

Feminism in the Twenty-First Century: Does It Need [Re]branding?

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Abstract

Headlines such as ‘Feminism was something for our mothers’, in the *Independent* (Levenson 2009) have recently been used by the media to declare the death of feminism; others such as ‘Warning: Feminism is bad for your health’ in the *Independent* (Dobson 2007) have attached negative connotations to the movement; similar headlines have been in and out the news since the 1980s. The article claims that, contrary to such accusations, the feminist movement today is still very much needed and very much alive and that, even if it is undeniable that women nowadays are practising feminism in ways that are different from those of their foremothers, this does not necessarily imply that feminism has ceased to exist. Indeed, there seems to be evidence that young women are making their own constructions of feminism as a way of carving out a personal space for the redefinition of their own identity.

Following on from this and using the British context as a case study, the article provides evidence for the observation that an array of new feminist activities, including national networks, local groups, and blogs, has recently emerged. Yet, while these activities have become an increasingly important part of the feminist debate, they have received little media or academic recognition; young women are currently often depicted as indifferent to feminist issues, and young feminist’s activities are labelled as politically ineffectual. As shown by recent surveys, women in contemporary Western society, although embracing the ideas of feminism, seem to be too often reluctant to identify with the ‘f-word’. What this seems to suggest is that young women believe in the values of feminism but many cannot or do not want to identify themselves with the feminist movement.

Using newspaper extracts and blogs as case studies with which to raise points of discussion about the various tendencies in feminism nowadays, the article offers both some food for thought as regards our evaluation of the feminist movement at the present time and a possible framework within which to consider how it might be refreshed. In conclusion the article suggests that, as regards the future of feminism, feminists need neither to ‘rebrand’ feminism to make it more attractive to a new generation nor to call themselves by another name: they simply need to change the way in which they communicate their message.

Keywords: feminism, 'third-wave', baby-boomer, *velinismo*, body politics, f-word, consciousness raising, consumerism, feminisation of labour, marketing.