

Pacific Institute

Feminism Through Time: Age, Difference, and Ideology by Tamar Shirinian

Abstract

For many years now there has been a general understanding within political movements, academia, and feminist advocates that there has been a shift from the feminism of the 1960s and 1970s, usually referred to as second wave feminism, to other visions of feminist activity and thought that began in the 1980s and has continued to change since then. However, this understanding of feminism (occurring as a temporal process) generally leads to a very limited understanding of gender as well as many other factors that contribute to the constitution of identity. My ambitions are to explore this “schism” within feminist thought through space so that global issues, which are pertinent in a postmodern and globalized world can be seen within various scales rather than as a teleological process of “women’s rights” and Western “feminist” issues. Within this work, I hope to discuss age, difference and ideology not just within a temporal platform, but within scales of time, space and self.

This will require a few steps. First, I will briefly lay out a genealogy of Western feminism. Then I will discuss the ways this definition of feminism has been perceived by some groups and identities as exclusionary. Looking at race, gender, class, sexuality, location, etc, through time, space, and self, we will better be able to understand how age has become such a large marker of difference within feminist politics. Then, I hope to be able to gather enough data from women residents of Lakeside Alzheimer’s home to see the ways in which women, especially those who are going through a period in their lives in an “incognizant” position envision their own identities and esteems. This may also involve a discussion of the use of language and age as requiring a new tongue. My initial vision of this step is to lay out some key words to bring up within conversation with these women and see where they take things. I am especially interested, considering the demographic, in body language, facial expression, and tone of voice.

I will consider all of this research data from which I will attempt to extract a goal. This goal is a new methodology from which all generations of advocates of feminism¹ can gain a way to replace the “schism” between “generations” with an understanding of scales. This will require a deep understanding of difference and especially, in this case, the marker of age as that difference. This methodology will be useful in developing a movement that both eschews unity through universalism and also abandons the notion that there are those who just do not understand. No,

¹ This term was established by bell hooks in “Feminism: A Movement to End Sexist Oppression” from *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center*.

we are not all considered “women” or even identify as such and no, we are not all concerned with the same issues. However, we do all have a strategic goal²: to end sexist oppression, as stated by bell hooks. This methodology is a means through which we may use this strategic goal as a way of learning to understand issues upon scales, including a scale of age.

² I am referring here to Gayatri Spivak’s concept of strategic essentialism where various groups, ethnicities, nationalities, etc, who have many differences between them, may strategically unite in order to identify themselves as a critical movement towards a goal.