



Evolution of Feminist Media in the Last Century

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Abstract. In Canada, the term “feminism” has begun to emerge since the late 19th century when there was the first wave of Canadian feminism. The era of this initial movement advocating for women’s right to vote came to an end around 1920. The second wave, which ended around 1985, was in support of equality in the fields of education and employment and advocated for a movement to end the violence against women. With regard to the third wave, it overlapped with those of the previous generations to a great extent, and the concept of the third wave came to an end in the 20th century. Finally, with the argument proposed by many feminists, the fourth wave of Canadian feminism arose with the assistance from technology.

Keywords: History · Human rights · Feminism · Media · Canada

1 Introduction

It has been five years since the launch of #MeToo Movement. Has it made a difference to what has been called a watershed moment for gender equality? In Canada, more women who have suffered from sexual assault or harassment are coming forward, and the argument about these issues, once hotly debated, is now fading from the public’s sight. Instead, the Canadian Human Rights Act of 1977 made equal pay for equal work mandatory, driven by the activism of feminism during the second wave in Canada in the 20th century [1]. By making a comparison between the print media of feminism in the 20th century and the social media nowadays, it is easy for us to see that there is a shift in the concepts conveyed by the old and new Media encompassed in the history of the feminist movement in Canada. This essay argues that feminist media were more politically influential in the 20th century. The content of the print media demonstrates, in a practical and empirically-based manner, a reconceptualization of political discourse and the progressive formation of political claims regarding feminism.

1.1 Research Method

Among the vast academic research of feminism theories and their movements in North America, scholars are accustomed to focusing on the United States or simply lumping the Canadian and American feminist movements together in one study because of their geographical and historical similarities. For a long time, Canada has been neglected by

academic studying while she has plenty of valuable resources worth studying. Hence, this essay will explore the Canadian feminism movement by comparing the second-wave media and social media nowadays. The first section of this essay focuses on the feminist movements and their print media in Canada during the 20th century. The second section instead, as the #MeToo movement roots in social media, the approach to studying this Internet movement is globalized.

1.2 Union WOMen's Political Framework

“Written materials, such as newsletters, books, and position papers, grounded feminism not only materially, but also in time” [2]. In addition to raising the public's awareness as much as social media, print media-based advocacy has also constructed a solid theoretical framework for the feminist movement. This is the reason why there was the development about the substantial body of empirical evidence and strategies, and as a consequence, the feminist movement during the 20th century was ground-breaking. In comparison with new media nowadays, the print media had far less access and production procedures. In the 1960s and 1970s, *Union Women* was certainly a renowned newspaper, which was published bimonthly and free to OWW members, and they were distributed to unionized areas upon request [3].

What is striking is that from description of the events happening recently on *Union Women*, people sense the perfect combination of theory and practice existing in the labour and feminist movements. The strike was effective, and it was a triumph achieved in the application of an analytical framework to daily situation using print media. “Before the advent of the union... The working conditions were unbearable... and the operators did not even get time to eat... a woman was fired for absenteeism, and the college would not even discuss her reinstatement, despite the fact that she had a medical certificate for the duration of her illness” [3]. Valerie J. Packota, one of the authors, named the incident as “the last straw” [3]. On May 20, 1977, the operators stuck to the strike. Valerie J. Packota mentioned, “When the college administration became aware of the unionization drive, strong pressure was exerted to stop the union movement. Despite management's best efforts, most employees signed on, and the union was formed” [3].

Imagine a woman in Ontario in 1970 who suffered from unequal treatment in her job; she would firstly see the table of data on unequal payment from 1967 to 1973 on *Equal Work* reported by Maryka Omatsu. She would be surprised at the exaggeratedly enlarged earnings gap between men and women, and what would she have done if she had realized the inequality? Valerie J. Packota's article surely provided her with a set of measures that could be followed by her—organizing a union and going on strike! The strike was a practical strategy worked out through the discussion by the activists during the second wave of the feminist movement in Canada.

Women's liberation takes time, requires lengthy discussion and the construction of a theoretical framework which is renewed constantly, and demands that “activists in the women's liberation movement to develop this highly complex explanatory framework over time” [2]. OWW President Evelyn Armstrong argues that “Women's equality is the key union struggle” [3]. Her theoretical framework is fully demonstrated in this newspaper, in which Evelyn Armstrong argues that “Full employment and performance-based rather than gender-based wages should be achieved. There is also the serious issue

of ensuring that promotions are based on individual skills, experience and qualifications. Unfortunately, requirements such as equal pay for equal work, adequate childcare and maternity benefits are often characterized as ‘women’s issues only’ rather than ‘workers’ issues. As a result, these demands are sometimes not seen as legitimate union demands.” However, only if more female gets employed, and more female labourers get engaged in the process of collective bargaining, organized by the union, workers’ issue will be focused on, and it is likely that these specific demands will be seen as legitimate demands. In the labour and feminist movements carried out during the 1970s, women got engaged in activism to sustain the union struggle by bearing this theory in mind, as they wanted equality. The result was sure to be, as M. Spink reported, “On September 12, Toronto’s public health nurses won an important victory for all of us on the issue of equal pay for equal work” [3].

What did the women union bring to the feminist activism in Canada during the 1970s? First, they appealed for “equality in employment” and proposed the demand that women should pay attention to pervasive inequalities. Then, leading the National Women’s Strike Coalition to organize the activities related to protests, feminists sent political signals of demanding equality and more political power to the government again, which happened 50 years after Canadian women’s obtaining the right to vote. Finally, through constant discussion and communication in the print media, these women’s movements and union alliances gained much theoretical and strategic experience in response to the situation and promoted modification to the bill accurately and effectively.

2 The Political Significance of Women-Only Places

Feminists in the 20th century regularly attached importance to physical spaces and face-to-face communication, which is what print media is all about. However, the feminists nowadays, to a great extent, have lost the ability to launch women’s centers and feminist bookstores, and organize autonomous political and social events [4].

Through the analysis on the print media of the Canadian feminist movement from 1969 to 1980, one striking common ground is evident—regardless of the primary source, the target audience was female. It seemed as if men were hardly ever regarded as a social group, and these print media did not convey complete offensiveness towards the male, but it could be learned between the lines that there was no longer the presence of a male, and all of the organizations and groups writing the articles could find physical places and spaces for the presence of activists in the print media. For example, Union Women published the same message about “call to action” in every issue of the newspaper:

Membership in OWW is open to all women in the Toronto area who are members of bona fide collective bargaining units. To join OWW, send this application form with proof of union membership to Holly Kirkconnell, 110 Glendale Avenue, Toronto M6R 2T2 [3].

The newsletter published by Women’s Place includes the articles about the activities conducted by the center, news about other women’s groups, and information about women’s concerns. Their real-time newsletter from the summer of 1972 serves as another example, which is related to the upgrading of the office area against Women’s Place. Here we get a very strong sense of the exclusivity shown by the movement with feminism as the theme in the 20th century.

“Dear Sisters, ‘Your Place’ has been in operation over a month now and this is the second newsletter since we moved in... The inside of the house itself is quote presentable, having absorbed 15 gallons of white paint and uncounted buckets of our sweat...the floor... and more furniture to be scrounged [5]”.

The message begins with “Dear Sisters”, which can be interpreted as the fact that if you know our existence, then you must be clear that we are feminists, and now we are writing this instant message to you, a woman. Women’s Place is, as their name suggests, a physical space for women only. They express the information that this beautiful office was built for women and the feminist movement.

“Liberation workshops are booming. The Fix-It course proved an embarrassing success... the volunteer instructors...can accommodate everyone who was here that first chaotic Wednesday evening ... more diverse feminist groups make use of the Place for their regular (and irregular) meetings... this summer, all rooms are fully booked” [5].

Women’s Place has already revealed the success of the theoretical sessions just at the beginning, and it is not difficult to picture the prevalence of the movements with labour and feminist as themes at the time. Not only did these places facilitate regular or occasional face-to-face meetings held by activists, but, more importantly, they were absolutely separated from the involvement of males. The construction of facilities ensured the existence of places for activism, and “ideas and ideologies and identities had to be not only conceivable but realizable, that is, they needed a place to exist” [4].

A physical place plays a role as objective as print media, and they have made great contribution to the spatial positioning of the feminist movement. Jessica Megarry asserts, “Feminism today occupies social media space, but transitory dependence has allowed the movement to build a physical base that is divorced from the local” [4]. Megarry refers to this political strategy which separates men from women as “separatism”, which she thinks has been conducive to the development of an innovative political and feminist culture. The separation from men, the establishment of physical sites, and the discussion on a theoretical framework in the details of everyday life propagated and practiced through the print media are the reasons why the feminist movement and its print media were of greater political significance in the 20th century.

2.1 The Importance of Time and Depth

“The second wave was the engine room for producing ground-breaking, radical political theories that are still relevant and powerful today and are still being used. I am not sure what ground-breaking theories our generation is producing right now” [2]. Social media is equipped with the revolutionary advantage of raising the consciousness of the masses through hashtags and its original properties, but its political influence is small in comparison with print media. Print media, the dominant tool employed in the propaganda during the 20th century, has facilitated activists’ establishment of ground-breaking theories. On the basis of a solid theoretical foundation, women were capable of discussing what actions were effective at meetings, and we were able to see their strong advocacy during the ongoing process when strategies were being customized. For example, the authors of “OWW calls for full employment” clearly conveyed the political demands of the union, “We demand an end to layoffs and call on the government to start a massive public works program...There should be education and child care programs,

job retraining programs... there needs to be a low-rent public housing construction program... unemployment can be alleviated by shortening the workweek without pay cuts... we demand equal pay for equal work... we must unite ...If we can do that, we can win" [3].

In the article "Equal pay for equal work?" by Maryka Omatsu, the reporter of Union Women, writes, "On June 2, 1977, the federal government passed the Canadian Human Rights Act (CHR), which was the federal government's response to women workers' demands for equal pay for equal work. It established the criteria for the value of work as 'the combination of skill, effort and responsibility' required to perform the work, and the conditions under which the work is done" [3]. This is the achievement of a long-established theory, a wealth of experience, and an approach to gender equality which is explored step by step by uniting women to launch the discussion about their lives. The print media, such as the newspaper named Union Women, was permitted to convey the process and results of this movement in a total of nine articles covering five pages and there were at least 2,000–5,000 words in each section. It was worth waiting for a long time, and the print media played an active role in fundamentally organizing the time and enhancing the depth behind the movement effectively, which enabled their political impact to be more profound.

3 Rapid Iterations in the Digital Environment

The #MeToo Movement only provides psychological comfort for victims. The fast pace and perishable rhythm are available in the digital environment operates, and thus social media-based human rights campaigns lack adequate organizational time and level of depth fundamentally.

In October 2017, journalists Jodi Kantor and Megan Twohey publicly revealed in New York Times that a greatly influential Hollywood producer had been systematically sexually harassing and assaulting women for decades [6]. As a consequence, the story led to an explosive backlash, followed by massive exposure and attention on Twitter and other platforms, and many victims of sexual assault retweeted the campaign, bringing "#MeToo" to different countries around the world as a trend. Specifically, the Canadian feminist movement has witnessed the fourth wave with technology as a pillar. It is certain that the response to the #MeToo Movement has sparked an empathetic discussion on the intersection of gender and power. Victims' voices were heard on the Internet, and many people launched the discussion on the pain of sexual harassment, ignored discrimination, and the concept of human rights. The #MeToo Movement influenced public discourse, with CEOs stepping down, candidates' failure elections and public figures falling out of favour [6].

However, "liberating women from male dominance requires that women spend time unpacking and demystifying patriarchal structures" [2]. It is rather necessary to conduct lengthy and intensive discussions during feminism movement, which was supposed to start from the basics of feminist theory long ago, because a complete set of theories and frameworks can only be explored after in-depth communication. These long discussions cannot be satisfied with the involvement of limited participants, and we cannot arrive at a level of in-depth communication with anyone via any social media.

Meanwhile, “social media has not saved activists’ time in ways which are useful” [2]. Through #Metoo Movement, people may have an in-depth understanding over the entanglement of sexual assault and power, as well as the tragedy of women’s marginalization, in the workplace. However, no one has the ability to settle the dispute legally, and it seems that similar cases of allegations will exist constantly, fading away from the sight of the public with #Metoo. The effects were minimal—few powerful men were forced to step down and no significant legal or political repercussions was available. Sarachild argues, “The women’s liberation movement first tried to break the isolation of women and then worked to clarify their collective situation. Social media, in contrast, requires women to debate ideas from independent, geographically distinct locations. Platforms build specific temporal logic around the need for immediate response and new content” [2]. Rapidly iterating and quickly fading, the nature of the social media acts as a chain that allows women around the world to quickly meet and reach a consensus in terms of emotional before being quickly iterated upon, and all the information stops there. In a digital environment where there is no quite perfect establishment of theory, “Action becomes easily divorced from theory in the digital environment, and this is having deleterious effects on women’s ability to tangibly challenge male dominance” [2].

3.1 Women’s Spaces on the Internet

The most significant difference between the fourth wave and second wave of feminist movements lies in the media. It is usually assumed that the Internet and virtual spaces are superior; after all, this is the inevitable trend of the times. Moreover, the accelerated development of social media has made great contribution to the rise of feminist consciousness. The #Metoo Movement has provided women with a platform where they can speak out, and they unite together as each person retweets or clicks likes. It seems that the hashtag Metoo has created a virtual space for females where all the women can voice their opinions safely and comfortably. “The culture of protest around digital visibility instills a ‘false sense of satisfaction in women, making them think they are progressing, but they are not. Women’s tweets and Facebook posts expand the power and reach of male-owned networks” [2]. I am fully convinced that there is no exclusive space for women on the Internet, and I agree with the statement proposed by Jessica Megarry that “social media enables men to censor and monitor feminist discourse”¹⁵.

First, female spaces on the Internet is not exclusive for women only. The Internet is, by default, a virtual social venue shared by men and women, and some feminists even propose the statement that social media platforms are possessed, designed, and controlled by men” [7]. There are feminist analyses that show that on the Internet—just as in the physical environment—men occupy more space than women” [7]. It is acknowledged that women have also been “severely underrepresented” in discussions on political topics on Twitter, and men still account for 80% of commenters on news sites [7]. The #Metoo Movement can be considered a significant venue for female’s participation, but can these be separated from male participants? One survey showed that “on the other side of the movement stand men who have never been accused of harassment, they fear the #MeToo movement may lose its original goal of empowering victims and seeking justice for wrongs done to them” [8]. The Internet is a public space where the speech of all the

people is evaluated. It is free for men to censor feminists' speech, "which poses new challenges for women's autonomous political organizations" [7].

I am very familiar with this phenomenon—some men in the #Metoo Movement express their voices to get rid of their grievances, and they speak out for the male community appearing as victims by regarding themselves as virtuous individuals. Men fear that the #Metoo Movement will disenfranchise them, and suddenly the focus of that movement will change. As a consequence, some activists spend more energy in rebutting these male perspectives and constantly reiterating that the original purpose of the #Metoo Movement was to allow the public to learn about the reality of sexual harassment. These rebuttals appear pale in contrast because they are unnecessary. As Jessica Megarry mentions, "Social media has expanded men's access to feminist strategic directions and individual feminist activists, making the political project of women's liberation increasingly accessible to male control. The digital space offers men more opportunities to interfere in feminist debates, position and obscure feminist activism, harass individual activists, invade female-centred spaces, speak out against women and entrench aggressive masculinities. As a result, the workload for women has increased: feminists must now expend a great deal of political energy trying to keep themselves safe from men in the digital environment" [7].

4 Conclusion

The theory of the feminist spiral proposed by Mary Daly, a Feminist philosopher, was unanimously endorsed by Jessica Megarry. This strikes me as it is similar to Marx's theory and the feminist movement in Canada in the 20th century. According to Marxist philosophy, the fundamental direction for the development of various things in the material world is an upward spiral process in their own right. Women's movement needs the depth of trial and the error brought by time and space. After each action, women reformulate their strategic goals for the following period, and they'd repeatedly make sure whether the movement being carried out makes sense. The space and time brought by print media are of great significance in satisfying the dynamic adaptation of women's emancipatory activities to the reality of life, "precisely because of the law of spiralling development, the process of feminism is cyclical, and it retains the knowledge of the past while moving into the future" [2].

"Social media is driven by different motivations and exerts greater flexibility at the level of production. Voting rights journals and feminist commentary are part of a conscious anti-formation movement aimed at influencing public opinion" [9]. The feminist movement in social media nowadays resides in the framework of the theories conducted in the past, and the activists participating in women's liberation movement are required to rethink and develop more appropriate strategies with the aim of satisfying the objective conditions nowadays.

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