

Point/Counterpoint  
Fall 2007  
Small Group Assignment #1  
12 September 2007

### **WHAT IS FEMINISM?**

1. First, spend some time getting to know your other group members by answering (some or all of) the following questions:

- a. Why are you taking this class?
- b. What are your immediate reactions to the term "feminism"? How is feminism represented in the media/popular culture?
- c. Would you call yourself a feminist? Why/why not?
- d. What kind of impact has the feminist movement/feminist ideas had on your own life or the lives of others? On U.S. culture/politics?
- e. Has the feminist movement been a success?
- f. Is feminism still necessary? Why?
- g. What is a feminist issue?
- h. What kinds of issues should feminists be focusing on?

2. Second, now that you have spent some time talking with your other group members about feminism, develop a very brief working definition of feminism. Be prepared to explain (and possibly defend) your definition to the rest of the class.

**Fall 2007**  
**Small Group**  
**Reproductive Rights**

Discuss the following questions in your group. Pick one member of your group to take notes.

1. What are some of the key issues surrounding reproductive rights? Why is this an important issue for feminists (and women), both currently and in the past?
2. According to the film, why was the pill so revolutionary for women? Why was it necessary, that is, what were the conditions of women in the 50s that made the pill so significant and transformed so many women's lives?
3. How do the readings for this week, particularly the Roberts and Schoen, tell a different side of the story of reproductive rights? How do they complicate the idea of choice? How does the Robert's chapter, "The Dark Side of Birth Control?" demonstrate the ways in which race has always been a central part of the birth control movement? According to her, what is the dark side?
4. Finally, critically explore the following larger question: how far should feminists go in order to get their agendas passed? Must they be uncritical? In order to work within the system for change, do they need to sell out? How much compromise is too much compromise?

2 examples:

- a. M. Sanger promoted the cause of birth control, but, in order to get support for it, she linked her cause with eugenicists. Her goal was to work within the system, to challenge and to change the laws in order to provide more control for women. But, in order to change the system, she had to compromise her ideas, downplaying her radically feminist message (as stated in the excerpt that we read for today) and making birth control more about population control and family planning. Did she sell out too much? Or, was she able to use the system to get what she wanted? What do you think? What does Roberts think?
- b. In the film, McCormick was desperate to get the pill developed/passed; so were the male scientist and doctor. They ignored the voices of the Puerto Rican women who suffered dangerous side effects and pushed to get the pill out on the market as fast as possible. As a result, many women became very sick; some died. How did this failure to listen to the voices of the women affect the success of the pill and the movement for birth control? Is this another case of putting the movement/agenda ahead of the women who will benefit from it? At whose expense are our agendas pushed? Are these women—the women who got sick—necessary casualties on the way to achieving our goals?

**Point/Counterpoint**  
**Fall 2007**  
**Small group #3**

### **A FEMINIST REPRODUCTIVE RIGHTS AGENDA**

The purpose of this small group is collectively to develop a feminist reproductive rights/justice agenda. We have spent the last two weeks discussing debates within feminism about what kind of agenda feminists should have in terms of reproductive rights. Many of our readings have challenged dominant feminism's seemingly exclusive focus on abortion as *the* reproductive rights issue. Some argue for the broadening of choices that get considered in the idea of pro-choice. Some suggest that choice is meaningless unless we think about the social/cultural/historical context in which those choices are encouraged and/or discouraged. And, some suggest that we should shift our attention away from reproductive rights and towards reproductive justice.

In your group, discuss the readings and their various suggestions for how feminism and the feminist reproductive rights agenda should be understood. What do you think an effective project for reproductive rights should look like? What are the key issues? What should be the central project? Is it possible to incorporate the concerns of a wide range of women? Or, do you want to develop a more focused agenda that speaks to the needs of specific individuals but could be connected with a larger movement?

As you are developing this platform, think about what issues should get priority. What issues should be left out? How do we make choices about what to consider and what to leave out? What would your movement be called? What is its connection to other movements? Is it difficult to create an agenda? Why/why not?

Finally, having discussed many of the above questions, select one group member to record the key points of your agenda and/or a description of your agenda's purpose. Your group will hand in your collective statement at the end of class tonight.

**Fall 2007**

**Small group #4**

**Feminism and Work**

The purpose of this small group is collectively to develop a list of some key issues for women/feminists concerning work and women as workers. We spent last week and much of tonight critically exploring the classic feminist idea that working outside of the home/ having a career leads to empowerment, freedom and equality. Many of our readings (and the film) have challenged this idea that work = empowerment, arguing that if it is empowering, it is so for only a select group of privileged women. They have asked: what about the rest of the women? The women who have always had to work? The women who can only get jobs cleaning up after career women?

In your group, discuss the readings/film and the various ways in which they explore women and work/women as workers. What do you think an effective agenda for women's rights as workers should look like? What are the key issues? What should be the central project? Is it possible to incorporate the concerns of a wide range of women? Or, do you want to develop a more focused agenda that speaks to the needs of specific individuals but could be connected with a larger movement?

As you are developing this platform, think about what issues should get priority. What issues should be left out? How do we make choices about what to consider and what to leave out? What would your movement be called? What is its connection to other movements? Is it difficult to create an agenda? Why/why not?

As you are discussing women and work, consider the following plea by Flanagan:

Upper-middle-class working mothers may never have calm hearts regarding their choices about work and motherhood, but there are certain things they can all do. They can acknowledge that many of the gains of professional-class working women have been leveraged on the backs of poor women. They can legitimize those women's work and compensate it fairly, which means—at the very least—paying Social Security taxes on it. They can demand that feminists abandon their current fixation on “work-life” balance and on “ending the mommy wars” and instead devote themselves entirely to the real and unending struggle of poor women and children in this country (17).

Should an effective agenda focus primarily on the issues of poor women and children? Why/why not?

Finally, having discussed many of the above questions, select one group member to record the key points of your agenda and/or a description of your agenda's purpose. Your group will hand in your collective statement at the end of class tonight.