, page 77). In 2004, the Australian Government spent \$20 million on a campaign aimed at raising awareness about domestic violence (Berenger, 2007). The *Australia Says No* campaign included television and radio advertisements, as well as a website and online booklet. Described as a positive step forward, the campaign aided in raising awareness, with more Australians now being aware that domestic violence is a crime (Berenger, 2007). However, negative assumptions, or ‘myths’, surrounding domestic violence continue to thrive. A 2006 survey of 2800 Victorians found that

40% of respondents believe men commit rape because they cannot control their sexual urges; one in six stated that women sometimes say no to sex when they mean yes; and 25% said that it is “not rare” for women to lie about being raped to the police (Cooke, 2006). The *Australia Says No* campaign did not appear to have much of an impact on migrant women from nations such as Greece, Italy, China and Vietnam. Whilst 800 migrant women in Victoria were questioned, only 4% had heard of the campaign, and 47% did not know where they would go to for help if they were abused (Cooke, 2006). Thus, greater intervention and campaigning is needed. Feminists and the Australian government must focus on the following – prevention and intervention, working with victims and perpetrators to discourage violence; instituting perpetrator programs to deal with and reform those who commit acts of violence; providing education about violence within schools; and creating further community awareness campaigns (Carrington and Phillips, 2006).

Transforming home and work environments is another significant aim laid out by Aune and Redfern. Modern feminists wish to see responsibility for both earning income and engaging in domestic work shared more evenly between the sexes (Aune and Redfern, 2010, page 107). Women still face a number of inequalities in the workplace and continue to be plagued by the glass ceiling, with female managers earning approximately \$22,000 a year less than their male counterparts (Lannin, 2009), as Siegel points out “equal pay for equal work is still a joke” (Siegel, 2007, page 8). Meanwhile, women continue to engage in more domestic labour despite working similar paid hours to men (Aune and Redfern, 2010, page 124). There exists multiple ways of addressing such problems. Young women ought to be socialised to succeed in the same way men are (Aune and Redfern, 2010, page 109), whilst being educated about leadership. However, a lack of formal education is not what holds women back in the workplace, given that female students outperform males in both school and university (Aune and Redfern, 2010, page 109). Thus encouragement cannot simply end with education, the workforce ought to be

restructured in a way that allows for women to better succeed – the provision of childcare should be improved, whilst more women should engage in activities and programs designed to build leadership skills (Yeatman, 1990, page 77). The existence of organisations such as Women on Boards do much to encourage women and help foster growth - such programs should continue their good work and inspire others to do the same. Perhaps similar programs could be created to encourage women to enter politics or apply for management positions. Women must also advocate for greater equality in the home, with men coming to share more of the domestic burden.

Like the workplace, politics must also be transformed into a more woman friendly environment. This will involve similar incentives to those that must occur in the workplace – such as encouraging women to adopt leadership roles and removing patriarchal barriers. The way female politicians are viewed must also change. Instead of bullying Julia Gillard about her appearance, media outlets, commentators and individuals ought to spend more time focusing on the positive achievements of our first female Prime Minister. It may also be helpful for feminists to point out positive examples of women in politics, such as Natasha Stott Despoja, who had a successful twelve year career (Barry, 2007) as a Democrats senator before retiring from parliament to better enjoy family life and motherhood. As many women are concerned with balancing career and family, Stott Despoja shows us that it is possible to have both at some point in one's life. Informal barriers that prevent women from entering politics, or achieving career success, such as lack of childcare; cultural and ideological patterns concerning gender; and negative perceptions of politics must also be challenged (Shvedova, 2002, page 8). In transforming politics, it may also be useful for feminists to advocate for other parties to adopt systems similar to that of the Labor party's women's quota.

The final goal that 21<sup>st</sup> century feminists should work towards is reclaiming feminism – redefining the movement as a vibrant entity that strives to bring women

greater equality and freedom from the patriarchal paradigm. For too long the postfeminist myth has prevailed, leaving many women and men with negative assumptions about feminism. As Baumgardner and Richards note, a large number of women ignorant about the nature of feminism do not wish to be identified with the movement “because they don’t want to be associated with spooky stereotypes about feminists and their freaky excesses, or because they resist being identified solely as feminists. You know this rap: *some feminists think all sex is rape, all men are evil, you have to be a lesbian to be a feminist, you can’t wear girly clothes or makeup, married women are lame, et cetera*” (Baumgardner and Richards in Siegel, 2007, page 9). Such stereotypes have turned many women away from feminism. Thus, the notion of “reclaiming” feminism is about educating women and men about what it means to be a feminist, and separating reality from myth, whilst making feminism more accessible (Aune and Redfern, 2010, page 204). Making feminism more accessible is not about “fixing” the movement, or selling it to the masses (Siegel, 2007, page 4), but rather focusing on issues that are important to Australian women of all races, classes, and sexualities. In making feminism more accessible, it must also become more visible. Feminists must continue to make their voices heard through literature, protest, activism, art, music, and any means possible. Reclaiming feminism also involves teaching others about the many achievements made by the movement. As Aune and Redfern point out, young women should grow up knowing why feminism is important and how it has aided in improving their lives, societies, and cultures (Aune and Redfern, 2010, page 205). Arguably, if feminism were better understood, more women would be interested in the movement and achieving change.

Despite what postfeminists say, feminism is not irrelevant. Nor has feminism already achieved its goals. Rather, feminism continues to be a vibrant movement with a long agenda and a distinct prescription for change. Women continue to encounter inequalities in their everyday lives – meeting sexual violence, objectification, and economic hardship more commonly than men (AlertNet, 2010).

In order to face, and eventually overcome, such inequalities, women must embrace feminism. Although feminism has made many great achievements, women cannot assume that the time for hard work has passed. Instead feminists must reassert themselves and continue to campaign for change in both the public and private spheres. As Pozner points out, women can involve themselves in the feminist campaign in many ways, perhaps by writing letters to editors and organisations; conducting studies in gender inequality and sexism; supporting independent media and artists; or publicly discussing ways in which the patriarchy can be improved (Dicker and Piepmeier, 2003, page 51). Feminist activism has created much change, and is in part responsible for many of the freedoms women enjoy today. Whilst feminists have many goals, the ultimate aim of feminism is to transform society – freeing its members from harassment, discrimination, and other confines of patriarchy. But in order to create such a society, women cannot give into the postfeminist myth, instead they must embrace feminism and continue to have hope in its ability to create a more egalitarian society.

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