

Grrl Power and Third Wave Feminism

She's cool, smart, confident, and independent. She can also be bold, rebellious, and daring. This seems to be the dominant image of young women today—an image manufactured through the eyes of advertisers. This ubiquitous image hyped in the media is represented in the tough and sexy “girl culture” symbolised by Buffy, Dark Angel, Ally McBeal, Motoko Kusanagi, Lara Croft, the Powerpuff girls, and Charlie's Angels.

All things being equal, will this image become universalised? Can young women be what they really want to be? Do these images reflect the realities of urban-based, university-educated young women?

Some women's studies scholars will argue that the perception that young women of today enjoy much more rights and freedom is just that—a perception. While they may indeed have more choices, in both the public and private spheres, they are also subjected to tremendous pressure because of the incongruities in how they grew up, the values they were taught, the standards of performance imposed on them, and the persona or image they need to maintain. Young, urban-based, university-educated women of this generation are socialised into a certain consciousness that embraces certain values inculcated by family, peers, school, church, and media, on the one hand, and rejecting many others, on the other. For example, many young women have a liberal view of their bodies and sexual expressions, including premarital sex. A view, it should be added, shared by their peers and families, although the former might be celebrating such openness of young women with their bodies and their sexuality, and the latter may be fretting about this. Yet, such an attitude of ease with one's body and sexuality is exactly one of the struggles feminists have fought for in the last three decades.

Why then do young women reject the label “feminist” even as they live out “feminist” ways of being and they have clearly benefited from it? Perhaps the portrayal of feminists by popular media as “man-hating, grim and determined women” has prevented many young women from identifying with the movement, let alone become part of it.

Is there more to the question than one of “image”? Another reason young women offer for their inability to identify with feminism is the political and ideological disagreements amongst feminists. While it can be said that this is

just reflective of the diversity of the issues and the cultures within the women's movement/s*, it has also prevented the movement/s from working effectively particularly across race, class, and culture. It is just too much for young women to invest in a movement and get caught in the middle of “debates” that sometimes turn ugly and bitter.

For older feminists, the reluctance of young women to take on a feminist identity is something to reckon with. The discourse of girl power evolving within the new strands of feminism requires more and deeper discussion in order to reach a “third wave” of feminism beyond Buffy, Dark Angel, Ally McBeal, Motoko Kusanagi, Lara Croft, the Powerpuff girls, and Charlie's Angels.

As we search for effective approaches, it might be useful to ask again whether feminism is indeed on a third wave. If yes, how does it differ from the first and second waves? This issue of *Women in Action (WIA)* interrogates young women who qualify as “third wavers” (those who identify with the concept of feminism but are still trying to define what this means for them). The same questions of just what “third-wave feminism” is or ought to be were posed to feminists who choose to define themselves as young even though chronologically they're not.©

Maria Eugenia Miranda discusses young Argentinean women's take on reproductive health issues, while Elke Zobl shares her conversation with editors of *Grrrl Zines*, a popular medium among young women today. Two reprints, Sarah Maddison's analysis of the challenges that third-wave feminism in Australia faces and Delanie Woodlock's critique of “girl-power” feminism bring us to the core of the discourse on young women and feminism. Two contributors articulate their experiences in, and observations of, the lobby for the youth's issues at the United Nations.

We're also excited to share with you excerpts from the online chat of six young women from different countries. The ‘chatters’ talked about their experiences, role models, views of the women's movement, and their own definitions of feminism.

We do hope that by focusing on urban-based, university-educated young women as the theme for this *WIA* issue, we are contributing in bringing to fore another significant issue affecting and shaping our feminisms.

Footnote: * The position that the women's movement is not monolithic and that various strands of feminism have also evolved to give birth to more than one women's movement has gained wide acceptability.

