Varieties of Radical Dissent:: Essay 2::
Comparing Feminisms

"What's a modern girl to do?"
—Maureen Dowd

As we build our understanding of the American radical tradition we soon discover that its various
movements work in common. Many who argued against slavery came to embrace arguments
against the continued imbalance between the sexes. Indeed, the feminist movement was born
within the universal suffrage movement. Early feminists—including Frederick Douglass himself—
realized there would be no ideal of equality among the citizenry of America until the right to
vote was truly a universal right to vote.

Part II of our course will follow the strong force of these first feminists into the Second Wave of
feminism which asserts women's equality as a choice in the social sphere. The Second Wave
seeks to liberate women from their suburban confinement within the solitary role of housewife/
mother. But soon we realize that "feminism" is no single doctrine. As modern feminism empowers
women with choices, their decisions are difficult and mixed. Significantly, the modern woman is
often asked to choose between home and a career. For some, women's roles must shift severely
and "housewifery" of any sort must be dismissed. Others embrace many roles, defying the binary
of "choice." Although there are those who point out that to do so often requires working the
"second shift." Lately, the so-called Opt-Out generation makes plans to return the woman to the
home. Most likely, the choice cannot be either/or; even if a woman stays at home, her role will
have been changed by feminism's influence. And what is the man's role in all of this?

The Essay

What is a modern girl (and a modern guy) to do? In an essay of 5-6 pages explain the changed
landscape of current gender roles as you see them more than 4 decades after the "liberation" of
Second Wave feminism. (What constitutes "modern womanhood" and "modern manhood"?) And,
comparing the promises and options of various feminisms, propose some principles that might
carry us into the "Fourth Wave."

In asking you to make claims for the present and visions for the future, I do not think a short essay
can unmask all the complexities of the problem, nor I am not expecting you to outline extensive
social engineering projects. Still, a successful essay will make moves to localize its observations
and its principles with tangible examples, perhaps offering a sketch of a smaller sphere (perhaps
the workplace or the home, marriage or friendship) where you can carefully witness the
evolution of these roles and make a case for a specific next step.

Most importantly, your argument should arise out of the consideration and comparison of several
(i.e. more than one) view of feminism that we have read. Use these texts for the way they
diagnose expired versions of womanhood as much as for ways they suggest successful roles for
women. As you negotiate the field, keep context (e.g. dates) in mind.

You should use more than one of the following central texts:
  • Frances Beal. "Double Jeopardy: To Be Black and Female."
  • Betty Friedan. from The Feminine Mystique.
  • Susan Brownmiller. "The Enemy Within."
  • Jennifer Baumgardner & Amy Richards. "ManifestA."

(You are also encouraged to use the newspaper materials and other texts we have read in this part of the
course as important starting points and/or supplements.)
**Workshop Draft: Oct. 6th**

Your Workshop Draft is due at the beginning of class on Wednesday, October 6th. Please bring 4 copies (making sure to keep a copy for yourself).

**Peer Workshop Friday: Oct. 8th**

On Friday, October 8th we will meet in Peer Workshop groups. Sign-up for these groups will take place in class earlier in the week. You should prepare carefully to offer efficient and helpful feedback: read, annotate, and complete a Workshop Comment sheet before the Workshop.

**Final Draft: Oct. 15th**

Your Final Draft is due Friday, October 15th by 11:11 a.m.—or before you leave for Fall Break. Include your Workshop Draft, Peer Comments, and a cover note (details revealed in class).

**Concerns?**

If you have questions or would like to talk out your ideas, please contact me.

If you have an idea for an argument that doesn’t seem to fit this assignment, pitch it to me. We'll see if it will work.

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**The Elements**

In this essay, again, the Triumvirate of Motive, Thesis, and Structure are crucial to your successful essay.

**Thesis**

Your thesis answers the problem as motive has defined it. Present a direct and focused thesis early in the essay gives you (and your readers) a horizon, a goal you'll aim to reach. Still, you'll want to hold onto some of the interesting details of your main idea to reveal in the body of the essay (and keep up interested and moving). And as you create progress by refining that thesis, continue to look back to your first statement to guide the course of your argument as you write.

**Motive**

Motive sets up your thesis by defining the problem as you see it. When dealing with a variety of voices (such as the varieties of feminism) motive serves to construct the conversation. In this case, the conversation will be some variant of Beal, Friedan, Brownmiller, Baumgardner, Richards, Story, Dowd, and yourself. Motive also asks you to consider the varieties of your readers' points of view. What are some of the ways an intelligent reader might think through the role of feminism in its fourth wave?

**Structure**

Structure helps you keep your argument from becoming black or white, insisting on pauses and turns that a curious or skeptical reader might ask for. Consider implications to extend your argument. Consider complications to assure you are not simplifying a complex issue. For instance, include a source (or a voice from your poll) as a counter-argument.