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Elaine Brightman

Me Too: An Analysis of Feminist Literary Anthologies

Introduction

Anthologies were essential to the Second Wave of feminism because of their portrayal of activist voices through both individual works as well as each publication as a whole. I wanted to look closely at how these literary elements reflected this collective activism, various emotions, and feminist movements. In order to do this, I researched the Second Wave of feminism originating within the 1960s and beyond, and I focused on how this feminist movement resulted in the widespread creation of feminist anthologies.

In regards to this research, an anthology is a form of literary expression and “cultural dialogue” that consists of selected works from a variety of authors and sources that are published together in order to collectively create a greater narrative from each individual literary facet. An anthology can “accommodate not only multiple points of view and multiple issues but also multiple styles of writing, such as poems, interviews, and journal entries in addition to more academic pieces” (Gilley 144, Smith). These publications generated by Second Wave participants manifest an “intellectual, social, and political project that has something ‘at stake’” such as the reputations of those who contribute to the cause (144, Smith). Through the selected works, the authors themselves, the overall background of each piece, and even society itself, an anthology establishes a greater conversation regarding the apparent themes found within as it “celebrates the bringing together of diverse voices” with a political, social, or personal reflective intent (Smith).

I investigated these primary narrations with a focus on a selection of works published in the 1970s and beyond. My initial goal was to discover how the movement has evolved over the

decades, the anthologies' intended purposes, and the commonalities they all share as these collective literary works give insight into these complex waves of feminism. Therefore, I highlighted the complexity of this continuously evolving movement beginning with the Second Wave and continuing into the Third Wave.

In addition to this, I analyzed its lasting effects within the modern era through my own anthology titled *Blessed By Light: Works by Women, For All*. In order to create such a piece, I requested and collected creative submissions from women within my own community, both from MUW and beyond. I created a composite list of individuals, consisting of family, friends, and MUW students. I contacted them with a specified prompt that served to help them in their writings or art, which took shape as original illustrations, paintings, and photographs. The women featured are intergenerational, with many living in the rural southern states, and their writings addressed themes of identity and self-discovery, abuse, and recovery. This will, in turn, serve to supplement this facet of the overall literary canon by providing proper preservation and documentation for the diverse narratives included in my anthology. I shared the publication with those who contribute, my fellow students, and staff from Mississippi University for Women. I also utilized these contributions as a way to reflect and compare, both contextually and thematically, to those found within anthologies of the Second and Third Wave.

Background of the Movement

Beginning in the 1960s, a political and cultural revolution occurred among women. Many women sought to challenge the notions of domestic ideologies and gender roles found within the 1950s era. They collectively found their voice in what is referred to as the Second Wave of feminism. This political movement did not occur out of nowhere; rather, long-standing ideas about inequality and the resulting anger that followed fueled this movement to happen. This

social and political movement in particular stemmed from long-standing ideologies regarding the foundation of social movements themselves—emotion. However, the fact that the movement attempted to counter gender hierarchies linked to devaluing femininity, emotion meant that many seized on the emotional content as evidence of women's inferiority and the correctness of existing gender beliefs as they were dismissed as "irrational and immature" (Jaspers 14.3). Women were viewed as disturbingly irrational beings who let their emotions fuel their actions, unlike men who were seen as supremely logical and reasonable. These Second Wave activists performed repeated acts of insubordination that led men to write off their movement as an outlandish, uncalled for, and unjust display of emotion rather than what it was—a desperate and justified plea for complete equality. However, without this raw emotion, inequality is deemed a rational societal practice. Rather than create a division between rationality and emotion, social activism should be seen as what it truly is—a fusion of the two, because "feeling and thinking are parallel, processes of evaluations and interacting with our worlds" (14.2)

Despite the obvious challenges, Second Wave feminists continued to pursue equality through their involvement and emotional connections with each other. Rather than focusing on "rationality, strategy, and organization," this movement was grounded in "questions of meaning, identity, and cultural production in collective action" (Hercus 35). This act of coming together for one common goal established and outlined this group's diagnosis that certain aspects of their lives were problematic or they suffered from some sort of injustice. They, in turn, banded together and provided a proposed solution and rationale in order to resolve this (35). As a result, emotion effortlessly became the fuel that carried collective action toward a lasting solution.

Anger, in particular, is essential to the foundation of collective action as many women connected with each other through this complex emotion. This anger became a gendered issue, as

women were expected to suppress this emotion due to their “lesser power and status” as women were forcefully expected to remain placid creatures of domesticity—always obeying, never defying (Hercus 37). As one might expect, the basis of this feminist revolution was anger itself—anger towards inequality, anger towards misogyny, and anger towards the never-ending injustices found in society in general. This anger was certainly justified; many women experienced this emotion as a result of sexual discrimination, assault, sexual repression, inadequate representation and rights, and other indignities. Working through this anger allowed women to find greater connections among themselves and the world around them. As they worked through their anger by confronting it and trying to diagnose its causes, it became an essential part of the process of small group consciousness-raising. As women collectively joined together and finally admitted they were angry, they could talk about that anger. Soon, they realized that their grievances were not individual, but collective and related to their roles and status as women. However, this anger was not simply directed towards men as conflicts among women soon arose in their fight for gender equality.

Throughout this Second Wave of feminism, not all women treated one another as equals, even as they collectively fought for equality. Rather, women of color were subjected to intense scrutiny by white women, and some were even forcibly rejected from this “universal” feminist movement. Feminism in the 1960s and 1970s was primarily projected as a white women’s revolution even though it promoted ideas of universal equality. Despite combating apparent oppression from men, numerous feminists entirely ignored their own oppression of women of color. They disregarded the “blind spots and disunities” that occurred within this supposedly collective form of action as they instead tended to “reproduce the very inequalities and hierarchies [they sought] to reveal and transform” (Biklen 451-452). As a result, this feminist

movement emerged as being predominantly led by white women deemphasized and disregarded the issues of class and race. Instead, these white feminists focused primarily on formal equality among men and women on an individual basis rather than on a composite, substantive “justice-based vision for social change” for all (Thompson 337).

Despite the exclusions, women of color actively pursued their own outlets for social change during this same time. Their activism, unlike preconceived notions, did not stem from this rejection and abandonment from white feminists. Rather, Black, Native American, Latina, and Asian feminist activism occurred simultaneously to that of white feminists, and women of color actively pursued new outlets for social justice beyond the confines of the Second Wave as they developed the foundation for the Third Wave. They actively began “working with white-dominated feminist groups, forming women’s caucuses in existing mixed-gender organizations, and developing autonomous Black, Latina, Native American, and Asian feminist organizations” while promoting universal social justice in regards to gender, race, and social class (338). A few of these outlets and organizations include: Hijas de Cuauhtémoc (1971), Asian Sisters (1971), Women of All Red Nations (1974), and National Black Feminist Organization (1973) (Thompson 338-340).

These are just a small selection of the numerous groups that emerged out of this movement. Despite their cultural differences, these female-led organizations sought to address racism, sexism, and imperialism in the United States. They did so through widespread involvement from women of all ages who wanted to make a deeper impact than simply gender equality. Feminism, in this tradition, is the “political theory and practice to free all women: women of color, working-class women, as well as white women as anything less than this is not feminism, but merely female self-aggrandizement” (340). In order to create a lasting social and

political movement, active participation and inclusion from all women is necessary. Feminism should not be deemed a narrow area of activism; rather, it should instead aim for complete social, political, and universal transformation.

Role of Personal Narrative in the Movement

In order to create even more widespread activism, a number of diverse women wrote about their experiences in order to document their involvement, both mentally and physically, throughout the duration of this movement. This use of narrative, especially through these anthologies, serves to preserve and document not only the events but also the sentiments observed by the individuals involved. As a result, “contributors to an anthology do not need to be academics but can be activists, poets, and community organizers,” (Gilley 144), and their literary works have “rich potential for illuminating features of the emergence, trajectories, and consequences of movements that are not yet well understood” (Polletta 419). Activism consists of far more than simply crafting narratives, but these writings encompass the entirety of the movement and even encourage others to seek collective action within said movement. These writings, in turn, shape the very movement they are written about. These narratives allow individuals to “make sense of the social world” as well as helping “constitute [sic] social identities” (Somers 606).

There is a direct link between these narratives and identity formation, as these works greatly affect those who read them. Social movements themselves are dynamic events that disrupt everything, and the movement’s literature is itself part of that disruption. These monumental societal events occur when:

[A]gency explodes structure, the taken for granted becomes precarious, when old words lose their meaning. Lives are interrupted, physical space is rearranged (think of street

demonstrations), the relations of deference and authority and civility that structure everyday life disintegrate and the old calculi of interest and risk suddenly lose their force. In that context, narratives may serve to contain the disruptive within a familiar form, to turn the anomalous into the "new." (Polletta 422)

Through these narratives, not only does the movement establish itself, but so do the people participating within it. Through the collective chaos, these individuals manage to find a facet of themselves through their involvement with the movement, and they choose to document this metamorphosis for others to experience, for those in their decade and well beyond. These stories evolve with the movement itself, as it shapes and molds its very existence, and these works serve to preserve these minuscule moments in time for others to reflect on and engage with.

This overall historic collection of women originates from a variety of cultural and social backgrounds, and their narratives have transcended the generations. Collectively, these Second Wave feminist writers and numerous social activists joined together to curate as well as to contribute to feminist anthologies documenting their struggles and triumphs both within this social movement and in spaces where they could react to its own confines. Indeed, because of divisions among various demographics of women within the movement, there are clear divisions in the anthologies produced out of this movement. Both white women and women of color actively pursued and participated in this expressive outlet and wrote extensively about their varying experiences.

Varieties of Personal Narratives Generated

Beginning in the 1960s, there was clearly an established relationship between emotions and feminist action as women used their anger regarding lack of representation and equality as fuel for their protests and writings. As a result, a number of women writers emerged out of this

movement. A key group of women writers emerged who rejected the “old genre of the female autobiography, which tends to find beauty even in pain and to transform rage into spiritual acceptance” (Heilbrun 12). Prior to this movement, feelings and expressions of intense rage and anger from women, especially within writing, was deemed unacceptable and inappropriate. In order to find success in their field, it was far easier to conceal their true feelings and emotions and craft ‘womanly’ works that would sell and remain popular among the general public. Rather than continue this practice, a number of feminist, female writers emerged who garnered immense controversy for their unfiltered, emotional writings, expressing deep pain, turmoil, and rage as they found inspiration within the “discussions of power, powerlessness, and the questions of sexual politics” that emerged out of the 1960s (17).

Many of these dissenters became the foundation of these political and social movements, and they are still revered to this day for their bravery and dedication to the cause. These women include Betty Friedan and her publication *The Feminine Mystique*, Gloria Steinem’s *MS magazine*, Audre Lorde and her wealth of poetry, and contributors to the Kitchen Table Press. These numerous women and organizations sought to “acknowledge the significance of intersectionalities of identity . . . of social and institutional life” (Biklen 452). These women created the foundation for other writers and activists to craft anthologies that made “visible those aspects of social life that were missing from public texts and to underscore how the personal is political” for all women (452).

Selection of Anthologies Examined

The feminist anthologies that emerged out of this Second Wave social uproar predominantly documented a feminist experience with very little regard, if any, to diverse women and their narratives. A proper insight into some of these works from the 1970s including

Psyche and *Women in Fiction*, demonstrates how these initial anthologies act as inaccurate representations of what the feminist experience consisted of—a fight against men with little regard to the relationships between the complex arrays of women. Within these works, women of color are vastly underrepresented as they consist of only a handful of the women included in each anthology.

The publication titled *Psyche* (1973) consists of a collection of works from modern American women poets. This anthology explores women poets “proclaim themselves in their own words, their own visions, undistorted by the prevalent male definitions of women” as they articulate their “innermost experience[s] of being a woman” through the featured poetry (Segnitz). This particular emphasis on equal female creative consciousness mirrors the fight for formal equality that persists through the 1970s. Like this form of equality, this publication expresses an incomplete outline of narratives from this decade since their primary focus is on equality among women and men with little regard to the substantive equality debate among all women.

In *Women and Fiction* (1975), the content aims to reflect “the varieties of human experience” by “examining unconventional points of view” through the “stories in this collection [that] do not illustrate anyone’s fixed ideas” as they instead “reflect the ambiguities of human experience” (Cahill xii). However, the majority of these included works are from well-established and well-known authors from many decades prior to this publication, such as Kate Chopin, Edith Wharton, and Virginia Woolf, among numerous others. These women in particular laid the groundwork for the Second Wave, however, their narratives and cultural backgrounds do not reflect the varieties of life that the editors of this anthology claim to portray as this collection lacks diverse representation for the evolving feminist movement and those participating within it

by the mid-1970s. Both of these anthologies are revolutionary for the time they were published in regards to bringing women writers together to share their stories, but they still lack overall representation for all women actively participating within this complex movement.

The publication titled *No More Masks* (1973), an anthology of poetry, exhibited an unconventional understanding of inclusivity than other anthologies at the time due to its awareness of the issue of including “token” women of color, a problematic practice apparent in both *Psyche* and *Women in Fiction*. This publication proves to be one that is “for once, a truly non-segregated” edition “in which black poets are not tokens” (Howe xxix). However, this anthology still lacks proper representation for all women of color despite their advanced awareness of these racial issues, especially within publications. These three anthologies demonstrate an immense disconnect between what some creators and editors believed the term inclusivity truly meant in regards to their published works and their own personal bias. Although these publications provided a groundwork for female voices and representation in both the social sphere and literature, these anthologies exhibit only a glimpse into the feminist experience that did little to document the entirety of the movement and those participating within it.

Beginning in the late 1980s, a wealth of new literary material emerged that sought to highlight the unique experiences of women of color. This facet of the Second Wave movement featured far more inclusive works that began “playing with, upending, and subverting traditional notions of beauty and power” (Greenberg 39). As a result, this more modern, transitional period within the movement was ultimately characterized by a greater social and literary acceptance for those who were largely marginalized and underrepresented within the earlier half of the Second Wave. As a result, these activists believed that women could not simply be defined in one

manner or another. Rather, adopting a feminist identity was a process that involved the merging of many identities including gender, race, and class.

These writings served as a “mechanism to help minority women define feminism for themselves” while simultaneously serving “as a mechanism for defending their right to feminism” (Townsend-Bell 129). These authors and publishers were key purveyors of this feminist movement as well as key spokespeople for the collective injustices minority women suffered—both from men and at the hands of white feminists strictly seeking formal equality. Some of the most influential and impactful publications were done in retaliation against the white-dominated publications that “marginalized the perspectives of black women and women of color so that they could never be the women whose lives feminism either narrated or were generated from,” as minority women were largely excluded from the literary publications until the early 1980s (Biklen 460).

These writings are not new as women of color actively participated and wrote about their experiences throughout the entirety of the Second Wave. However, due to societal discrimination as well as a lack of resources and funding, women of color faced numerous hardships in regards to making their written works known. This changed at the onset of the 1980s as numerous anthologies were published that defined “a new path forward for feminism” that focused on the unification of all women (Gilley 142). Such anthologies include *The Third Woman, Making Face, Making Soul*, and by the Kitchen Table Press, *This Bridge Called My Back*, which acts as one of the most influential and lasting publications of its kind. These particular publications finally documented the other side of the Second Wave movement for all to see, a side socially, politically, and financially suppressed within the earlier half of this movement. Through minority

led presses, these three anthologies served to document and showcase stories of identity, creativity, and tradition.

The Third Woman (1980) is a publication led by minority women that features female writers from a number of diverse cultural backgrounds including: American Indian women, black women, Chicana women, and Asian women. This anthology serves to rectify the issue that “minority women writers have yet to be represented adequately in anthologies or [sic] receive[d] the critical attention their literature deserve[d]” (Fisher xxvii). This notion of inclusivity is also relevant in *This Bridge Called My Back* (1983), an anthology that was originally published by Persephone Press, Inc., a predominant white women’s press located in Massachusetts. Eventually, after this particular press ceased production, women running the Kitchen Table: Women of Color Press of New York seized control of the intended publication, currently known as *This Bridge Called My Back* and made it their own—a literary anthology “conceived of and produced entirely by women of color” (Moraga). *Making Face, Making Soul* (1990) was compiled in the latter years of the second wave order to “continue where *This Bridge Called my Back* left off” (Anzaldúa xvi). As a result, this anthology confronted “the Racism in the white women’s movement in a more thorough, personal, direct, empirical, and theoretical way” that would “deepen the dialogue between all women” in hopes of establishing “alliance-building” (Anzaldúa xvi). These three anthologies eloquently illustrate the overall inclusive, alliance-driven ideology that dominated the latter half of the second wave movement which, in turn, became the foundation for the Third Wave.

The Third Wave is a movement “normally used to define the feminist politics of young women active from the 1990s onwards” as these young feminists believed “that their life experiences contrast with those of women in the second-wave generation” (Mahoney 1006). A

number of third wave activists argue that universalizing tendencies “resulted in the foregrounding of socially and culturally privileged female experiences and the promotion of prescriptive forms of female politics,” an ideology of these formal equality seeking activists within the 1960s and 1970s (1006). The writings from this era especially “critiqued Second-Wave feminism for presenting women as having shared characteristics” that resulted “in the universalizing of diverse and varied female experience” as their critiques clearly attacked the origins of the movement, with its foundations rooted in white-dominated activism, publications, and focus on formal equality (Mahoney 1006).

However, the Third Wave grew out of the diverse activism and literary works originating in the 1980s and early 1990s. Third wave feminists aim to promote “the importance of individuality and diverse personal experiences when defining their own politics,” an approach to substantive equality mirrored by the activism and writings of their predecessors (1006). As a result, Third Wave feminism’s essential characteristic is complexity, as its participants actively embrace generational discourse and promote a modern, entirely inclusive approach to feminism through influences from late second wave ideologies. This is still an ongoing movement, but the clearly defined “interrelation between past and present in current constructions of feminism” creates significant shifts within contemporary views regarding “ideas of gender, femininity, and feminist history” (1012).

These notions of Third Wave feminism are abundant in anthologies of this period as well. The vast majority of publications consist of a three-pronged narrative focus: “feminist confession, consciousness-raising, and the recovery movement” (Włodarczyk 90). Through feminist confession and consciousness raising, Third Wave activists vehemently avoid the sense of sameness and othering found within the Second Wave. Instead, Third Wavers seek to redefine

the traditional notion of a feminist anthology and instead craft publications that included “submissions from a variety of contributors representing different races, different class and ethnic backgrounds, different lifestyles and worldviews” (91). The third focus, recovery talk, also originates from the overwhelming desire to acknowledge and shift significantly away from the exclusionary practices found within the second wave as women established solidarity among themselves, regardless of identity. For example, such works “open with the description of a significant problem in the narrator’s personal life; a problem which may stem from a traumatic childhood experience, or from the internalization of society’s expectations and contradictory pop-cultural messages” (Włodarczyk 85). As a result, the emphasis began to shift heavily to the role of the editor in these pieces as they were expected to “choose the submissions in a way which incorporates a wide range of contributors” (91). Because of this newfound emphasis on intersectionality and diversity, the submissions are “intensely personal” and maintain a focus on “self-acceptance and self-esteem” (91). Thus, the overarching focus of Third Wave feminist literature is on diverse stories and individualism, not a shared agenda among all. In place of a shared political identity, a new connecting force begins to emerge—empathy.

In *To Be Real: Telling the Truth and Changing the Face of Feminism* (1995), Rebecca Walker stresses the importance of creating literature and conversations among each other that work towards “including more than excluding, exploring more than defining, [and] searching more than arriving” in an attempt to overcome prior tendencies toward “divisiveness and dualism” (Walker xxxiii, xxxv). Rather, she wants to foster empathetic environments of complete and unequivocal understanding among all women, in an attempt to create a sense of solidarity and intersectionality instead of isolation and exclusion. She ultimately crafts her anthology as a way to showcase strong pieces of a greater conversation that “opens doors of

understanding and prioritizes political commitment and self-acceptance” in order to talk about “difference, desire, and the things we fear most within our emerging selves” as an extension of this recovery narrative model and confessional practices (xxxvii, xl). Walker delivers her interpretation of a new type of feminist anthology that offers a rebellion against traditional, steadfast beliefs that dictate women must conform to certain subcategories of feminism and womanhood in order to be viewed as a valid member of the feminist movement (Wlodarczyk 66). She, in turn, channeled her rebellious attitudes into crafting a feminist anthology that features personal testimonies and reflections that “build empathy and compassion” among each other and the readers (Walker xxxvii). Most notably, unlike anthologies created within the Second Wave that feature works that were already in circulation, the contributions found within Walker’s *To Be Real* are written specifically for the publication of her anthology, a common trait found within subsequent publications.

These ideas are reflected further in the Barbara Findlen’s anthology titled *Listen Up: Voices from the Next Feminist Generation* that was published in 1995 as well. Findlen drew inspiration from Walker’s publication as she collected stories that include “testimonies from fitness instructors, sexual abuse survivors, ex-anorectics, obese women, immigrant women, women of color, abortion stories and birth stories” (Wlodarczyk 67). This work establishes a safe space for all women, regardless of identity, to unite in order to collectively create a collection that “explore[s] their ideas and hopes and struggles and places within feminism and within other social change movements” (Findlen xiii). Findlen ultimately achieves her objective as her piece allowed both the women featured and all future readers to find solace in seeing a diverse array of stories represented and shared in an enriching, thought-provoking manner. These stories effortlessly combine in order to fight for equality among all because “almost every woman

knows what it feels like to be mistreated, trivialized, kept out, put down, ignored, assaulted, laughed at or discriminated against because of her sex” (xiv).

Despite active involvement in fostering creative works that promote empathy and acceptance, the more analytical rather than strictly confessional *Third Wave Agenda: Being Feminist, Doing Feminism* by Heywood and Drake touches upon more difficult subjects to discuss and grasp—oppression among fellow feminists. It differs from *To Be Real* and *Listen Up* due to its “mixing of academic-style criticism with personal testimony, [and] photographs and feminist artwork” (Wlodarczyk 67). Within the introduction, the editors reflect on the importance of being aware of the oppressions and intersectionality that all women, even proclaimed feminists, endure and create through their actions and ideologies. They state:

We know that what oppresses me may not oppress you, that what oppresses you may be something I participate in, and that what oppresses me may be something you participate in. Even as different strains of feminism and activism sometimes directly contradict each other, they are all part of our third wave lives, our thinking, our praxes: we are products of all the contradictory definitions of and differences within feminism, beasts of such a hybrid kind that perhaps we need a different name altogether. (Heywood and Drake 3)

Oppression is inevitable in any aspect of life, whether it is intentional or not. However, with its upfront awareness of the matter, this publication establishes a greater sense of intersectionality that was lost in the vast majority of Second Wave publications. As a result, this anthology acts as a groundwork for future publications and studies of the movement through its use of analytical essays, statistics, and studies of the numerous factors involved within the respective waves.

Finally, Melody Berger tackles the very issue of addressing them as waves in the first place in her publication, appropriately titled *We Don't Need Another Wave* (2006). Within it, she

argues that dividing the movement between waves adds to the very divisiveness and alienation that feminism seeks to abolish in its practice. Instead, her anthology serves as a “critique of the ways in which feminism gets discussed in mainstream media” due to so much of the “focus on the packaging of [the feminist] message” into concrete, defining “waves” rather than what the actual message consists of in practice (Berger 21). In order to advance the feminist movement, Berger calls for the lines between each generation of feminists be blurred in order to advance as a united force in order to guarantee an equal, feminist future for all.

Despite their apparent differences in subject matter, demographic, and intent, all four anthologies exhibit works that employ confessional-style prose within a recovery narrative model. In Abra Fortune Chernick’s “The Body Politic” in Findlen’s anthology, she describes how her battle with anorexia impacted not only her physical state but also her mental psyche, documenting how this disease forced her to lose “the capacity to care about [her]self and others” as her illness slowly ruined her relationships with family and friends and destroyed her own self-esteem (Chernick 103).

In “To Be Real” from Rebecca Walker’s anthology, Danzy Senna ponders her racial and cultural identity as she recounts her complex upbringing in the “racial battlefield of Boston” (Senna 5). Born to a white mother and a black father, Senna recounts her tumultuous childhood spent questioning not only her race but also what kind of woman she would inevitably become as she struggled to decide whether she should identify as “black, Negro, African-American, feminist, femme, mulatto, quadroon, lesbian, straight, bisexual, lipstick, butch bottom, femme top, vegetarian, carnivore” or something different entirely (5-6).

Another key element of the recovery narrative model are stories regarding the direct impact of fellow feminist mentors or the power of finding oneself and finding community

through feminist teachings and practices. This ideology is featured in Berger's anthology within Elena Azzoni's piece, "Seventh-Grade Slut," where she documents her time in college spent "attending protests and marches for women's rights" as she ultimately discovered herself and her feminist values as a result of this involvement (Azzoni 70). She decided to pursue this passion through obtaining a degree in Women's Studies, and she continues this passion as she aids sexual assault victims through her role as a community educator. She firmly believes that "turning around to help pull other women back up and into themselves is revolutionary," and she actively pursues this activism through her involvement in the feminist movement (73).

In addition to this community and identity-driven content, Third Wave feminist works also placed an emphasis on the recovery model found within the "coming out story" of finding one's sexuality and sexual expression through their complex involvement in feminist movements, beyond the confines of physically projecting as strictly feminine in appearance (Wlodarczyk 88). In Findlen's publication, Jennifer Reid March Myhre documents her complex balance between her feminist viewpoints and masculine exterior in her piece titled "One Bad Hair Day Too Many, or the Hairstory of an Androgynous Feminist." Within it, she documents her exceedingly butch exterior as she discusses her battle with fellow feminists who expect her to conform to a particular physical view of a true "feminist." She believes "femininity isn't inherent, natural, or biological," and she continues to define herself as a feminist even though "other feminists are sometimes uncomfortable" with her more masculine exterior (Myhre 85, 88).

Despite the varied subject matter within each piece, these works are united in their confessional styles of prose where the respective narrator ultimately discusses scenarios in which "after numerous trials and mishaps, [she] discovers that she is, and has always been, a feminist,"

ultimately fostering a sense of “growing self-acceptance and increasing articulation of the demand for tolerance and inclusion in the feminist movement” (Włodarczyk 89).

Role of Created Anthology

Through this research and knowledge gained regarding the nature of Third Wave Feminism, I crafted my own anthology that fits within this narrative tradition. I conveyed these complex sentiments of female identity within my own anthology as I explored the innate intergenerational differences and similarities between women living through the Second Wave in conjunction with contemporary women living within the Third Wave. However, my publication embodies a number of the characteristics of these aforementioned Third Wave publications, most notably, confessional-style prose within a recovery narrative model. Through these pieces, all of the featured women convey their personal struggles through insightful prose and impactful imagery.

When crafting this anthology, the title *Blessed by Light* seemed exceptionally appropriate due to the enlightening subject matter of each piece, all from women currently living in the south, a community steeped in religious culture and influence. This literary collection acts as both a celebration of individual identity and a rebellion against projected social norms as it functions as “A Collection of Stories by Women, for All.” I decided to organize the overall anthology in thematic sections in order to showcase the enriching, unique elements each author discusses in regards to similar, overarching subject matter. As a result, the themes are as follows: Feminist Identity, Southern Ideology, International Culture, Body Image, Medicalization, Objectification, Relationships, and, finally, Empowerment.

I begin the anthology with the poem titled “She’s Too Much” by Maggie Coomer. I felt as if it was appropriate to begin the entire collection with a poem that encompasses the struggles

women face when they are vocal about their feminist identities and involvement. Women are consistently viewed as “hormonal and crazy” and should “put down [their] banner” and instead should “stifle [their] yell” (Brightman 6). Regardless of this inevitable backlash directed towards the feminist movement, Coomer effortlessly alludes to the solidarity found within it as she commands all women to embrace these supposed taboos and continue their fight for equality. As a result, her poem acts as a battle-cry for discovering both individual and collective power within feminist identity.

I then decided to shift the subject matter to Southern Ideology, a clear migration from the preceding theme. In the essay titled “My Two Years Among the Natives, or How I Learned That I Don’t Belong Here,” Ali Taylor documents her time spent in the south, a period of her life riddled in alienation and discomfort. Contrary to popular belief, Taylor did not receive the warm welcome or experience southern hospitality like one would expect. Rather, she felt as if she “would rather have lived as a female in a middle eastern country under Sharia law than move to the deep American south” (24). She documents the arduous process of finding a job in a town riddled in familial ties, and she discusses the underlying southern culture that dictates women must never be “professional women” (25). Immediately, Taylor was rejected due to her outspoken demeanor, intellectual nature, and her identities as a world traveler and queer individual. Due to the archaic, sexist culture of the Deep South, Taylor never felt as if she could comfortably find community and belonging within its geographic boundaries.

Next, I decided to focus on featuring a number of stories from international women who currently live within the South. For Salina Rai, her relationship with her mother and grandmother, despite the immense geographic distance, was essential in her discovery of her own feminist identity. In her essay titled “Lasting Legacy,” Rai recounts a vivid memory of her

childhood where she repeatedly sneaked into her mother's room to try on a coveted set of silver, elephant bangles. She "gradually got over [her] mother's. . . shiny white bangles" (27). However, they became a symbol of her entrance into womanhood when her mother gifted them to her before she moved to the United States to attend a university. They act as symbols of her grandmother's struggle as she "realized that the bangles were the only jewel[ry] [she] ever owned in her life" (27). As a result, the passing down of these cherished bangles meant that Rai's grandmother acknowledged that Rai had the potential and the freedom to "be the woman [her mother] and [grandmother] could never be, a woman more than somebody's widow, mother, or housewife" (28).

Following this, I wanted a section dedicated entirely to body image, both positive and negative in nature. For Betsie Cutrer, body image is a complex struggle that follows her throughout her life. In "Sex for Sale on the Frozen Foods Aisle," she reflects on a pivotal moment in her childhood where she discovered that thin, attractive women are coveted and prized within society. When navigating a grocery frozen foods aisle at the age of nine, Cutrer became transfixed as she gazed upon a sexualized woman in a burger advertisement. In this moment, she immediately compared her "own chicken legs poking out of hand-me-down OshKosh B'gosh shorts" and felt a wave of inferiority wash over her (37). Following this incident, Cutrer felt the need to purge in order to feel as if she fit within these unrealistic standards for women.

I then chose to feature a section focused on the medicalized bodies of women, both in a positive and negative perspective as well. I included my own poem titled "Pins & Needles" as a therapeutic way for me to reflect on trauma I experienced at the hands of fellow women within the medicalized sphere. When I reached puberty, I had numerous health issues in regards to my

hormone regulation and irregular bleeding patterns. I dreaded that same time every month because I was perpetually traumatized by the unbearable physical pain and emotional turmoil it caused for me. After over a year of suffering silently to myself in a “sea of my own turmoil and defeat,” I finally reached out for “a medical-induced Eden” (42). Upon doing so, I was faced with numerous female doctors chalking up my symptoms as a result of obesity, dehydration, or a combination of the two. I felt betrayed, and I felt as if my pain was entirely disregarded. However, the fact that this neglect and disdain occurred at the hands of another woman hurt far more than the physical pain I already endured for so long.

I wanted to include the weightier subject matter near the end of the collection in order to both ease the reader into it and foster a lasting impression for the reader as well. In “The New Normal,” Samantha Hudson unequivocally discusses the mental and physical hardships she endured resulting from sexual harassment from her uncle at a Thanksgiving dinner. Hudson “felt confident in a stylish dress and pantyhose” as she dressed up to attend the dinner (47). She finally “felt like [she] was actually starting to conquer the self-image issues [she] had” (47). However, this confidence rapidly diminished once her uncle harassed her as she suddenly felt “violated, ashamed, and, worst of all, felt that it was [her] fault” (47). In this moment, she immediately became aware of the harassment occurring around her constantly, and she felt entirely powerless when dealing with this emotional trauma.

In addition, I dedicated a section to the notion of toxic and abusive romantic relationships. In an essay titled “Catharsis,” Haley Gunter documents how her past abusive relationship affected both herself and her loved ones after she found the courage to speak up about the abuse. After years of traumatic abuse, Gunter found the courage to remove herself from the toxic relationship that nearly consumed her. She eventually spoke to her family about

these issues lurking underneath the surface of her relationship without their knowledge. After receiving encouragement from her family, she was finally able to say the words she was so fearful of recounting: “he raped me” (48).

Finally, I concluded the anthology with pieces reminiscent of the first few in the collection. I wanted to end on a more positive, hopeful note with works featuring the theme of empowerment. In the poem titled “Here to Stay,” Bailee Morgan ponders the similarities and differences between herself and a First Lady. The First Lady obviously lives in a “new home of eggshell and ivory walls” as she has “lived a whole life groomed for eggshell and ivory” during her four years (60). Morgan, on the other hand, recounts her four years ahead of her as a college student, a life spent “slinging a hammer over her shoulder” to build the very foundation for herself that the First Lady is easily handed (60). Despite their apparent differences in lifestyle, both this fictitious First Lady and Morgan find solidarity in the notion of being torn from something they carefully nurture and build in their respective, contrasting communities. However, regardless of these differences, they are united as women and “now, at least, [they’re] here to stay” (60).

In my publication, women from a variety of cultural, social, and racial backgrounds collectively combined to foster a literary environment grounded in empathy, understanding, and acceptance. The women featured crafted stories that showcase their unique perspectives through powerful prose and unprecedented images. There are stories of battling health issues, fighting social conventions, discussing abuse, discovering identity, and, most notably, establishing empathy and solidarity among all.

Methodology

In the first stages of establishing my anthology, I contacted the women I hoped to feature within this creative piece. In order to maximize time, I contacted these women through email. I created a general email describing my project, its purpose, and their intended role within it, as well as my contact information if they have any inquiries. Within this email, I offered a generalized prompt for the recipients to use in order to guide their creative responses. I gave each individual the same prompt: “Please reflect on a moment or period in your life where you felt as if this experience(s) were defined by your being a woman.”

My goal was to leave it as open-ended and unbiased as possible in order to minimize my own impact on the contextual or visual direction of each piece. I allowed a variety of writing forms such as poetry, short stories, plays, vignettes, songs, personal essays, and journal entries. I established the length parameters with the participants, and these guidelines guaranteed each individual had optimal and equal space in the finished anthology. I also allowed visual art submissions of scanned original paintings, illustrations, and photos that I then uploaded into the anthology and organized according to theme.

Upon sending these initial emails, I periodically checked in on their progress and answered any questions that arose as they created their contributions. I created these emails and administered them in May for each contributor to have adequate time to complete their contributions, and I constructed this anthology over the summer and during the 2019 fall semester. I initially planned to have all of my submissions turned into me by June, but my last few submissions were not turned into me until the middle of September. As a result, I realized how demanding it is to work with others’ schedules. This, by far, was the most challenging aspect of the project because the timing of the submissions greatly affected the overall timeline

and my working schedule. However, I did exceed my initial goal of 20 participants and instead had 25 individuals submit their creative pieces. With grant funding, I released the printed publication in the middle of November and held a release party, with selected readings from the women featured within this creative piece.

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