

# The Pinkwashing of Alice Paul in HBO's *Iron Jawed Angels*

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HBO's 2004 *IRON JAWED ANGELS* FINDS IT NECESSARY TO DRESS UP THE FEMINIST BATTLEAXE Alice Paul for a twenty-first century audience. Historically, Alice Paul and her cohorts were at odds with expectations for women in the public and private spheres in the early 1900s. This article demonstrates that the HBO version remakes Alice Paul and her colleagues into third-wave feminists and that the process of doing so waters down the potential for societal change that for so long has been an integral part of the feminist movement.

## *Iron Jawed Angels*

The story of Alice Paul and her cohorts is presented in the 2004 movie *Iron Jawed Angels* and is accompanied by some very modern notions of femininity. The movie chronicles the formation of the National Woman's Party (NWP) during the early 1900s and delves into the personal lives of these women as they struggle to attain the vote on a national level. However, the movie remakes these suffragists into thoroughly modern women. The reviewers do a brilliant job of pointing out the current notions of femininity at work in this movie. They also give us a sense of the confusion many viewers, including myself, felt about this movie and some of the narrative components that were at play.

The reviews of *Iron Jawed Angels* pick out several elements that the director used to make these historical women fit a twenty-first century vision of a woman who fights for her rights. For example, from the *Boston Globe*:

To some, the old-fashioned word "suffragette" suggests captivity in a tight corset rather than women's rights. The phrase 'Iron Jawed Angels,' on the other hand, connotes an extreme-sports-like empowerment that speaks of youth, drive, and spiritual inner glow. And that's the goal of the new HBO movie "Iron Jawed Angels"—to buff up history for younger viewers and liberate the early women's movement from its stodgy image. To tell the story of the steel-willed college grads responsible for the 1920 amendment giving women the right to vote, the movie charges up Wilson-era America with a bag of speedy camera tricks, a vital young lead actress (Hilary Swank), a tad of sexual suggestion, and an unabashedly contemporary soundtrack. (Gilbert ¶ 1–3)

Or from the *Daily News of Los Angeles*: "Iron Jawed Angels' explores both the grisly—and the girly—side of the suffrage movement: Wrenching depictions of vicious force-feedings of a hunger striker go hand-in-hand with girl talk of boys and hats; we even

watch as Swank's character, Alice Paul, pleasures herself in a bathtub while recalling a pleasant day out with a gentleman caller" (Kronke ¶ 2). And from *The New York Times*:

[O]n the way to a women's suffrage meeting in 1912, the radical agitator Alice Paul (Hilary Swank) freezes in her tracks at the sight of a pink cloche in a shop window. She and her friend Lucy Burns (Frances O'Connor) banter winningly over who saw the hat first, then flip a coin to settle who should have it. The scene, shown early in Sunday's HBO film 'Iron Jawed Angels,' is intended to disarm: early twentieth-century feminists like Paul may have been zealots, but they were still feminine. Pretty, funny, sexually attracted to men and fond of shopping, the heroines of 'Iron Jawed Angels' have been made over to suit today's ambivalent notions about the women's movement—'Legally Blonde III: The Suffragette Years'. (Stanley ¶ 1–2)

One more from the *St. Petersburg Times*:

The lasting, but unintended, message of HBO's "Iron Jawed Angels" is that contemporary audiences need hip-hop music, MTV-style editing and sexual suggestion to keep them watching a movie about the American women's suffrage movement. Yes, these are our great-grandmother's rebels, but we've never seen them this vibrant, funny, and cute. They like pretty hats! They think about sex! They march to a twenty-first century beat! German director Katja von Garnier begs us to forget every black-and-white picture we've seen of dour Susan B. Anthony. Overlook 'Iron Jawed Angels' concessions to modern sensibilities (would someone in 1915 really say "do the math"?) and watch this movie despite its gratuitous bathtub scene. It's good to be reminded in an election year how hard and long women fought to win the vote. The debut tonight on HBO after 'Sex and the City' takes us from the unbuttoned to the button-downed. (Keeler 1–3)

The comparison to *Sex and the City* is made often in various reviews. The movie aired right after one of *Sex and the City*'s final episodes. The comparison between the two shows is keen.

The parts of the movie that were most mentioned in the reviews were the obsession with the pretty pink hat throughout the movie as well as the masturbation scene in the middle of the movie. Many of the reviewers question why these elements were included in a movie about suffragists from the early 1990s. The director of the film, Katja von Garnier, states why on HBO's website for the movie. She says that she wanted to break clichés about the lives of women seeking the vote. She says:

[T]here is this cliché that women who fight for their rights can't love; they have no sense of humor, they aren't attractive. I think we are trying to break the cliché and portray women who are fun to watch, that have a sense of humor, and are smart and unconventional. Our women, they're wanted *because* they're smart, apart from the fact that they're very attractive. (von Garnier 1)

For von Garnier the feminists that audiences want to see are attractive, smart, and sexy. Hillary Swank, as the lead character Alice Paul, found nothing amiss in *Iron Jawed Angels*' depictions of these women. She states in a 2004 article that the movie is "not so much about a certain era as it is about a conviction of the heart and what's right and what's just. Alice has to make a choice between love and her drive in life, which is to help women become empowered. It's a hard choice that women today still have to make" (Davis). The choice between a man and a career seems very natural to Swank, one with which she feels many women clearly have to deal with today.

However, the historical Alice Paul was very different from von Garnier's vision. These variations can be attributed to the development of third-wave feminism and its relationship to femininity in our time. Ultimately at stake is a loss of coherency in the feminist movement as it becomes too individualized and consumerist at the expense of collective action.

## Alice Paul Breaks the Mold

Clearly the director was taking large freedoms with history in this mediated version of Alice Paul. This is not a new phenomenon in film as “feature films are created within a matrix of competing pressures—including the desire to be faithful to historical fact, as well as narrative considerations, economic pressures, genre conventions, political and regulatory pressures, and so on—that may increase their vulnerability to historical inaccuracies when compared to scholarly written histories” (Chopra-Gant 8). Written histories state that Paul was a brilliant and single-minded woman. She had a BS in biology from Swarthmore (a Quaker college that was founded by her grandfather), and an MA and a PhD from the University of Pennsylvania. She was a graduate student in sociology and economics at the School of Economics of the University of London for a time. She eventually went on to earn a doctorate of civil law from American University in 1928. During her time in London she met leaders of the British movement for women's suffrage including Emmeline Pankhurst. She participated in hunger strikes and spent time in prison on three different occasions. Paul used and orchestrated so-called “militant” tactics that were not the norm for the suffragists and were seen as improper for females at this time. Alice Paul and her cohorts in the NWP “were singularly independent and aggressive, confronted society on its own terms, found those terms unacceptable, and determined to follow the path that they perceived led most directly to their emancipation, regardless of the barriers encountered” (Lunardini 17). Paul herself has been described by people who knew her as “the heart, brain, and soul of the Woman's Party,” as someone whose “mind moves with the precision of a beautiful machine,” and as a “Napoleon without self-indulgence” (Irwin 15). The sexualized, fashion-conscious Alice Paul from the HBO film significantly differs from the historical accounts of her personality. Rather than contemplating fashion and men, Paul—with her strong intellect and her renowned drive—was focused on obtaining suffrage for women.

For example, Paul has been called a racist because of her callousness at times. This quality was exemplified in such events as the Woman Suffrage Parade of 1913, which Alice Paul and the Congressional Union organized. Paul did not outright ban African-American women from marching, which she could have done. Instead, Paul said that no African-American women were to march at the front of the parade because it was about women's rights, not race. She also did not want to upset the Southern delegates who were participating. Instead she set up a segregated unit for African-American women to march in, separated from the rest of the parade by a group of men (Lunardini 27). When confronted about her stance on race, she said that the passage of the Nineteenth Amendment would “not interfere with states' regulation for voting procedures but would only “see that the franchise conditions for every state were the same for women as for men” (Cott 69). The fact that even if black women in the South did receive the vote they could not use it did not and would not formally concern Paul or the National Woman's

Party for the duration of their efforts. The "social climate that encouraged and fostered discriminatory behavior in society in general, dictated, with few exceptions, that blacks were not to be encouraged to speak at or attend suffrage meetings in most sections of the country" (Lunardini 27). This attitude toward African Americans, and African-American women specifically, was held by most suffragists and black women were largely excluded from the organizations like the NWP. Cott says that "the suffrage movement since the late nineteenth century had caved into the racism of the surrounding society, sacrificing democratic principles and the dignity of black people if it seemed advantageous to white women's obtaining the vote" (68).

In the movie, the parade is presented in great detail but the decision not to allow black women at the front of the parade is only briefly engaged. When Ida Wells-Barnett, an African-American activist from Illinois, stepped into the parade in the movie she was greeted by a smile from Paul. Wells-Barnett did step into the parade in real life in the Illinois' delegation, but Paul did not greet her or even see her. Wells-Barnett disagreed with Paul's decision to allow African-American women into the parade if they stayed in specific segregated positions (Lundardini "African American" 27). The movie tempers the racist actions that Paul took by making it seem like what was going on was not up to her, but rather a decision made only to satisfy others. In real life, she had no qualms about leaving one group behind if she thought it would further her goal. The movie masks some of her less-flattering and thoroughly unfeminine acts to present one particular, very friendly, view of Paul.

Another event the movie creates for Paul that did not play out in history was to give her a relationship with a man. The man in the movie, Ben Weissman, played by Patrick Dempsey, is a cartoonist for the *Washington Post*. This is important for two reasons. First, the movie presents the relationship between Weissman and Paul as a significant part of the plot in terms of the publicity Weissman could get for Paul with the newspaper. With this cinematic move the director adds the age-old element of the female depending on a man. However, Paul did not need free publicity in real life. According to her biographer, Paul was excellent at obtaining publicity; she knew how to draw a crowd because of the strategies that the NWP used. Also, women like senator's wives and other upper-class women who were involved in her public events helped gain attention. Cott says the more "fashionable or renowned the perpetrators of unladylike deeds on behalf of suffrage, the more sensational and newsworthy their behavior appeared" (Cott 55). Paul did not need to rely on a man to obtain publicity. The nature of the acts that the NWP engaged in drew a crowd, and Paul was pretty good at getting attention on her own. For example, the NWP protestors were sent to prison after picketing the White House on charges of obstructing sidewalk traffic. These charges were later dismissed as a court of appeals ruled that she and her colleagues had been illegally arrested and imprisoned. However, it is clear that Paul's tactics, such as protesting in front of the White House and organizing a suffrage parade, drew the attention of the public, and it was often violent attention (Lunardini 115). An article in *The New York Times* from November 14, 1917 states that thirty-one women were arrested for picketing in front of the White House after almost causing a riot. They stood "unmolested outside the gates of the White House for some time," but as "the crowds poured from the Government departments and packed the street, boys set upon the women and tore down their banners" ("White").

The second thing that makes Weissman's character interesting is that he did not exist in real life. He is a work of fiction on von Garnier's part. There are no accounts in history of Paul being involved with men romantically. There is no evidence that she was romantically engaged with women either. Paul was single-mindedly engaged with the vote. Irwin, her biographer, gives accounts of younger women giggling at the thought of Paul married. A romantic life was not something that was a part of her work with suffrage. It also would have interfered with her education as many schools, like Swarthmore, did not allow married women to attend. Her own mother did not finish her education because she married Paul's father. However, the movie plays up the romantic relationship between her and Weissman, with it all culminating in a masturbation scene of Paul in a bathtub. Weissman is probably the most outlandish example of the vision that von Garnier imposes on Paul. Part of the historical story that makes Paul unique was that she was never married nor was she interested in marriage. She was focused on one goal: suffrage for women. However, part of von Garnier's vision that makes a woman fun to watch and attractive, to use von Garnier's own words, is Paul's relationship with a man.

As noted at the beginning of this section, films that purport to portray history often get historical facts wrong. We cannot dismiss this film based on the fact that it does not represent history exactly as historians say it happened. Rather, this essay will not just dwell on historical inaccuracies but it will move us to "a more serious engagement with the opportunities and problems that attend the attempt to use film as a way of understanding the past" (Chopra-Gant 69). This essay seeks to demonstrate how the film "itself as an artifact that is available for historical scrutiny—a document that reveals something about the time in which it was made and released" (7). Specifically, beliefs about what it means to be a feminist and to do work for the advancement of women is at stake in the image of womanhood presented in the retelling of these historical events through a modern lens.

### *Iron Jawed Angels* and Feminism

The concept of femininity with which Alice Paul and her cohorts were dealing in the early 1900's kept women tied to the home. When women did enter the public sphere, they were supposed to keep their original duties within the family in mind. This in large part comes from the fear that if women obtained the vote they would leave their families for public lives, and society as they knew it would be destroyed. In her book *Women and the American Experience*, Nancy Woloch notes that many mainstream suffragists sought to transform the "image of the suffrage movement from a threatening, challenging group into a wise, compassionate, and service-orientated one. The woman voter would not be the destroyer of home, family and society but their protector" (Woloch 346). If women got the vote, the suffragists suggested, they would not leave the home and abandon their families, but rather they would use their home-honed skills to help out in the public sphere for the good of the nation. These ideas about femininity and the role of women in society in the early 1900s narrowed down public opportunities for women, and Paul and her group worked hard to fight against these constraints. They fought against social constructions related to their sex which limited women's ability to do what they wanted (and needed) to do. In this case, what they wanted to do was par-

ticipate in political and public life on equal footing with men. Feminism for them was about equality and participation in the public sphere. As Linda G. Ford says, these "militant suffragists were feminist revolutionaries, 'striking the blow' themselves to secure drastic political change for women, and with that, change in women's social role, status and image" (279). For Paul, feminism in her time meant changing the roles that women were expected to play or changing ideas about what women were allowed to do. Feminism today is not always part of that same goal.

Many names have been given to the current mode of feminism we are now experiencing. Feminism today has been called antifeminism, third-wave feminism, postfeminism, "chick" postfeminism, power feminism, choice feminism, commodity feminism and lifestyle feminism, just to name a few that are important to articulating what is happening in this movie about feminists that seems so un-feminist. Third-wave feminism seeks to unravel the essentialist definition of femininity found in second-wave feminism that suggested that all women are tightly tied together by virtue of being women. Instead, third-wave feminists suggested that characteristics like ethnicity, race, religion, and cultural values had just as much of an impact on women as did gender or sex. Third-wave feminism also allows a woman to be sexy and socially aware, fashionistas and revolutionaries, and perhaps even stay-at-home moms. It seeks to describe women as powerful and in control of their own sexuality. Third-wave feminism helps explain the thoroughly un-historical elements of this movie that have Alice Paul's character living up to many of the seemingly unfeminist demands of modern America.

There is no doubt that this movie displays an overt historically feminist message about the women of the NWP fighting for their right to vote and for the expansion of women's roles in society. The movie equally suggests that wearing pretty pink hats, lusting after men, and paying careful attention to your body is also important for feminists and is perhaps just as important as fighting for the right to vote. What accounts for this dual message about feminism and femininity? Many believe that current feminism allows for any act made or opinion expressed by a woman to be considered feminist. In a 2007 article "Frustrations of the Modern Feminist" Rachel Kincaid states that:

feminism has kaleidoscoped into a thousand pieces of itself. People who wonder what modern feminism is like are told to ask around; they'll get a different answer from everyone. We are trying to adapt to the uncomfortable restrictions we feel, trying to find a way to live that upholds our values without compromising our happiness. Can I be a stay-at-home mother and still be a good feminist? We ask ourselves. Can I work in the sex industry and still be a good feminist? How do I have a feminist marriage? A feminist career? Feminist religious life? Feminist sexual reassignment surgery? For every new question, a new philosophy grows to answer it. What was originally a fairly cohesive, if not unified, movement has expanded to include every possible opposing opinion. (61)

In third-wave feminism activities that are not typically associated with feminism, like staying at home and taking care of the kids, even if it means giving up a promising career in the field in which a woman was trained, would be interpreted as a feminist choice. Linda Hirshman discusses this in her much debated article "Homeward Bound" in a December 2005 *American Prospect* article and later goes on to discuss it in detail in her book *Get to Work: A Manifesto for Women of the World*. In the article Hirshman states that both "stay-at-home and working moms often consider themselves feminists. They

reasonably make this claim because feminism has actively encouraged women to run from a fight by embracing any decision a woman makes as a feminist act" (Hirshman 17–18). Many women see no problem with this feminist open door policy which allows anything a woman does to be called feminist as long as it's her choice.

For example, Naomi Wolf states in the 1993 book *Fire with Fire* that many "millions of conservative and Republican women hold fierce beliefs about opportunity for women, self determination, ownership of business, and individualism; these must be respected as a right-wing version of feminism" (126). She goes on to claim that "these women's energy and resources and ideology have as much right to the name of feminism, and could benefit women as much as and in some situations more than can left-wing feminism" (Wolf 126–27). One of the most contested issues in this book is abortion as she asserts that women do not have to support the right of another woman to have an abortion to be feminist and that women should stop letting issues like this ensure feminism of its "helpless status as a perpetual minority party" (Wolf 126). Wolf calls this type of feminism that includes every woman and her beliefs "power feminism" and its first tenet is that "every woman has a right to her own self" so that "a woman is entitled to define herself, express her beliefs, and make her own life" (127). In this mode of feminism "any woman who believes in women's right to self-definition and self-respect is a feminist" (Wolf 127). Kincaid iterates her support for this kind of feminism. She states that "feminism is never about the alienation or condemnation of women, of yourself or others. Any action that involves ostracizing, vilification, or rejection, or anything that makes you feel bad about being a woman, is not feminism. The foundation of feminism is that we deserve to be happy" (61). For Kincaid "feminism was never about becoming the right kind of woman; it makes the opposite claim, that we are each of us exactly as we should be. On the contrary, there is something wrong with the system that we don't fit into" (61). Feminism has become an umbrella term that shields any behavior a woman engages in from scrutiny. Steven Hill in his 1993 article "To Choose or Not to Choose: A Politics of Choice," states that a "shallow 'politics of choice' has crept its way into gender politics, acting as a wedge to slowly pry apart the integrity of feminist analysis of society. It threatens to turn feminism upside-down, transforming it from a liberation movement into one that caters to a libertine sensibility pursuing simply the cause of liberty—the ability to do as one wishes"(3). *Iron Jawed Angels* caters, at least in part, to this third-wave sensibility.

As noted before, several reviewers mentioned the fact that *Iron Jawed Angels* premiered after one of the final episodes of *Sex and the City*. The ladies of *Sex and the City* have been called feminists and postfeminists (Smith, Gerhard 2). They talk about sex, often, in public, and at length. They are extremely fashionable and fond of very expensive shoes. They are all successful career women and are, for most of the seasons, unmarried. They do what they want to do when they want to do it, and they look gorgeous while doing so. The fact that this movie directly followed one of the last episodes of *Sex and the City* should be no surprise. Jane Gerhard tells us that the "ghost of 70s feminism haunts [*Sex and the City*] through a repressed, nightmarish vision of autonomous womanhood, the lesbian/feminist, a man-hating, definitely humorless, and certainly fashion challenged caricature. Postfeminism is forged against this ghost of the scary lesbian/feminist as are most popular manifestations of 'feminism' or 'liberated women' since the 1970s" (2). The director von Garnier did not want the women of the NWP to come

across as humorless, unsexy or unlovable, so instead the modern *Sex and the City*-esque version of feminism finds its place in a movie about women who existed 100 years earlier, specifically in terms of consumerism, body consciousness, heterosexual relationships, and openness to diversity.

One reviewer describes a scene from the movie that demonstrates blatant body-image concerns. Odenwald says “in one inexplicable scene, she [the director] lingers sensuously over the bare arms, calves and shoulders of the women activists dressing for—are you ready for this?—a lobbying event” (4). The emphasis on the body, the images of elegant knees, pretty toes, slick shoulders and made-up face, mark a beautiful body as an important part of being a feminist, just as important as the suffrage event that follows. Naomi Wolf, in her 1992 book *The Beauty Myth*, states that women can choose to look glamorous and still be a feminist. Steven Hill states that, for Wolf:

[I]f a woman *freely chooses* to maintain a fashionably thin body or to have breast-enhancing surgery or to wear back-breaking and semi-crippling high heels or to spend her time and hard-earned money remaking her clothes, face, and body into a “self-defined” work of art that hews to the standards imposed by the old “beauty myth” then that is a feminist position, a part of the new third wave. (4–5)

For third-wave feminism displaying a perfect body and wrapping it in the most fashionable clothing is a feminist choice. The *New York Times* columnist Maureen Dowd states in her book *Are Men Necessary?*: “[I]t is incontrovertibly true that American feminism was trumped by American narcissism. This is the season when the female beauty ideal is not Gloria Steinem, a serious bunny, but Jessica Simpson, a simple bunny, and when Hollywood’s remake of *The Stepford Wives* stumbled because it was no longer satire but documentary” (Dowd 11). Dowd goes on to say that women now want “to be *Maxim* babes as much as men want *Maxim* babes. So women have traveled an arc from fighting objectification to seeking it” (Dowd 183).

The sexual aspect of the females in this movie is also in line with more modern ideas about feminism. Alice Paul is seen masturbating in a bubbly bathtub while fantasizing about a man who did not exist in real life. She is presented as a sexual being even though historical accounts present to us no evidence of a sex life. *Sex and the City* also features characters obsessed with sex, specifically heterosexual sex, and relationships that ultimately will end in marriage. The women of *Sex and the City* are presented as independent, free thinking mavericks, yet in the show “narrative space is also given over, in a relatively resigned and fatalistic way, to the requirement that real women must submit themselves to the norms of heterosexual femininity for love and sexuality to have meaning and for life to take its rightful course” (McRobbie 542). The 2008 *Sex and the City* movie illustrates this perfectly with three out of the four women ending up in married relationships, two with children. The happy ending is truly about being married and perhaps even being a mother. In the case of the fourth character, Samantha, she leaves her long-term boyfriend so she can continue to have sex with many men, another version of third-wave femininity. The 1998 article “Canny and Lacy” by Ruth Shalit discusses the hypersexed characters in *Ally McBeal*, *Dharma and Greg* and *Veronica’s Closet*, characters who have also been labeled feminists. Shalit states that these characters have been labeled by *Esquire* magazine specifically as “do-me feminists.”

[The] do-me feminist is plucky, confident, upwardly mobile, and extremely horny. She is alert to the wounds of race and class and gender, but she knows that feminism is safe for women who love men and bubble baths and kittenish outfits; that the right ideology and the best sex are not mutually exclusive. She knows that she is as smart and as ambitious as a guy, but she's proud to be a girl and girlish. (27)

Feminists in third-wave praxis are stylish and sexy, but also forward thinking and socially aware. They can protest the injustices they see around them and be concerned with their looks. Hillary Swank's Alice Paul can have the best of both worlds as a third-wave feminist.

One incident that highlights this balance is the moment in the movie where Alice Paul smiles and nods and allows Ida Wells-Barnett to join the parade. One of the major triumphs of the third-wave feminism is the inclusion of women from all walks of life. The second-wave feminists have been accused of ignoring factors of race, class, and sexual orientation in favor of grouping all women into one category of Woman in hopes of creating change (Gerhard 39). That it is impossible to ignore these differences and lump them all together is something the third-wave feminists have made very clear. Amber Kinser, in the 2004 article "Negotiating Spaces For/Through Third-Wave Feminism," states that an "aspect of the rhetorical significance of a 'third wave' of feminism is that it helps us to generate feminisms that speak to the increasingly pluralistic world of which we are a part" (138). She goes on to say, given that women today are part of a world where spatial distances have been shrunk by technology, and "given the social reform brought about by activists continuing to work on issues of race, age, ability, and sexuality in addition to gender, third wavers may be better at pluralism than their second-wave fore Sisters were" (Kinser 139). This openness is reflected in the decision to soften the racist attitudes of Alice Paul and the NWP in the movie *Iron Jawed Angels* to make them more palatable to a third-wave feminist view. While the entire movie is largely about white women and reaffirms expectations of a largely Caucasian notion of femininity, this nod to inclusion can be explained by looking at third-wave feminism.

The purchase of a pink hat is the final feminine element of the film that takes only a few minutes to portray, but the effects are felt throughout the movie. A major aspect of third-wave feminism is the commodification of feminism and femininity. Goldman, Heath and Smith argue that feminism is wrapped up in the commodification of femininity. They say that "the commercial marriage of feminism and femininity plays off of a conception of personal freedom located in the visual construction of self-appearance" (338). The suffragists in the movie were clearly struggling to be seen as individuals, as women in charge of their own destiny, and as agents of change. The concern is that for third-wave feminism change is so often not about changing the world but about changing your clothes or changing your body. Buying a pretty pink hat is feminist in the third-wave. The problem is that physical change very rarely leads to fiscal or social change for women. The locus of improvement is located with the body not in the community or even within the mind.

In her analysis of female-centric television programs on Nickelodeon Sarah Banet-Weiser states that the media address of third wave feminism and girl power ideology is "about tension and contradiction, about the individual pleasures of consumption and the social responsibilities of solidarity" (137). There is a fear that the balance between social action and personal choice will tip in the favor of personal choice. For Dowd,

the natural conclusion of feminism as choice and its links to capitalism leads us to a conclusion where anything goes and collective action on the part of women is a thing of the past. She describes the opening of the first DeBeers diamond store in America where Gloria Steinem is protesting the conditions in which diamonds are gained in Africa. On the inside of the store Lindsay Lohan was “gushing over the possibility that she could get to wear one of the big rocks” (Dowd 234). She questions that if “you had sat [*Ms.* magazine founder] Gloria Steinem in a chair in 1968 and shown her the future, would she even have bothered?” (Dowd 235). Another example of choices in style or fashion being interpreted as feminism is found in an issue of *BUST*, a third-wave feminist magazine, which featured fashions inspired by famous feminists like Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Camille Paglia. Elizabeth Groeneveld states in an article on this issue that this kind of choice presented to consumers as feminism seems “to exist only at the level of individual acts of consumption, and is thus quite limited” (189). She goes on to say that while “lifestyle feminism arguably provides a version of feminism that is friendly and accessible, it does not offer an analysis of collective injustice and cannot serve as a basis for activism beyond individual acts of consumption” (189). The movie makes it seem that the life for which Alice Paul fought is the life that women have right now. She made everything possible: women got the vote, and they got the right to look feminine and feel sexy. After watching the movie it does not feel that there is any work left to be done.

Early feminists were fighting to break out of the mold into which society had put women. Third wave feminists are fighting to fit into whatever mold they so desire, even if it was the one from which their foremothers were trying to break free. Sociologist Shelley Budgeon says that many young women today “enjoy, yet take for granted, the opportunities made possible by the struggles of second-wave feminism. The implicit assumption is that equality has been achieved both at home and in the workplace; hence, women can relax in their collective struggle and concentrate on the real work ahead—individual goals” (59). The movie reinforces the idea that the battle has already been fought, the vote was already won, and yes, women should focus on their own personal happiness next.

These third-wave ideas about sexuality, fashion, diversity, and choice explain why the moves that von Garnier made with the characters in *Iron Jawed Angels* did not seem to strike her as odd in any particular way, not like it did the reviewers and me. It is conceivable that she was working under a model of feminism that says women can do whatever they want to do as individuals and still be feminist. As long as we have choices to make that make us happy then we can see ourselves as feminists. Paul can be pretty, funny, sexy and smart too. Third-wave feminism invites everyone in and does not question their behaviors as long as the choice was their own.

## Conclusions

In *Iron Jawed Angels* there is a nod to the notions of first-wave feminism in the fight that Alice Paul and her colleagues engaged for women’s suffrage. However, also dominant in the movie is third-wave feminism which says women can be, and perhaps should be, beautiful, tolerant, lust after men, and like pretty things. They can also be a stay-at-home mom, get plastic surgery, or choose to say no to another woman’s right to have an

abortion and call it a feminist act. Having lots of options, no matter what the options might be (and how un-feminist they might have been to a first-wave feminist like Paul) is a typical part of third-wave feminism. This is problematic. Amber E. Kinser states that "some choices are more compromising to women's lives than others, and third-wave feminists have no business shutting down the discussion about which choices accomplish what, all in the name of pluralistic thinking. Pluralism, multiplicity, polyphony, all of these suggest a willingness to hear; they do not imply ipso facto acceptance of what is heard" (145).

She argues that not everything can be feminist. If everything were feminist it would allow a "feminism free-for-all." Instead, we should concentrate on "negotiating space in ways that help clarify which utterances belong fighting other battles outside of, perhaps alongside, feminism" (145). Ultimately, "if we invite every cause and point of view under the purview of feminism, then it is spread so thin that it disintegrates altogether, coming to mean nothing at all, since it cannot possibly mean everything, and weak feminism will prevail" (145).

A concern specifically for this movie is that, for those who saw the movie and for those who will see it in the future, the HBO Paul is one of the few things people will know about this group of first-wave feminists. Chopra-Grant tells us that films about historical events are good at conveying information about the past, especially in terms of costumes of the past and the details about the everyday lives of historical people, but "they are less suitable for providing the political, economic and social commentary that is the currency of academic histories" (2). The movie's depiction of Paul potentially undercuts so much of Paul's feminist politics, yet it is likely to survive as a pseudo-historical document. These expectations about sexuality, body-consciousness, and style will be further ingrained as something a typical woman does or should do. It is the hope that this paper will further the conversation that is clearly on-going about what feminism should do, should be, and how it relates to our modern, consumerist society.

Summer Wood, in an article titled "On Language: Freedom of Choice," offers an example from *Sex and the City* to illustrate the potentially problematic nature of third-wave "choice feminism." She describes the scene where Charlotte is telling Miranda, the lawyer, that she quit her job and that the women's movement is supposed to be all about choice. So Miranda should support her move as a feminist move. After suggesting that "Charlotte's 'choice' to drop out of the workforce has been unduly influenced by her then-husband, Trey, Miranda hangs up on Charlotte, leaving her shouting, 'I choose my choice, I choose my choice, I choose my choice,' over and over, as if to convince herself she really does" (Wood 22). The struggle between feminist choices and choice disguised as feminism even troubles the ladies of *Sex and the City*.

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