The Changing Identity of Feminism in the Third Wave: A Critical Analysis

Jillian Marie Klean

Eastern Illinois University

This research is a product of the graduate program in Communication Studies at Eastern Illinois University. Find out more about the program.

Recommended Citation

http://thekeep.eiu.edu/theses/1380

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the Student Theses & Publications at The Keep. It has been accepted for inclusion in Masters Theses by an authorized administrator of The Keep. For more information, please contact tabruns@eiu.edu.
THESIS REPRODUCTION CERTIFICATE

TO: Graduate Degree Candidates (who have written formal theses)

SUBJECT: Permission to Reproduce Theses

The University Library is receiving a number of request from other institutions asking permission to reproduce dissertations for inclusion in their library holdings. Although no copyright laws are involved, we feel that professional courtesy demands that permission be obtained from the author before we allow these to be copied.

PLEASE SIGN ONE OF THE FOLLOWING STATEMENTS:

Booth Library of Eastern Illinois University has my permission to lend my thesis to a reputable college or university for the purpose of copying it for inclusion in that institution's library or research holdings.

[Signature]

Date

I respectfully request Booth Library of Eastern Illinois University NOT allow my thesis to be reproduced because:

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

[Signature]

Date

This form must be submitted in duplicate.
The changing identity of Feminism in the third wave: A critical analysis.

SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF Master of Arts IN THE GRADUATE SCHOOL, EASTERN ILLINOIS UNIVERSITY CHARLESTON, ILLINOIS

I HEREBY RECOMMEND THAT THIS THESIS BE ACCEPTED AS FULFILLING THIS PART OF THE GRADUATE DEGREE CITED ABOVE.
The Changing Identity of Feminism in the Third Wave: A Critical Analysis
Jillian Marie Klean
Eastern Illinois University

The author wishes to acknowledge the guidance and support of the Communication Studies Department at Eastern Illinois University, especially Dr. Shane Miller, Dr. Sherry Holladay and Dr. Melanie Mills, in the development of this thesis. Special thanks to: Chris Zwilling, Jillian Kern, Amanda McKay, The Klean family, Erica Hawkinson, The Zwilling Family and all my grad school cheerleaders.
Changing identity

This thesis is dedicated
to

Gary and Roxane Klean

My parents and friends, who each taught me about feminism in their own ways.
Abstract

This thesis examines three texts: Three Black Skirts, The Vagina Monologues, and The Art and Power of Being a Lady to discover the changing identities of women in the third wave movement of feminism. A rhetorical criticism is conducted of the images of feminism put forth by the texts to discover the identities that the authors are advocating and advancing for third wave feminists. This thesis argues that the multiple identities found in these texts are essential to the feminist movement. This thesis also explores the tension between individualism and community in the third wave.
Changing identity

Table of Contents

Chapter 1
Introduction ...................................................................................................... 3

Chapter 2
Methodology ..................................................................................................... 12

Chapter 3
A Modern Etiquette for the Modern Lady .............................................. 24

Chapter 4
Women’s Sexuality as Freedom? ................................................................. 43

Chapter 5
Feminist Style .................................................................................................. 56

Chapter 6
Implications and Solutions ........................................................................... 73
Changing Identity

Introduction

Women are bombarded daily with messages about what it means to be a woman in American society. Fashion magazines promote an unattainable body image, romance novels provide a cookie cutter view of passive women who need to be in romantic relationships, and television shows portray women as "accessories" in the workplace.

Even what a "feminist" is and stands for has a particular, perhaps negative, implication in the world today. The word "feminist" itself is highly contested because there is no one definition of feminism. Historical forces and modern definitions of feminism have shaped a concept that may be fearful, threatening or overly-radical for moderate consumption (Faludi, 1991). Indeed, the term "feminism" itself has never been widely popular (Freedman, 2002). However, the ideals of feminism have been accepted and even integrated with umbrella usages. As a t-shirt proclaims tongue-in-cheek, "I am not a feminist but I believe that women are citizens, deserve to be paid the same as men, and should be seen as people in their own right".
Changing Identity

In the past, feminist scholars emphasized androgyny as a way to play down the differences between men and women (Daly, 1978; Rich, 1986), but current scholars have argued for a return to femininity. This return to femininity is the reclamation of the factors which once were means for oppression, such as higher standards for beauty and the acceptance of weaker physiology. As women come to accept and take pride in the biological factors that make them women, it is argued that they will be embracing a more healthy view of what it means to be a woman. These feminist scholars agree that women do not need to put aside their femininity to have equal rights, just as a black person should not have to put aside being black, or a disabled person would not be asked to put aside being disabled.

Like any movement that significantly challenges fundamental social assumptions and practices, the feminist movement has been the subject of great controversy since its inception. In what is now commonly referred to as the first wave of feminism from approximately the 1850’s until the 1940’s, women struggled for suffrage, property rights and educational access (Freedman, 2002). The feminist movement has been through many changes and shifts since then. The second wave of feminism focused on sexual freedom, equal pay for equal work, and an equal rights
amendment (Friedan, 1974). Commonly considered to have lasted from the 1960’s to the 1980’s, the second wave of feminism is characterized by the major push for women’s equality and reproductive freedom (Freedman, 2002).

As the feminist movement has entered what is commonly referred to as the third wave, there is little agreement as to what a third wave feminist movement consists of and it is apparent that there is little consensus as to what issues are most salient for third wave feminists (Heywood & Drake, 1997). Third wave feminists are faced with not only issues of women’s equality, but also race, sexual orientation, and sexuality. Third wave feminists live in a social climate in which economic hardship is a concern for generation X and the wage gap is still not closed (Heywood & Drake, 1997). Along with economic concerns, third wave feminists are fragmented in terms of what makes a feminist, what is feminine and reconstructing (or de-constructing) the feminist identities that the second wave promoted. As Heywood and Drake (1997) so aptly point out

"Third wave makes the inclusion of persons of various genders, sexualities, nationalities, and classes a top priority and combines elements of equity feminism and gender feminism in a grassroots feminism that still fights for equal
Changing Identity

access and equal pay for equal work but also seeks to transform the structures within which young people work. The lived messiness characteristic of the third wave is what defines it: girls who want to be boys, boys who want to be girls, boys and girls who insist that they are both, whites who want to be black, blacks who want to or refuse to be white, people who are white and black, gay and straight, masculine and feminine, or who are finding ways to be and name none of the above; successful individuals longing for community and coalition, communities and coalitions longing for success, tensions between striving for individual success and subordinating the individual to the cause; identities formed within a relentlessly consumer-oriented culture but informed by a politics that has problems with consumption” (p.8).

Reactions to this fragmentation have been mixed with some feminists arguing that feminism is no longer the tour de force that it used to be (Freedman, 2002), while others argue that feminism is truly "humanism" for the first time in history (Baumgardner & Richards, 2000). As Time magazine announced in the late 1980's, some even consider
the feminist movement to be "dead". While popular second wave feminists, such as Gloria Steinem (ABC News, 2003, have been interviewed about the course that they see third wave feminism taking, the voices of third wave feminists themselves are rarely heard on the subject and are unlikely to be while there is a lack of agreement as to what the third wave is or stands for. It is even difficult to identify prominent third wave feminists, because the movement is so splintered that one figure or spokesperson is nearly impossible to imagine (Baumgardner & Richards, 2000). The third wave is more focused on the individual than the previous feminist movement, which also leads to less cohesion in the movement. Most significantly, third wave feminists themselves have yet to define their issues and form a coherent unity within the movement, and in fact seem to thrive on the lack of definition (www.thirdwavefoundation.org).

Indeed, a widely recognized problem central to third wave feminism is a lack of concrete definition and theory (hooks, 1984; Foss, Foss & Griffin, 2004; Baumgardener & Richards, 2000; Campbell, 1991; Conduit, 1988; Findlan, 1995; Heywood & Drake, 1997; Kamen, 1991). There is no solid agreement as to what a feminist is or stands for, and this makes unification within the movement difficult. Some
Claim that feminism is an effort to be seen as equal to men (see Friedan, 1974). Others comment that feminism is a separate movement to free all human beings from oppression, regardless of sex, race, or gender (see hooks, 2000). Finally, some see feminists as pushing an agenda to make women superior to men (Kamen, 1991).

hooks (1984) calls for feminist theorists to "resist hegemonic dominance of feminist thought by insisting that it is a theory in the making" (p.10-11). This resistance comes from not allowing feminism to be pigeon-holed into one area or another. It is argued that it would be easier to dismiss feminist ideas if they were able to be construed as just the concerns of one group or only consisting of one or two concerns. Instead the third wave is much more encompassing of diverse positions and agendas, and, therefore, much more malleable. This "theory in the making" (hooks, 2000) also allows the movement to move into new areas or tackle existing concerns, while still remaining true to its ideals.

Difficulty with definitions has led to splintered perceptions about feminism and, worse yet, such fragmentation may actually contribute to false ideologies and hegemonic domination in the field of feminist studies (Friedlin, 2002). As feminists struggle to define
Changing Identity

themselves, there is more probability of being seen as unorganized or incompetent by those around them. Therefore the feminist movement adds to its own murkiness, through its primary goal of not having one dominant, over-arching structure.

The goal of this thesis is to conduct an in-depth analysis of three selected texts in third wave feminist print media for current constructions of feminist identity. This thesis explores the important question of what values are being used to construct feminist messages in the settings of media and popular print. This paper seeks to further research the area of feminist value systems and examine the roles for women that those values promote. The questions that will be addressed center around value systems and identity construction. How do these particular texts construct an identity or multiple identities for third wave feminists and what values are being used? Why are these particular identities being addressed in lieu of others? How do these artifacts define what a third wave feminist is and what issues third wave feminism is dealing with? Such questions are crucial to ask in the discovery of what third wave feminism pertains to.

This study of identity construction in the third wave is especially important in light of the changing face of
feminism. As the third wave identity is more fully explored, more understanding of the third wave will be achieved. The objective of this thesis is to examine these images of feminist thought from a rhetorical standpoint and focus on how these sub-categories affect the feminist movement in general. Rhetorical criticism is an appropriate tool to use in discovering and evaluating the underlying assumptions such as identities are built on, because social identities are rhetorically constructed (Charland, 1987; Foss, 1983; Foss, 1986; Hecht & Faulkner, 2000; McGee, 1975). The themes that will be discussed within this thesis are: feminism as modern etiquette, feminist as sexual being and the identity assumed for third wave feminists.

Third wave feminism has been defined as “the core mass of the current women’s movement in their late teens through early twenties” (Baumgardener & Richards, 2002, p.401), although other sources have identified the third wave as women between the ages of 15 and 30 (www.thirdwavefoundation.org). The third wave of feminism is a particularly neglected area of study within the discipline. While there are numerous studies of famous figureheads within the women’s movement, or language of the feminist texts themselves, little attention has been paid
to the experience of third wave feminists (see Dow, 1992; Cloud, 1996; Conduit, 1996; Mandzuik, 2003; Parry-Giles, 2000). Attention to the rhetorical messages of these texts is important for several reasons. As feminist critics continue to argue over what feminism is, what it means to do feminist criticism and the lack of clear definitions (hooks, 1984), there is an ongoing grappling with the academic study of feminist messages and their implications for the world in which we live.
Methodology

The methodology for this thesis is grounded in feminist theory, feminist rhetorical criticism and rhetorical theories about identity construction. One of the unique aspects of rhetorical criticism from a feminist standpoint is that there is no monolithic standardized means of conducting rhetorical criticism (hooks, 1984, & Conduit, 1988). By refusing to limit ideas and research, feminist criticism encourages the study of areas that have never been researched before to better understand the impact on women’s lives. In this section, I will outline what rhetorical criticism is, how feminist criticism is done, how identity is constructed, and how this paper will apply feminist criticism and identity construction.

Rhetorical Criticism

Rhetorical criticism is the process of taking an artifact, analyzing the artifact and producing a compelling argument about the artifact that has not been previously discussed (Hunt, 2003; Foss, 1983). The academic character of the research comes from the validity of the argument
made by the scholar. There are several reasons why a scholar may choose to conduct a rhetorical criticism. Rhetoric itself is persuasive and inherently contains persuasive messages; this means that by exploring the messages in rhetorical texts we can learn about the author, intended audience and the unintended audience. As Hart (1997) explains, "Rhetorical criticism is the business of identifying the complications of rhetoric and then explaining them in a comprehensive and efficient manner" (p.23). In other words, rhetorical criticism is done to examine a particular artifact and make an evaluation of it. Rhetorical criticism involves judgment on the part of the critic (Black, 2003). Rhetorical criticism is an appropriate approach to this research because one of the main purposes of rhetorical criticism is to document social trends and produce "explicit understanding of implicit realizations" (Hart, 1997 p.26). As the third wave of feminists continues to re-define their role in the ever-changing world, the study of these sub-cultures is needed and important to communication studies. Hart (1976) has called for more research into the everyday, mundane experiences of life. This is especially true in the everyday lives of third wave feminists because of the shifting of the feminist movement and changing ideals of
feminism. This understanding of the everyday rhetoric of third wave feminists is not only particularly salient for researchers, but for third wave feminists themselves.

Feminist Criticism

Criticism and Theory

As stated by Condit, (1988), feminist criticism is, and must be, an ongoing attempt to "share the goal of eradicating the oppression of women through increased understanding of the conditions of women's lives."

Feminist criticism (see Hart, 1997) is a tool that is used to understand various mediums, including texts, media and the spoken word. In the search for the underlying value systems of texts, feminist criticism provides a particular lens through which to see the text and in turn critique it. Rather than providing a structured methodology to employ when performing criticism, feminist criticism is instead founded upon a set of basic assumptions that function as guidelines for how criticism should be accomplished.

As Campbell (1991) states, it is no longer enough to just recognize that women were important speakers in history. We must also examine messages for underlying value
systems contained in texts to understand the experience of women and uncover basic assumptions in texts that have not been explored. By exposing the value systems undergirding the identities proposed for third wave feminists it will be possible to evaluate how well these values serve third wave feminists.

Feminist theory and criticism has been criticized by scholars for presenting more of an ideology than a theory (Biesecker, 1992). The argument of challengers of feminist theory is that feminist scholars are unable and unwilling to examine texts or ideas from a fresh perspective, or to present any new ideas. This is highly unlikely with the ever-changing face of feminism and feminists in American culture. As more and more research is being produced that does not fit into the standards that Biesecker (1992) notes, there is less and less doubt that feminist scholars are unwilling to examine texts from a fresh perspective. As an example of a non-traditional work of feminist rhetoric, Swan (1999) explores the Disney movie and Broadway show, Beauty and the Beast in ways that do not fit old stereotypes of feminist scholars searching for ways to make every text oppressive to women. In this text, Swan makes the point that this classic fairy tale is actually a pro-feminist message. This is not exactly what a critic of the
feminist movement might expect (praising a fairy tale!), but one that is more representative of the nuanced and complicated research that is produced by feminist scholars.

**Uniqueness of Feminist Rhetoric**

Campbell (1973) treats the rhetoric of the women's liberation movement as a distinctive genre that has unique properties from other genres. It has been noted by some authors that there can be no clear-cut understanding of feminist rhetorical theory, because it differs so greatly from any other genre criticism, and is marked by openness and flexibility (Campbell, 1991). "The rhetoric of women's liberation is a distinctive genre because it evinces unique rhetorical qualities that are a fusion of substantive and stylistic qualities" (Campbell, 1973, p.75). The "fusion" that Campbell refers to is mediated on the fact that in order for women to succeed they must act counter-culturally against fundamental values of American culture (such as independence and achievement) and that women are more likely to use rhetorical messages in very different ways than their male counterparts. Although feminist movement rhetoric is often lumped into the same category with rhetoric from other protest or marginalized groups, it
should not be. This genre of rhetoric is particular because women are living in direct violation to the American values that our culture professes: freedom, liberty and the equal right for all. Women must learn to navigate society "backwards and in high heels" by learning to communicate in the dominate ways that society prescribes, while still remaining separate of that and maintaining their femininity. This is different from the way that race or class may be constructed by scholars in the development of other protest rhetoric criticism because sexism is a practice of domination that people are socialized to accept before they experience any other forms of domination (hooks, 1984). Also, gender is an element that frequently combines with other race or class issues to create additional considerations that require attention. Feminist rhetoric attacks the very foundation upon which cultural reality relies. In no other group are members asked to deny their membership, while still needing to maintain the illusion of belonging.

A Thirdwave Definition

As feminist critics have noted, there is a disconnect for women in experience and knowledge (Weedan, 1987).
Although it appears that women receive equal rights and consideration, the experience of women is often quite different. The experience of everyday women is short-changed by the patriarchal society which influences theory development (Faludi, 1991). The experience of women is often ignored and frequently not discussed because it does not fit the mold of being historical, done by individuals, or occurring in the public realm (Foss & Foss, 1991). Instead women’s communication is often done in non-traditional ways, such as with architecture, sewing, or mother-child communication (Foss & Foss, 1991). These non-traditional methods of communication have often been neglected for above reasons, but constitute a significant portion of women’s communication and thus deserve our attention (Foss & Foss, 1991).

The language that we use, or do not use, on a daily basis, can have a large impact on what is perceived as reality. This struggle over language use is precisely what feminist criticism is about; recognizing the influence of the world upon women and men and calling these factors to attention (Weedan, 1987). As stated by Alcoff (1988), feminist theory is the explanation and analysis of sexism and the concomitant justification of feminist demands. As feminist theorists continue to examine the world around
them and make sense of the world in a humanist and non-patriarchal fashion, our understanding of the broader human condition is simultaneously furthered.

This thesis will follow in the footsteps of Condit (1988) and use feminist criticism as a way of viewing particular texts for the ideology about women and feminists that the work contains. Feminist criticism strives to identify the value systems that underlie the rhetoric of women and more fully articulate how these value systems shape women's identities. This thesis will contribute, in small part, to the expansive task of identifying and defining third wave feminism by examining the language and value structures underlying these selected third wave texts.

Identity Construction

One of the key issues that this thesis discusses is the identity or identities that these works, *The Art and Power of Being a Lady* (Clearly & Von Mueffling, 2001), *The Vagina Monologues* (Ensler, 2000), and *Three Black Skirts* (Johnson, 2001), ask their readers to accept. How is identity constructed by these texts and what does that identity present to the reader about feminism? Following in the same vein as Charland (1987), McGee (1975), Foss
(1986), and Ishiyama et al. (1997), this thesis will seek to define what collective identity is presented in these works and the rhetorical strategies used to construct these identities.

Rhetorical constructions of identity are most often traced back to the work of Burke (Ishiyama, 1997). Burke’s process of identification is marked by what is construed as a psychological identity and one’s sense of “self” (Burke, 1989). By Burke’s definition, this identity is neither completely self-created nor entirely based upon the views of others, but is instead a combination of the two. This combination is built upon what the person feels about themselves and what messages they receive from the world around them. Identity may also be conceptualized at a broader level, however, as a “collective” identity of a group of people, or even a country as a whole. Such collective identities have received scholarly analysis from various rhetorical scholars. McGee (1975), for example, has examined how the identity of a “people” is constituted by the rhetorical actions that they take and the ways that others may interpret them. These rhetorical actions, such as language or shared cultural knowledge, can be used to support or disrupt a particular rhetorical identity for a person or a group of people. More recently, Ishiyama et
Changing Identity

al. (1997) point out "Collective identity, as a merger of individual identities, proclaims unity and sameness, yet as a rhetorical construct it is never seamless; it always contains within itself the dialectical invitation to division" (p. 91). As the authors state in their research, the results of an election can say more about the identity of a people, in this case Russian people, than about the electoral process itself.

This collective identity requires that its members share what has been termed "ideographs." McGee (1980) has defined ideographs as a set of shared ideas or values that influence the way that a group of people see the world, and therefore serve to unite them. In the case of Jewish identity, Hecht and Faulkner (2000) have demonstrated a significant shift in the Jewish community's sense of identity due to the acceptance of outside influences and beliefs. By absorbing new ideographs based on different values, traditional Jewish identity has begun to subtly shift. The Jewish identity has become less orthodox and more influenced by modern views, according to Hecht and Faulkner (2000).

Because there is little agreement on what a third wave feminist identity is, a rhetorical analysis of the texts contributing to the identity of third wave feminists is
Changing Identity

obviously warranted. This thesis will examine the messages put forth by these texts to uncover the identities that they are constructing for third wave feminists.

Artifact Selection

The artifacts chosen in this study were based on a variety of factors. The selected texts for this project are: The Art and Power of Being a Lady (Clearly & Von Mueffling, 2001), The Vagina Monologues (Ensler, 2000), and Three Black Skirts (Johnson, 2001). For the most part, the artifacts were chosen either because they contribute some unique aspect to the definition of feminism, or because they are print media that are popular among and targeted to women in the third-wave demographic. This popularity, in sales or readership, suggests that these images are being used as one way for modern women to construct a feminist identity. Artifacts for this study were chosen after careful examination of the types of feminist texts that are available from major book retailers. Upon noting that the types of texts targeted at the third wave demographic seemed to fall into three categories, these books were chosen as representative of one of three categories. The three categories that emerged were: modern etiquette or manners books, texts that discussed women’s sexuality in a
feminist light, and texts that promoted an independent, albeit feminine, outlook on life. From these three categories *The Art and Power of Being a Lady* (Clearly & Von Mueffling, 2001), *The Vagina Monologues* (Ensler, 2000), and *Three Black Skirts* (Johnson, 2001) were chosen as representative. These texts were chosen based on popularity and wide availability among popular bookstores (i.e. Barnes and Noble, Borders, Amazon.com, etc.) as well as promotional and marketing actions that present the books as feminist texts. In chapter three, an analysis of *The Art and Power of Being a Lady* as modern etiquette will be discussed in further detail.
Women have been seeking advice about proper ways of conducting a dinner party, writing a thank you letter, or dressing for a wedding reception since someone decided that there was a "proper" way to go about such things and that they were "women's work". The bridal industry, women's magazines and Emily Post have made a living out of prescribing behavior at dinner parties. Of course, according to these authors, "Rules of etiquette are nothing more than sign-posts by which we are guided to the goal of good taste" (Post, 1997, p. xvi).

Some of the ideas in etiquette books may seem outdated by today's standards; however, the desire for rules of etiquette is actually a contemporary trend in popular texts for women. Finishing school for ladies may seem like an dated concept, however, more and more authors are finding a market for giving advice about being a trendy chic lady in the modern world. In *The Art and Power of Being a Lady* by Noelle Clearly and Dini Von Mueffling (2001), readers are promised a "revolutionary guide to living your life with grace, brains, fearlessness and style" (Clearly & Von Mueffling, backcover). This particular text is one that is marketed as less of an etiquette book and more of a guide
Changing Identity

for women living in current times. The book is shelved among the women's studies books in large, national booksellers and has had good sales with an Amazon.com ranking 45,504 as of August 1, 2004 (Amazon.com). With the publisher's keywords for the book listed as "women- United States- social conditions" and "women-United States-conduct of life" this book appears to be a feminist text, but reads more like a modern Peggy Post guide. With chapters instructing about manners, style, romance and entertaining there is an implicit assumption that if women are well-mannered, they will be able to be fully in control and receive the respect that they deserve without having to be undignified or break a nail. This chapter will explore the claims being made about what it means to be a "lady" and evaluate what this text says about feminism in the third wave. Some previous rhetorical research has been done in this area, mostly in the arena of political etiquette or civility, that suggests that etiquette or civility is not empowering, but rather a limit to one's freedom of expression (see Foster-Dixon, 1993; Elder, 2002; Pierson, 2000; Hariman, 1992). Although no previous study of modern manners manuals has been conducted this may also be the case in other spheres.
This modern guide claims to be for women who are seeking a way to be a lady in a world that is rapidly changing.

"These changes called into question many basic ways in which men and women interacted on a daily basis, leaving many of us uncertain whether it was gracious or insulting to open a door for a woman. We applaud the early feminists—we wouldn't be where we are today without their struggles for equality—and questioning those behaviors pointed out something important: that how women respond to them is more significant than the tradition that mandated them. But we believe that it's now safe to evaluate some of these old chestnuts from the vantage point of the progress we've made. We feel it's silly not to trust women to be able to tell the difference between a courteous gesture and being treated like a helpless maiden. There's also the simple fact that the pace of life is a lot faster. In this day of "Be all that you can be," "Every woman for herself" and "She who dies with the
most toys wins," there is no doubt that we’ve lost sight of some of the most noble attributes that used to be held in high regard, particularly among women, such as: dignity, discretion, courtesy, humility, and social consciousness. Qualities that the women that we hold up as examples today possess in abundance. Qualities that our mothers were speaking of when they told us to behave like ladies.” (Clearly & Von Mueffling, 2001, p.11).

With the ever-changing role of women, the authors assume that women need a modern guide to good behavior. After all, the authors assume, there is less and less to dictate the behavior of modern women. What is the proper way to respond to a rude e-mail or what are the polite cell phone rules while in public? These questions are touched upon in this text along with other modern guidelines. This text is trying to reclaim the feminine, but does so in a way that puts feminine and feminist in competition. The off-hand way in which the authors speak of “early feminists” in the preceding quote lets the reader know that the authors feel that the early feminists did not possess or display the traits of a “lady”. This creates a situation in which the authors make it appear that women have to choose between
the feminine and feminism, it also implies that feminism is no longer needed by stating that they are grateful for what early feminists have done, but that the women we should look to today for examples are not those early feminists. This false dichotomy between feminism and femininity that the authors set up has been previously explored by Dow (1992), in which the bifurcation of popular cultural texts is noted.

The question that this paper seeks to answer is what kind of female identity or identities women readers are being asked to construct. These types of books are marketed towards women with some agenda in mind. Are the readers to believe that men already know the rules for using a cell phone politely in public, or that men just don't care or need cell phone etiquette to survive? First and foremost, it is an interesting word choice on the part of the authors to entitle the work *The Art and Power of Being a Lady*. What does that term "lady" imply and what power goes along with this?

"We know what you are thinking: why on earth are we dusting off such a prissy, nineteenth century term to describe our ideal for the twenty-first-century woman? Some of our closest, smartest friends balked when at the word when we first
told them about this book. But we thought more about it. The word “lady” [sic] is supposed to be the female equivalent of gentleman. Though most of our male friends aren’t landed gentry, they know what we mean when we call them gentlemen, and they know that it’s the highest of compliments. Then we thought of the women who come to mind when we think of the word lady. Women of style and of substance—women we admire and who inspire us. The more we thought about it, we realized that no other word would captured exactly what we were after.” (Clearly & Von Mueffling, 2001, p.12).

Although the authors give a treatment of what they envision a lady to be, there is little effort given to what a gentleman is and what types of behavior would be fitting to a gentleman. Apparently, men already know what a gentleman is and how to behave like one, although it seems that the questions that these authors struggle with would apply to both genders.

There is little mention of men at all in this text, except in cases of romantic interest. This is problematic in that is suggests two things: women are the only ones who should be concerned with manners and men are not required
or needed to do the same. The use of "gentleman" to denote a male counterpart, as the authors use it, obviously does not require a manual. If women need a book about becoming a lady, it follows that men would need a book about becoming gentlemen. Men are notably not included in this work however, and no such text for men is mentioned by the authors.

The main theme of this book is encapsulated within the assumption that times have changed and women, particularly, need to know how to act in these new and challenging times. It appears that becoming a "lady" is a way to reclaim the feminine. "What we've been left with is a whole heap of confusion about how to interact with our 'equals' without relinquishing those feminine qualities we may still like" (p.126). The text proposes that if women can adopt these recommended guidelines for behavior, they are more likely to be able to navigate the changing gender roles of modern times. Most importantly, why is this book placed upon a shelf along with other books labeled women's studies? A work that deals with manners and becoming more socially adept would seemingly be more appropriate on the shelves of the self-help or entertaining section of a bookstore.

A Lady by Any Other Name
Women that are named "ladies" in the beginning chapter of the book come from all different age groups, backgrounds and professions (within the celebrity range). From Oprah to Susan Sarandon to Mia Hamm, there are many women that the authors select for modern women to look up to and learn from. In the prologue of the book, the authors define for the reader what their conception of a modern lady is. "Was a lady a Generation X, working, single mother? Reflexively and, I know now, inaccurately, I thought of a lady as someone high society, even frivolous, with a disposable income and time on her hands, who knew how to set a table perfectly" (p. 2). Instead the authors created their own definition to include "Dignity and grace, for sure. Self-confidence, independence, a sense of right and wrong and the strength to act on it, a sense of social responsibility, humor, style, and good manners. Above all, consideration of others" (p. 2). "There is power in being a lady, in rising above the fray, in not trying to be one of the boys all the time, in using femininity not to manipulate but to bring a different, important perspective to the table" (p. 3).

The definition that the authors tout as "being a lady," has its own shortcomings however. The sense of
right and wrong that the authors rely on is never defined and would be difficult to do. How can a sense of right and wrong be defined, unless it is mandated and institutionalized? The emphasis on the consideration of others is also a problematic construction. Women have traditionally been socialized to bend over backwards for others, to be nurturing, to be passive and not create a ruckus (hooks, 1984). This label reinforces these stereotypes that the women's movement has fought so hard to combat. When women are being told that being "unladylike" to others is "unbecoming," they are being admonished for the very attributes such as outspokenness, aggression and competition that feminists have fought so hard to win. This admonishment does not empower women, as becoming a lady is supposedly about, but instead limits them.

In the text, the authors place a good amount of importance on standing up for what you believe in and social justice, "Whether taking time to help a woman get her stroller up a flight of stairs; making sure to recycle; donating money or time to a cause that she believes in; or raising her children to be the kind of people who will make the world a better place, a lady gives back" (p.142). Although this is a very positive message and one that definitely has good intentions, it is contradictory to the
progressive ideas that the author promote, such as being nice to others and having good manners. The attributes that the authors have reclaimed would make it difficult for one to be socially conscious beyond making cookies for a bake sale or serving coffee at a charity event. It would be hard to stand up for a cause that a woman believes in if she is always concerned about not hurting others feelings or “going overboard with niceties” (p.35). Women who are seeking to be “ladies,” as defined by this text, give up their right to stand up for themselves in cases of conflict. If a woman is always concerned about others needs, it complicates the possibility of her needs being met.

The section, “the ultimate social responsibility: Motherhood” (p.156), also contains mixed messages. The authors suggest that women must be willing to make great sacrifices for their children and that having children is the greatest task to which they can aspire. “A lady knows that in no other job are the challenges as big but the rewards greater; the love, respect and friendship of her children and seeing them turn out well”(p.158). This raises serious questions about what kinds of messages are being sent with this text. These statements would obviously not apply to women who do not have children or do not want to. As a matter of fact, the authors imply that
Changing Identity

every woman should have children in order to be a "lady". This also raises some serious questions about men and parenting. If the man’s role doesn’t require the same kind of sacrifice that the woman’s roles does, it may be that the authors assume that men don’t participate or don’t want to participate in raising children, an assumption that is unfair when applied to all men.

Diamonds are a Girl’s Best Friend?

Interestingly enough, the women named in the first chapter are all, with few exceptions, from a wealthy social class, which is a running theme throughout the book. The definition that the authors give for being a lady is one that privileges certain groups over others. A struggling welfare mom, although supposedly able to be a “lady,” is less likely to meet the criteria set out for a lady. There is less chance of a welfare mom having the time or energy to worry about the correct way to write a business e-mail or “looking right for the moment” (Clearly & Von Mueffling, 2001, p. 58). This definition is definitely one that privileges upper to middle class women. When a woman is more concerned about economic survival, she has less time
to think about what to wear, what an invitation should say or maintaining a "proper distance" with subordinates at work.

Being "high-style" is something for a lady to aspire to, and, of course, having rules for a cell phone means having the money to afford one. The authors expect that the reader will attend glamorous dinner parties, and throw them herself. "We say that if throwing the shindig is going to take even a minute off your life, order take-out, hire a caterer, or reconsider" (p. 110). This allusion to wealthy, upper-class lifestyles is central to the authors' assumptions of what it means to be a lady. Although some advice is given about "style is not about how much you spend, it is what you spend it on" (p. 60), the authors are ultimately sending the message that what a woman spends on her wardrobe or home is important because appearances count.

"A lady understands the power of style. We send messages through what we wear. Clothes- and jewelry, hairstyles, makeup and perfume- can bolster us when we are facing adversity or can send someone the hint that we are feeling sexy. They can say "Don't mess with me today" or get us geared up for a girls' night on the town. The individual way a lady wears it all tells the
world that she’s unique, and that she is decisive and comfortable with herself. She doesn’t have major traumas when she gets up in the morning and decides what to wear, because what’s in her closet reflects her. Maybe you like Renee Zellweger’s vintage chic or Whoopi Goldberg’s fabulous dreadlocks. The statement you make through your clothes and hair is the least important one you will make in your life, so have fun with it. A lady is aware of the subliminal messages she sends through her style and knows how to use them.” (Clearly & Von Mueffling, 2001, p. 57)

This runs counter to messages the women have been trying to establish within the women’s movement about not focusing so much on beauty and outside appearances. While a “lady” may be one that takes care in choosing what she wears, those who have little to choose from in their closets are less likely to be picky.

Heterosexuality as Lifestyle Choice

In the chapter entitled, “Romance: Ladies in love, like... and lust” (p. 125), the authors cover the subject of
how a lady behaves on a first date, what to do about going
dutch, and when sex becomes appropriate. What is blaringly
obvious is that this text is written to an entirely
heterosexual audience. “In response to those who have
declared it ‘against the rules’ for a women to ask a man
out, we say: rubbish!”(p.132). Curiously, this chapter
allows very many rules about dating, but all of them
pertain to a heterosexual audience. When clarifying the
rules for “going dutch” on a date, the authors point out
that “women are in an enviable position. Traditionally, the
man always picked up the tab (and many waiters still assume
this when bringing the bill)” (p.131). Where does that
leave “ladies” who are not dating a man? Furthermore, this
chapter also implies that all women want a heterosexual
relationship that will end in marriage. In the end of the
chapter, there is section written about what happens when a
lady meets someone who makes her want to leave the dating
pool. This section is the “capstone” experience of the
chapter.

The Identity of a Lady

While the authors provide a definition of a lady is,
readers are also being asked to accept a specific identity
with this text. Throughout the text, the authors extol the importance of being a women who is gracious, well-mannered, and cares for others. These guidelines are well-defined for women who are interested in becoming ladies. A lady, for example, goes to the doctor regularly, knows how much she owes in debt and is gracious to those around her. But the identity that the authors construct for their readers is one in which more traditional values, such as being nurturing, being relationship-oriented and concerned about looks, are viewed as desirable and important qualities in women. Readers, in other words, are being asked to accept that women need to get back to being more gentile and more traditional in the way that they do things.

Selling the Desire to Become a Lady

This text relies heavily on celebrities to sell their message to the audience. Not only are celebrities used as the examples of ladies, but almost all of the examples and illustrations used to prove their point are about celebrities. The authors use the names of and quotes from highly-recognizable and admired celebrities to make the identity portrayed desirable to the audience. In the chapter about style, the authors use a quote from Julianna
Margulies to make a point about a lady always having a trademark in the way that she dresses. "I always seem to find a way to incorporate a pair of trousers into my outfit." (Clearly & Von Mueffling, p. 69). These celebrities are appealing to the audience, because they are women in our society which other women are supposed to see as the crème de la creme. Celebrities are often thought to be the most successful, most beautiful, most desirable women in society. The reader knows that the celebrities mentioned are paid millions of dollars, attend the latest parties and appear on television, in magazines and in movies, and are easily recognizable without a lot of biographical information.

The second strategy that the authors use is the inclusion of online polling to report public opinion about specific topics. This strategy of surveying the general public lends an air of accessibility and legitimacy to the text. Polls allow the reader to feel that this is not just the opinion of the author, but that other people have agreed and even offered tips in how they conduct themselves as "ladies" in everyday life. These polls make the information and advice seem widely accepted, without any attempt to ensure that the results are representative of the population of women at large.
The authors provide several polls throughout the text: In the chapter on romance “Survey says... 96%: a lady may kiss on the first date, Only 6% never make the first move, 41% have never asked a man out” (p.128), in the chapter on the workplace “Ninety-four percent of ladies surveyed said they would address an offensive remark immediately by taking the offender aside, instead of ignoring it or saying something in front of other people” (p.103), or the chapter on friendship “this is probably why 37 percent of our survey respondents, when asked if they’d lend money to a friend, wrote that it was a ‘bad idea.’ Interestingly, the other 63 percent said that they would hand over the money to a friend in need without a second thought”(p.83). These surveys provide a basis for the reader to feel like these ideas don’t come just from the authors themselves, but rather are widely accepted and known truths that the authors stumbled upon in their surveying of the general public. Research on polls has been mostly restricted to the political arena, but it has found that the use of polls allows speakers to construct messages in ways that are appealing to audiences in ways that other rhetorical strategies do not accomplish by lending an air of creditability (Hall, 2003).
The third strategy that the authors are using is within the language itself. Labeling something makes it special in its own way, and this definitely holds true for the label of a lady. The distinction of a lady goes hand in hand with the reclamation of femininity. For women who are looking to set themselves apart and be unique in society, the label of lady may be one that they choose to adopt. The authors are asking readers to believe that by accepting a title (and the behaviors that go along with it) they will be setting themselves apart from others.

Discussion

The Art and Power of Being a Lady is a text which targets the third wave demographic and the information put forth for readers can provide insight into what identity third wavers are being asked to assume. This identity is one of middle upper-class, heterosexual, and more traditionally feminine gender roles. The authors put forth an identity for women that is not only based on being gracious, gentile and community-minded, but also on being a mother. The authors are describing June Cleaver in detail and asking modern women to accept this identity. This text is not just an etiquette manual, but also a look into
Changing Identity

what the authors feel that readers should aspire to be. While social responsibility, being polite and not hurting others' feelings are important, this text is a counter cultural message for most feminists, and it appears to be a message that places little value on previous feminist ideals. The text instead places the most worth on values that are antithetical to fundamental feminist values. While, this in and of itself is a testament to the flexibility and fluidity of the third wave movement it begs the question of how desirable and productive such identities are for third wave feminists, a question that will be taken up in the concluding chapter.
In *The Vagina Monologues* (TVM) (Ensler, 2001), there is a new take on what it means to be a woman in today’s society. For most of history, at least of the Western world, there has been little discussion of women’s sexuality (Dworkin, 1987). In this play, there is an overt discussion of what women’s sexuality is and how it is expressed. “I bet you’re worried. I was worried. That’s why I began this piece. I was worried about vaginas. I was worried about what we think about vaginas, and even more worried that we don’t think about them. I was worried about my own vagina. It needed a context of other vaginas—a community, a culture of vaginas” (Ensler, p.3). This opening line of the play reveals the purpose of this text. Written by the playwright, Eve Ensler and performed around the world *The Vagina Monologues* has created an international dialogue about vaginas. Although a play about vaginas itself does not seem all that impressive, an off-Broadway production that turned “into an international cultural phenomenon and has been performed in forty countries along with two North American touring companies, currently booked over 160 cities in the US & Canada, and has been translated into 35 different languages” certainly has something to tell us
The Vagina Monologues has been hailed as a hit, recognized on television shows and become a household word (www.vaginamonologues.com). The play has recently gone on to be a forum for raising millions of dollars in support of stopping violence against women all over the world (www.vday.org). Although the play has received much theatrical acclaim and praise (see Kranz, 2000; Booth, 2002; Baumgardener, 2002), has been labeled as a consciousness raising tools for women (see Scott, 2003) and received jeers from conservative groups (see Friedenfels, 2002) there has been little scholarly work done on The Vagina Monologues in the area of rhetorical messages.

In the past, feminist authors have pointed out that sex is not always liberating for women, but instead about possession (by men), communion, and virginity (Dworkin, 1987; Millet, 1970). As stated by Bland (1995), it become clear with the feminists of the early twentieth century that women were no longer seeing men as in control of sexuality, but rather saw the need to take control on their own. Yet despite efforts toward such ends, Butler (1990) states that women have remained the unrepresentable in a phallogocentric culture. "The feminine becomes marginal, absent, other; that which the masculine is not. Not only
is she different, she is also inferior. Masculinity is represented by the positive, the possession of the penis and its symbolic alter ago, the potent phallus. Femininity, however, is represented not by the vagina or the clitoris, but by the lack of a penis, an impotency” (Brewis, Hampton & Linstead, 1997, p.1279). Therefore, sexuality is based upon the “potent” or male view. As a result, female sexuality is rarely considered and even more rarely discussed. In this text, not only is feminine sexuality discussed, but celebrated and embraced. In TMV, women are no longer represented by the “lack of a penis”, but instead represented by the possession of a vagina. This is a significant development not only in how women’s sexuality is viewed, but also in how women view themselves in terms of their own sexuality. The redefinition of women’s sexuality as the possession of a vagina instead of the absence of a penis turns previous theory inside out. Women can now look at their sexuality, through this text, as not a lack, but instead a possession and a difference to be celebrated. The feminine no longer becomes marginal and inferior, but a positive possession of a vagina.

In The Vagina Monologues, there is not a focus on one type of sexuality, but rather a montage of how women experience, participate in and feel about their sexuality.
There is a theme of women's sexuality and sexual satisfaction or lack thereof. Women speak boldly and, at times, not so boldly about their sexuality. This includes all types of sexuality, lesbian, straight, married, and sex workers. This is an empowering text for women because not only are issues of women's sexuality actually being discussed, but all types of women's sexuality, not just those having to do with men, are discussed and accepted. This is a big jump from the "phallogocentric culture" that Butler (1990) describes.

Yet this chapter cautiously endorses such a shift. As previously mentioned by Foucault (1978), the idea of talking about a topic more to make it less taboo, may not have the intended consequences. The Vagina Monologues puts a lot of emphasis on the physicality of the vagina, which may be detrimental to its cause. By placing so much emphasis on the vagina, women can give up the power to own their sexuality and rather become possessed by the vagina. This tension of emphasis on the vagina versus the importance of discussing women's sexuality will be explored in further detail in this chapter.
The Angry Vagina

In "My Angry Vagina", the speaker is in touch with her own sexuality by giving her vagina a voice. "My vagina's angry. It is. It's pissed off." (p. 69). By giving her vagina a voice, the narrator is able to say that her vagina is angry at the "vagina motherfuckers" who keep thinking up ways to torture it; to keep her vagina from being happy. "Make something like that, something to give them pleasure. No, of course they won't do that. Hate to see a woman having pleasure, particularly sexual pleasure" (p. 72). But the author is not about to let that stop her, she knows that her vagina "wants sex. It loves sex. It wants silence and freedom and gentle kisses and warm liquids and deep touch. It wants chocolate." (p.73). The author recognizes the need to rebel against the repression of feminine sexuality, not with subversion or whining, but forcefully with clear ideas and a steady voice. However, this voice can only come from her vagina. This rebellion against patriarchal domination in the form of silencing and dismissal of women's sexuality is clearly an issue with women who are looking to feel better about their own sexuality, to reclaim sexuality as not about domination, but female expression and acceptance. However, this
expression is limited to the vagina. Although any rebellion against domination is better than none, the focus on the vagina makes the issue one of vaginas vs. men. This obviously is not sufficient, however, since women are struggling against domination, not another gender itself. Women are just as likely as men to be the cause of oppression to other women, by not allowing other women to talk about their sexuality, or labeling the other’s sexuality as "deviant." Women are continually struggling against the oppression not necessarily of men, but of a society that does not value the expression of women’s sexuality.

Reclamation

In "Recla[i]ming Cunt" [sic] the audience is asked to sound out the word "cunt" and see it as a word of power, a word that is generally not seen as a favorable or even appropriate word to describe a woman’s “dignity”. By recla[i]ming such a distasteful word, however, the thought is that women are able to claim their own sexuality as important, powerful even. By de-sensitizing the audience to "cunt", TVM is able to make the word less meaningful for the audience. Just as a junior-high school student who
repeatedly uses "cool," the word loses meaning for those who are exposed to the repetition of it. By taking away the shock value of "cunt," the audience is less likely to see the word as a weapon to use against women, but rather just as a word in the English vernacular. It is likely that the "recla[i]mation of cunt" is an attempt to have power for women over their own bodies, a way of claiming that if women can control how they feel about what is said of vaginas, they will control how they feel about their own bodies.

In a further re-cla[i]mation, "The Vagina Workshop," a woman is moved to tears to discover her own clitoris. "I’ve lost my clitoris. It’s gone. I shouldn’t have worn it swimming" (p.49). After being reassured that she did not lose her clitoris, she finds it and puts her finger on it. Through this experience she comes to a more holistic conclusion "my vagina, my vagina, me" (p.50). As she accepts her vagina and recla[i]ms her sexuality as her own, she comes to see herself as a more complete person. The question that this leaves the reader with about the text is how finding just one part of the self will lead to a more holistic view of themselves as a person.
In “The Women Who Loved to Make Vaginas Happy,” we find an example of a woman who used to enjoy the company of men, but tired of being repressed, signified by men shushing her moaning during sex, “Men thought I was too intense; some called me insane” (p.108). Instead, she turns to women who are much more supportive of her moaning. In fact she revels so much in her newfound “freedom” she dedicates her life to making others moan. This is one of the pieces in the play that gets the most reaction from the audience. When the storyteller is imparting her knowledge on the audience, she tells of how when men forced her to repress her moans, “it made most men anxious. Frankly, it terrified them. I was loud and they couldn’t concentrate on what they were doing” (p.108). So the woman tries to tone down her moaning to the detriment of her health “I began to feel bad about moaning. I got quiet and polite. I made noise into the pillow. I learned to choke the moan, hold it back like a sneeze. I began to get headaches and stress-related disorders” (p.108). The speaker also talks about making other vaginas happy, “Discovering the key, unlocking the vagina’s mouth, unlocking this voice, this wild song. I made love to quiet women and I found this
place inside them and they shocked themselves in their moaning. I made love to moaners and they found a deeper, more penetrating moan” (p.109). The interesting thing to note is that all of this is focused entirely on the vagina, sexual freedom appears to come only from embracing the vagina and allowing the vagina a certain amount of control. This is significant because it places all of the power for women’s sexuality in the vagina, and, in part, removes control from the woman herself. When the vagina is viewed as external to the woman herself this creates a problematic construction for women’s sexuality.

In “Because He Liked to Look At It,” a man is the salvation of the vagina. A woman comes to love her vagina through the admiration of a nondescript, ordinary man. The man, Bob, not only admires her, but is a vagina “connoisseur.” As the woman in the monologue is railing against the patriarchy, she discovers Bob and in turn discovers how to love her vagina. “He stayed looking for almost an hour, as if he were studying a map, observing the moon, staring into my eyes, but it was my vagina” (p.57). The woman allows herself to be lost in Bob’s admiration and, in turn, sees herself as desirable. This is an interesting example compared to the previous excerpt about men. Perhaps, the idea is not the gender of the lover, but
the intensity of the interest—the worshipping of the vagina. In this monologue, we find a man who is willing to just study the women, not as a sex object or for her thin thighs, but for the uniqueness of her beautiful vagina. "You’re so beautiful," he said. "You’re elegant and deep and innocent and wild." "In the light, I watched him looking at me, and he was so genuinely excited, so peaceful and euphoric, I began to get turned on" (p. 57). What is most interesting with this monologue is that in order for this woman to feel "loved" by a man, he must first accept her vagina and by doing so is actually accepting her, implying that the women’s worth emerges from or is dependant on the worth of her vagina. This concept sells women short in the long run by placing control of their sexuality in the value others place on their genitalia.

What is more important than the gender of the lover, or the way that women choose to express their sexuality, is that they are accepting their sexuality and beginning to talk about it. Although TVM has many interesting aspects that deserve discussion, the most interesting aspect is that women are choosing to start thinking about and discussing their own sexuality, and see this discussion as a freedom from repression, fear and loathing about their own anatomies. The identity that is put forward by The
Changing Identity

_Vagina Monologues_ is one that is open with sexuality, albeit a little too focused on physical anatomy. This identity asks women to place their self-worth and value in their vaginas and to subsume their own identity to that of their vaginas.

Monologues for Sale

The rhetorical strategies used to get the audience to "buy" the messages of _The Vagina Monologues_ rely on humor and intimacy. The monologues are based on actual women's experience and are told in a way that expresses the personality of the speaker. Women can empathize, sympathize and laugh at the experience of others. Tackling subjects that are usually considered taboo, requires a certain amount of humor and good-natured teasing of the audience. Women seem to be able to relate well, because this text tells stories of all women, regardless of race, religion, orientation or any other factor. By way of this, almost all women are able to find something to relate to in _The Vagina Monologues_. This allows women to create a sense of identification (Burke, 1997) in that their life experience adds to their understanding of the play and
Changing Identity allows them to create an impression of the identity presented based on both the experience and their own reactions.

Discussion

Overall, The Vagina Monologues is a highly interesting view of the world of women that the author envisions. The identity that the author asks women to accept is one of the physicality of the vagina. TVM has quite a few identities that are visible in the monologues, that of strong, outspoken women or that of women as victims of violence, but the diverse issues are united by an identity that is subsumed within the vagina itself. Whether a woman is white, black, lesbian, straight or bi-sexual, the common dominator is that all women share the experience of having a vagina and therefore are represented by it also. This identity of being defined by the vagina is one that relies on valuing the physical. Because women possess the vagina physically they can be identified by it.

Although the monologues are popular and have definitely opened up much more discussion of women’s sexuality, there is an excessive focus on actual anatomy and subsequent neglect of other facets of sexuality. If
women are held by what their vaginas want, there is little concern about what is happening in the mind or heart. If a woman is placing her self-worth and constructing an identity based solely on her vagina she loses the multiplicity of herself and instead a vehicle that exists solely to satisfy the needs or desires of her vagina.
CHAPTER 5- Feminist Style

“I’ve got a fake fur collar and velveteen shoes, I’ve got the freedom to shop and the freedom to chose, I wake up each day to the sanitized news. Is that why they call it the mass-culture blues?” (Johnson, 2000, p.viii). This quote is from the beginning of a text by Anna Johnson entitled Three Black Skirts. The obsession with shopping, social justice, and emotional and physical well-being is the center of this book by Johnson. This text is only one of a growing number of texts that promote an “organic, do it yourself, be self-reliant” lifestyle for modern women. These types of books have been selling well at major booksellers’, Three Black Skirts has an Amazon.com sales rating of 27,716 as of August 1, 2004 (Amazon.com). From the kitschy illustrations and campy language, Three Black Skirts is a combination style guide, etiquette book, and feminist manifesto. The cover liner proclaims:

“In a smart, funny and refreshingly down-to-Earth survival guide, Anna Johnson covers it all: health, dating, money, career moves, style, sex nutrition, responsibility, home décor, body image, friendship. And, of course, the indispensability of owning three black skirts- one to seduce, one
Changing Identity

to succeed, one to slob out in. What else is there?" (Johnson, back cover).

With the publishers key words of "women-life skills, women-conduct in life, women-psychology, body image, and self-esteem" it is clear that this book is marketing itself as a feminist text. As the back cover reads, this book is about "balance, strength, well-being- and a killer wardrobe" (Johnson, 2000, backcover). Suggesting that women do not have to give up style and grace to be self-sufficient, this text is predicated on the idea that women are seeking new ways to express themselves and their identity. Other work in this area has been explored by bell hooks (1989), in expanding feminism to combat "systematic dehumanization, worldwide famine, ecological devastation, industrial contamination, and the possibility of nuclear destruction (p.19)." hooks sees feminism as a tool to resist all domination from white supremacist capitalist patriarchy which includes sexism, racism, class elitism, capitalism, and heterosexism (hooks, 1989) The idea of a broadened definition of feminism is also contained within hooks (2000) Feminism is for Everbody: Passionate Politics in which hooks calls for all feminists to band together to make a difference in all aspects of life and to focus on the goal of social justice for all.
However, these worthy goals of Johnson in promoting healthy feminist attitudes and self-determination are undermined by the focus of *Three Black Skirts*. The author has good intentions, but these intentions get lost in translation. Upon reading the jacket notes from this book, one might be tempted by the idea that this text is a fresh outlook on feminist ideas, perhaps providing a more realistic view on body image issues. After reading the work, however, it is clear that this book is passing off as feminist the same topic areas as most women’s mainstream magazines, such as fashion, spirituality and love, albeit with a new twist or catchy French subtitles.

The Quest for Self-Discovery

Throughout the book, Johnson recommends that women come to terms with who they really are. Whether the method is loving one’s body (without dieting), solo sexual expression, or finding the spirit that they have always had, there is a strong stress upon the need for women to embrace who they really are.

"Given the ideal and the plastic surgery promoted to remedy our supposed flaws, it is really hard to love our bodies the way that they are- ingrown
pubic hairs, lilac-colored bruises, underarm flipflop, and all. But love them we must! The body, the mind and the spirit are of the same dimension. Insult one and we damage them all" (p. 12).

This theme of self-discovery is also apparent in the chapter on style. The author suggests that everyone can be a hip, trendy chic, if they discover what fashion rules work best for their body type. "Chic may have a code, but personal style takes that code and bends it to circumstance" (p.34). This theme of self-discovery is one that women seldom hear. Fashion magazines promote the same clothing for everyone (regardless of body type), television programming for women focuses on a handful of topics and "women’s concerns" seem to be lumped into a small category that rarely makes headline news.

The interesting thing to observe is that while the overall implication is that women should "find themselves" and work to attain the balanced well-being that the book suggests, there is little attention actually paid to any deeper subject matter than clothes and making oneself feel better about being shallow. There is very little suggestion about improving anything not image related. While style, diet and how one appears to the outside world are important,
there is little attention given to anything else. Even the relationship advice given is image related, focusing on staying in-touch with others, if only to keep from breaking social etiquette. "Answer the phone politely and clearly, you never know who is on the other end. Make friends with receptionists; they have to be pleasant all day long, you only have to be pleasant once. And they are the gatekeepers." (Johnson, p.169). No suggestions are given on how to become an actual individual, just to look or act like one. "Make-up isn’t magic, but it can have transgressive powers. There’s nothing like red lip gloss after a divorce or smudgy black eye-liner on a first date" (Johnson, p.52). What this book actually seems to be project is a sense of well-being about being shallow. In the quest to discover the right “chic” fashion trends to follow, or the right way to throw a party, this book gives the impression of an attempt to clean-up and promote stereotypical views that women are concerned mostly about appearances. Although this text is certainly a step above fashion magazines that promote an unattainable body image, there is still the fact that this book is centered around image, whether by self-discovery or by imposed societal rules, it is still conforming to a typical standard. This standard is especially damaging because it equates feminism
Changing Identity

with the superficial, asking women to focus more on outside appearances than meaningful content.

The Do-It-Yourself Because You Can't Trust Others Feminist

An over-arching concern in *Three Black Skirts* revolves around women being able to rely upon themselves.

"When your life is messy it's easy to feel that the hand of destiny is shuffling you to the back of the class, doomed to the dunce's corner with pencil suckers and the self-tattooed delinquents. And the frenzied pace of the way that we live does nothing to allay our own (perceived) inadequacies. How does any woman get ahead when the stakes are so high?" (Johnson, p.vi)

The only way that the author sees for women to "clean up" their lives is to start taking control of them. This could mean by dropping bad relationships, joining a club or learning a new hobby. In the chapter entitled *Handywomen: Get a Grip* there are instructions for being able to stop a running toilet, clear a clogged drain, and fix a flat tire.

"A basic household toolbox opens up your world. It means not having to wait around for someone
else to hang a mirror, fix a screen, or tighten a door hinge. A respectable car needs a manual, maps, a flashlight, and a repair kit, and your handbag should hold a Swiss army knife, a tape measure, a mobile phone, and a mini Maglite. With these tools, no matter where you are you can see what you’re doing, know where you are going, take a measure of what you need, and be able to open a bottle of wine in the middle of nowhere. Nothing feels better than being able to say ‘I can handle this’ (p.81).”

While this is not a comprehensive guide to fixing household items, there are quite a few helpful hints that any handy person would be able to use. A list of useful resources to get things done, and the tools that are required are always good to have at hand. What is most alarming though, is that the text assumes that most women are not able to do these things. These simple home or apartment repairs are assumed to be beyond the scope for modern women. Although this text does acknowledge that home repair or automobile maintenance is not a typically feminine activity, this stereotypical view that women would not be able to fix a tire or a running toilet reinforces stereotypes instead of challenging them. While the book is
a helpful guide for those with little knowledge, it is rather insulting to the "modern, balanced women" to imply that she should "read the directions. They may be written in pidgin, but the directions for the tool, adhesive, or replacement part can keep you out of trouble. Ditto diagram" (p.82). Well, duh! Reminding a man to read the directions before starting a project would be asinine, but here it is needed because the author is under the assumption that women have never wielded a power tool, or had a shop class. The same concept is found with the "handywomen’s guide to unclogging a toilet" in which the author suggests that the first step is to get a plunger, when the author refers to clearing a drain that is stopped up and advises the reader that "most sinks have a built-in stopper that must be removed before you tackle the drain" (p.85), or when the text suggests "take a can of WD-40 and squirt your hinges" (p.90) to un-squeak a door hinge. Helpful, but is a little rudimentary for most 20 and older women. Ironic, because this book’s demographic is exactly that audience.

While a book that acknowledges the short-comings of the education of women in the art of mechanical repair may have some much needed advice, it gets lost in tips that most women who have lived on their own would know. While
women may not be adept at home repair, the instructions for plunging a toilet are presented at a fifth grade level. This is problematic because it sets women up to consider themselves at that level when it comes to home repair. If the book provided more handyperson ideas that were more useful and in-depth, or at least at the level that most women are capable of, it would be a way of boosting women instead of assuming that the stereotype that all women are uneducated in this area is true.

This book also makes troubling class assumptions about women in terms of home or auto projects. The author assumes that readers would be wealthy enough to have the option of having such simplistic repairs done for them, and that it would be desirable to have them done. In the case of being able to use a plunger, most middle and lower class citizens are aware of how to use a plunger simply out of necessity. It is only the wealthy who would be in a position to have someone else use plungers in their toilet and not know how to use one themselves. Another way that the author uses stereotypes in her text is by even making the argument that women adhere to these social standards of not doing auto or home maintenance. While for women in a high economic class this information may indeed be quite new and useful, for most middle class people is simply patronizing.
It is also interesting to note that when professional tradespeople are referred to in this text, there is a clear gender preference for all handypeople to be men and for women to have to be extra careful when dealing with them. This promotes a stereotype of men as predators and women as frail, naive victims. It would be as foolish to assume that all women can twirl a baton as it would be to assume that all men are able to fix things, and that all people who do fix things are men. "The worst mistake that a female property owner or first time renovator can make is losing control over her own space" (p.91). "Specialized jobs like plumbing, wiring, complex carpentry, and tiling may be better served by professionals, but once you've experienced a tribe of mucho macho tradesman you will want to do it yourself!" (p.91). This promotes an identity for women that forces them to participate in home repair, not because they particularly want to, but to avoid being victimized. By portraying women as victims the text reinforces a stereotype that the book attempts to negate. The philosophy that women should take part in home repairs is less grounded in self-confidence and more grounded in a fear of female victimization. It is true that some contractors or handypeople may be in business for illegitimate reasons, but this is hardly the norm and can apply to tradespeople.
of both sexes. This only serves to reinforce the stereotype of women as helpless damsels in distress, even if they can fix their own grout. Overall, Three Black Skirts implies that women need to be self-reliant, but only to save themselves from others. Such a counter-intuitive message, while well-intentioned, undermines the positive message that the book is trying to relay.

Feminist in Motion

In the introduction, the author tells us that she has written this book in order to help women cope with increasingly busy lives.

"The nagging feeling of always being a little behind becomes a life state. It’s often the petty details that clog the wheels of your chariot: a broken sandal strap, an old debt you can’t shift, a receipt that you can’t find the night before filing your taxes, the belief that you look hideous in jeans, or a forgotten birthday. Gradually little glitches start to sculpt your world and, more insidiously still, your delicate sense of self" (p. vi).
While women are still pulling the second-shift in many households (Freidin, 1975), held to higher standards of beauty, and work for less pay, it is not surprising that women in the third wave demographic would be able to identify with this crunch for time. Women are constantly on the go, with careers, children, and caring for what they look like. This particular issue of being over-stressed is one of obvious salience to the third wave audience. There is an overriding message that if women take care of their bodies, have a good attitude and give back to their communities they will be happier, more productive over-stressed women. While at first glance this may seem to be an empowering message, the text does not question why women are so over-stressed in the first place, but rather suggests a mentality that a smile and a clean closet go a long way to eradicating stress. The strategies the text suggests are definitely good suggestions to relieve stress, such as yoga, meditation or a talk with a good girlfriend, but these strategies assume that the stressors cannot be changed, so what is left alone is interrogation of what might be contributing to this time crunch in the first place. The text does not consider the wage gap or second shift, and thereby treats these problematic practices as either natural or unavoidable. It would be akin to applying
Changing Identity

concealer to a pimple, instead of looking into the problem of the pimple itself. If someone resigns themselves to the fact that the pimples will never go away and never takes any steps to fix the problem, they will find themselves buying a lot of concealer! This emphasis on outward solutions to an inward problem is one that is ultimately doomed to failure. Despite the fact that this text does provide empowering messages for women who are seeking to “make changes to your life, to stick to a goal and be true to your ideals” (Johnson, p.vi), these messages are overshadowed by quick-fixes and superficial solutions. The identity that is being promoted for women by this work is one that relies mostly on outward appearances and catchy title headings and masks the real issues. While community service and positive attitude as a cure-all appears a desirable solution, these underlying problems must certainly be addressed when attempting to alleviate women’s overworked lives.

The Desire to be a Global Goddess: An Infomercial
The identity that this text wants its readers to buy into has been previously discussed. *Three Black Skirts* hopes that readers will see value in learning to rely on themselves, discovering who they really are ("make sure at least four nights a week are TV-free and twenty minutes a day are purely yours— not phone, no love interest, no worries" (Johnson, p.168), and being a more productive and nicer person to those around you. The interesting question is how this identity is sold to readers? This text relies heavily on trendy language and kitschy illustrations to make its point. Although the drawings perhaps do not display the full range of women, they do display women who are in a variety of moods, clothing and settings.

One additional factor in terms of illustrations is that they are mostly humorous. The chapter on "Mood Management" features a girl on a swing and the illustration about yoga features a girl doing an inverted pose with a Pipi Longstocking feel. Mostly though, the drawings seem to reinforce the way that women hope they are viewed, mostly thin, in trendy clothes, and with a touch of attitude in the right places. These illustrations seem to portray a desired self that the readers are interested in.

The second issue reinforcing the identity this book promotes is the language that is used. The overall style is
informal and chatty, rather than prescriptive and polemical. Fun poems, catchy titles and a positive spin draw the reader in. This text also at times reads like a confessional diary for the author.

"This book was born, essentially, out of sloth. Inertia drove me to act. An instability to stick to a relaxation program, manage money or even keep simple promises led to incredible frustration. To escape from the valley of the flakes I found simple answers to complex life problems. I stopped saying yes when I meant no, I tried to get up earlier, I established routines, and, even if I broke them, I attempted to make everyday count—be it shifting debt or shaking my rump." (Johnson, p.vii).

This informal intimacy that the author creates makes the book read like talking to a close friend. This strategy is an effective way to draw the reader in. Women are influenced by relationships with others, so it appears that a writing style in which the author is confessional, but not too self-deprecating, is one in which women seeking this identity would respond to. Overall, this text is a step in the direction of seeking to change old patterns, however, it falls
Changing Identity

short in asking the tough questions and reinforcing stereotypes that are not so healthy for men or women.

Discussion

*Three Black Skirts* is a text that has multiple layers and does at least superficially develop multiple identities. But the most complete and overriding identity that is present is that of the little girl. With the need to play well with others to keep friends, stay away from bad, bad men who will try to trick you, and the instructions about being a "handyperson" written at a level that little girls would appreciate, the identity of the naïve, innocent and playful girl is the overarching identity presented. Even the chapter on style provides a sense of little-girlness by alluding to style as dress-up on a grander scale. While this is certainly not the only identity provided for readers, it is one that has the most compelling evidence in the text to support it. This identity is predicated on the value system that the world is scary and the best way to deal with life is to avoid the hard questions. From the reluctance to address the time crunch that most women experience to the way that the author suggests nutritious
Changing Identity

eating habits the surface level is barely scratched on any issue, and no nuanced, complex, adult solutions are offered.

Overall, *Three Black Skirts* is a valiant attempt to provide a “Survival manual for modern ladies”, but gets lost in the process of doing so. While the author focuses on areas that are helpful and well-intentioned, the stereotypes relied upon muddle the message. The text has some good ideas contained within it, and the author makes a noble effort, but falls short of the text's goals in some areas. The identity developed by the text works in direct opposition to the messages that the author seems to want to promote.
Overall, these texts lend themselves to a broad view of what identities are being constructed for third wave feminists in the modern world. From self-reliance to being stylish, third wave feminists have multiple issues to contend with. As women continue to take on more roles in the workplace, in the community and at home, there is a growing need for flexible identities. Women are being pulled in several directions at once and therefore can no longer rely on rigid, stereotypical views of women’s roles. Women are expected to be employees, wives, daughters, mothers, managers, independent and feminine all at the same time. This requires a certain amount of finesse, but also an identity that is flexible enough to embrace all the roles that women are assuming. The third wave has come into its own in a time period where women have more freedom and more responsibility.

This is the Way We’ve Always Done It

While self-discovery and claiming one’s own sexuality are a giant step toward understanding the everyday conditions of women’s lives in the third wave, the
identities that are implicated in these texts are still predicated on previous standards and stereotypes. As in *The Art and Power of Being a Lady*, "There is power in being a lady, in rising above the fray, in not trying to be one of the boys all the time, in using femininity not to manipulate but to bring a different, important perspective to the table" (Clearly & Von Mueffling, p.3) While this might be an important goal, it is one that is undermined by stereotypical conceptions of the feminine identity. While all three texts seek to empower women, each relies on a feminine identity that is based on values in direct conflict with traditional feminist values. As a result texts that claim to be feminist instead pit feminist goals against feminine graces. While such bifurcation is nothing new in popular culture (Dow, 1992), the presence of such a split in ostensibly feminist texts is alarming. This false dichotomy presents feminism up as unnecessary and outdated. Faludi (1991) covers this dichotomy in more detail as her research explores the media backlash to feminism. As Faludi finds in her research, feminism has often been presented as an either/or proposition to women by the media, pitting motherhood against career ambitions, marriage against education and religion against freedom. Third wave feminists have embraced the very values and
assumptions that are used to attack feminism in general. Again, this could be a re-claimation attempt or a throw-back to more traditional values that threaten the fundamental assumptions of feminism. However this viewpoint of feminist vs. feminine encompasses only certain roles of feminism, not the whole idea. Third wave feminists are incorporating the feminine into modern conceptions of feminism in these texts. By doing so, the fluidness of the third wave accepting multiple identities allows women to pick and disregard facets of feminism that seem to no longer work, without scrapping the whole idea. The stereotypes that are being used here ask the audience to assume some identity, and this identity builds on these stereotypes, but also takes this identity in a new direction.

Rhetorically, the authors of these texts, at some points, use these stereotypes as a sort of starting point. This starting point could be asking the audience to name something that the speaker knows they will know about, as a jumping off point to a more complex issue. Such stereotypes are something that the audience can relate to, even if they don’t agree with it. From that point, the authors establish common ground to start with. This is especially useful from a rhetorical standpoint, because it
allows the authors to make certain claims without having to back them up or provide evidence to make a point. However, it is a strategy that could potentially backfire if the reader refuses to accept the stereotypes or puts the book down after reading the first few pages, convinced that the text is just an archaic portrait of women.

This use of stereotypes as a jumping off point for these authors provides some important messages about the ways in which third wave women are reconciling the multiple issues in their lives. First and foremost, this rhetorical strategy allows women to hold on to pieces of identities that they value, while discarding pieces that are outdated or no longer valid. For instance, perhaps it is important to women to be polite to others and throw wonderful dinner parties, but they want to do so not because it is what women do, but instead as a fun and valuable skill to have. In the second wave, there was the penchant to reject anything that did not fit the picture of women that they were working toward, in the meantime, some important and valuable traits or values may have been overlooked. Third wave feminists are reclaiming the identities that have been so long looked down upon, but reclaiming them in a way that is no longer oppressive. These texts have positive goals for women, but rhetorically enact them in a way that is
Changing Identity

problematic. The dichotomy between the feminist and feminine is surfaced in that the authors, at points, set up the two to be at opposite ends of the spectrum. The backlash against strict feminist ideals has bred feminists that are more likely to value the feminine, while at the same time re-inventing the feminist.

Secondly, the use of these stereotypes in feminist identity building allows women control over these stereotypes and therefore, makes them less powerful. If I accept the stereotypes that someone has about me, then that person can no longer use them against me and doesn’t need to. This allows women to not only own their stereotypes, but also to change or tweak them. As with Three Black Skirts, the stereotype the women are interested in clothing may be valid, but women are taking that stereotype not as a derogatory idea, but instead embracing it as a means of self-expression. Women are no longer forcing themselves to dress one way or another, be it in high heels for men or in androgynous clothing to be taken seriously, but instead in a mix of both or none or either. This is especially visible in TVM where women are discussing what their vaginas would wear, such as "berets, sweatpants, or a slicker" (Ensler, 1998 p.16-17). In the second wave, women had to work so hard to break down negative
Changing Identity

stereotypes that they also rejected the positive. The third wave is able to look at these stereotypes and create something entirely new and fresh from the old. Women are seeing wearing high heels as something fun to do, instead of oppressively dressing a certain way to conform. As third wave women continue to come up with their own feminist identities, the definition of feminist has also been morphing into a more flexible, accepting definition.

All for One, but Not One for All

With such fluid identities being touted as the “ideal,” it is easy to see why feminists from the 2nd wave have assumed that third wavers are only concerned with looks, weight and the size of a paycheck (Friedlin, 2002). However, it appears that the ideals of second wave feminists have not been lost, only re-defined in third wave feminism. As women become more flexible and fluid in their identities, the ideals of third wave feminism are more completely understood. As a movement that values several opinions and viewpoints all at once, the formation of concrete values and beliefs is counter-productive. How can a movement that seeks to be all-inclusive single out one identity for all women? The very idea that a text that
Changing Identity

could be considered feminist contains topics ranging from manners to auto repair speaks volumes about the changes that are taking place in third wave feminism. It is an important part of the feminist movement that all people be recognized as individuals, and this is a very positive step in the right direction. Having multiple identities allows women more freedom to choose the life that they want to live. When it can be recognized that one identity for all women is not going to work, the ideals of the feminist movement are much closer to realized. Women in the third wave demographic are as varied as the lives that they live, the fact that women are becoming and already are so diverse is a testament to the effect of second wave feminists. However, having too much value on the “I” and not the “we” can also create problems, something that third wave feminists need to be aware of. The downfall of this multiple identity issue is that women are moving further and further away from a unified group, which makes it harder to have any one direction, maintain constancy, or have specific goals for the feminist movement, except to maintain the flexibility.

While some texts seem to assume that women are already equal, there is still concern about women’s equality. There is also a growing awareness of the need to
Changing Identity

have the feminist movement focus not only about women, but instead focus on social justice and the commitment to others. Two of the texts examined focused on social justice and giving back to the community. While some second wave feminists complain that all of their hard work is enjoyed by a generation that doesn’t understand how hard won it was, the next generation of feminists is not only concerned with how to set a good table, but how to care for those around her in a way that helps out the whole world. While third wave feminists still struggle with issues of beauty, social class, and gender discrimination, there is a light at the end of the tunnel. Women are coming to grips, it seems, with the tension between being an individual and being a part of the community at large. In these texts then, it is not surprising that the authors are encouraging women to become individuals, but also that they anchor this individuality and self-reliance within social justice and giving back to the community. As Johnson extols readers “Selfless service makes you happy in a very simple way: The more immersed you become in someone else’s problems, the less you focus on your own; the more you contribute socially, the better the world looks.” (Johnson, p.219). In this way the tension that the feminist movement is facing is clear, that little can be accomplished when
everyone is focused on themselves, however, a woman cannot live for others alone. This is a tension that is both freeing and restricting for third wave feminists, while the focus on individuality is less restricting of individual women, the lack of unity makes it hard to accomplish or even set goals. This is a necessary point that the feminist movement is now encountering. As women continue to grow and exceed the generation before them, this tension between the individual and the larger community as a whole may become even more of an issue. As this individual/communal tension continues to be discussed and played with, the grey spaces of the feminist movement are becoming more and more mainstream. The fat movement, eco-feminism and global consciousness are no longer in the minority of the women’s movement. As women continue to seek what makes them individual, instead of what makes them part of a group (be it feminists or womankind in general), there is greater understanding of how far women have come, and how far we have to go. As women continue to struggle with equal pay for equal work, the second shift of work and home and increasingly unattainable standards for body image and female beauty, these issues are becoming more salient for feminists. As this analysis suggests, these new third wave identities are developing and encouraging individual
attributes quite well, but the lack of unity leads to an inability to tackle significant issues as a group. This struggle for freedom from the more structured identity of second wave feminists maybe beneficial for individuals, but ultimately is a sticking point for advancing the ideals or setting goals as a unified group.

Becoming Feminine: Coloring Outside the Lines

The second tension that these texts are dealing with is what is means to be feminine without having to adhere to a solid idea of what femininity is. Does being feminine mean wearing high heels or red lipstick? Can a woman be feminine and still stand up for herself? As women are beginning to become more aware of and more fully embrace feminine traits and tendencies, there is still a problem in that women don’t want to be compartmentalized one way or another. As The Vagina Monologues so aptly points out “I love vaginas. I love women. I do not see them as separate things.” (Ensler, p.105). Women are aware that being a woman entails certain things, but that it doesn’t have to mean that they have to bow to traditions or standards that they no longer believe in. In these texts, women are accepting an identity that admits that they are and like to
be feminine, but that being feminine means different things to different people and in no way makes them less of a feminist. Due to the fact that, in the past, feminists have been suppressing femininity as a stumbling block, women were encouraged to aspire to be androgynous or to see femininity as a bad thing (Daly, 1978). However, with the resurgence of femininity and feminine ideals, there is a tension in creating a feminine identity that is less oppressive and more flexible than in the past. The texts work on resolving this tension not by prescribing certain rules for what makes a woman feminine, but by encouraging women to discover what femininity means to them. *Three Black Skirts* and *The Art and Power of Being a Lady* encourage readers to explore their own style with clothing, make-up and surroundings, without implying specific rules. However, the tension cannot be fully resolved with clothing or make-up. This suggests that these texts are not providing answers for third wave feminists, as much as opening the floor to discussion. The concerns of the third wave feminists are more interested in social justice, community and global consciousness in a way that makes the term “humanist” seem a more fitting title, but at the same time this does not negate issues that have impacted women since the second wave. Humanist becomes not a “dirty” word,
Changing Identity

as feminism often is thought to be, but instead one that
describes a more holistic view of third wave women. As
women continue to struggle with these issues and engage in
dialogue about what it means to be a feminist versus being
feminine the identity or identity for women will
undoubtedly continue to change.

The reason why third wave feminists cannot be defined
is that the non-labeling, progressive goals of the second
wave has been taken to even further extremes with the third
wave. The ability to focus on making the world a better
place, and looking better doing it may seem a little
unreasonable or trite to second wave feminists.
Nevertheless, third wave feminists are taking discarded
bits and pieces of femininity along with the feminist
values of the second wave, to create something that is more
wholly inclusive than either separately. In reclaiming
their own sexuality, and unabashedly looking to make the
world a better place, the identity of third wave feminists
is more humanist than ever before.

Implications

Having established that such identities are being
constructed for third wave feminists, the question that
becomes of utmost importance is do these identities have a positive impact on the world of feminism? If second and third wave feminists are not in agreement on how the movement should continue, this may spell trouble for the feminist movement in general. Second and third wavers need to come to some understanding, and this will be quite difficult with the third wave so varied and dynamic on so many issues. Also, the lean toward more individualism in feminist identities may be an issue that causes more tension as time goes on. As third wave feminists continue to focus more on individuals and lack cohesive unity the goals of the feminist movement may become more obscured as time goes on. Although several of these texts include stereotypical ideas or rely on outdated concepts to make a point, the resurrection of feminine ideals and embracing of women who desire to throw dinner parties as much as those who wear Birkenstocks is a much more balanced view of women. Although not all women may choose to participate in either activity, the desire to do so does preclude being a feminist.
Limitations

Much more research needs to be done into the area of third wave feminism to determine if these identities are overarching throughout the readership and audiences of these works. One of the unique problems that this project faced is the lack of previous research in this area. Several issues within third wave feminism have been identified with this research, however much more research needs to be done; this thesis has barely scratched the surface. As third wave feminists continue to struggle with significant and varied issues, many more areas cry out for exploration.
References


Booth, L. (2002). I learnt that it could be a liability and an adventure having a vagina. *New Statesman*, 131 (4575), 63.


Changing Identity

Books.


Pierson, D.P. (2000). A show about nothing: Seinfeld and
the modern comedy of manners. *Journal of Popular Culture, 34*(1), 49-65.


