

# Feminism only seems to be fading: It's changing



Star Tribune illustration by Jim Freitag

**feminism/** the principle that women should have political, economic and social rights equal to those of men  
— Webster's New World Dictionary

By Kristin Tillotson  
Star Tribune Staff Writer

"I'm not a feminist, but . . ."

More than three decades after Angela Davis and Gloria Steinem bore the label proudly, that disclaimer echoes among America's young women. These women are by definition feminists in thought, word and deed, yet shun the "f" word.

In the 1960s, female college students made media splashes by marching for equal employment opportunities. Today, they're more likely to get air time if they're Hooters food-servers defending their right to work in hot pants.

Conservative politicians claim women are either tired of trying to have it all, or are being spoon-fed unfair privileges. Even the new

frontier of cyberspace is turning out to be dominated by male users.

The landscape has changed, and it looks to some as if the groundswell of the '60s is all but gone — or at least, gone gray.

"We don't keep track of member ages," said Beverly Swenson, 39, a volunteer with the Minnesota chapter of NOW (National Organization for Women), "but we have very few core activists under the age of 25. Most are in their 40s and 50s."

Heather Rein, membership organizer for the state chapter of NARAL (National Abortion and Reproductive Rights Action League), tells a different story. "Most of our paying members are in their 30s or older, but a lot of the ones who maybe can't afford to donate money, who are out there doing things, are in their 20s," said Rein, 23. A few hundred of the chapter's 6,000 members are students at a dozen Minnesota colleges, she added.

Turn to FEMINISM on E2

For young women who have grown up taking equal rights for granted — at least in theory — is feminism fading? No, but it is undergoing a generational shift, according to Rebecca Walker, the 25-year-old editor of "To Be Real: Telling the Truth and Changing the Face of Feminism."

"Feminism isn't organic to youth culture. We've inherited it and are trying to make it ours," said Walker, who last year was named one of the country's most promising leaders under 40 by Time magazine for her work with Third Wave Direct Action Corp., a nonprofit organization she co-founded. (It takes its name from the fact that 1960s activists were known as the "second wave" of feminism after the pioneering women's suffragists of the early 20th century.)

Walker will be in Minneapolis Thursday to read from the book, an anthology of 20 essays that, she says, "explore my generation's relationship with feminism." Contributors range from a professor (bell hooks) to a super-

model (Veronica Webb) to a few men. Many speak of efforts to marry the real with the ideal: loving hip-hop music, but not misogynist lyrics; wanting a white wedding or beautiful things without feeling guilty; juggling the complications of race, culture clashes and sexual orientation.

The collection is bookended by historical perspectives — a foreword by Steinem and an afterword by Davis, both of whom Walker met growing up as the daughter of poet and novelist Alice Walker ("The Color Purple") and whom she considers role models.

Davis and Steinem have words of praise and encouragement for the book's contributors. They also lament what they consider misconceptions about feminism, for instance, the contention that "having it all means doing it all" for working mothers, or the belief that feminists must be "politically correct."

Walker says the next phase in feminism's evolution will entail a "politics of ambiguity, not identi-

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Photo provided by Anchor Books  
Rebecca Walker predicts the next phase of feminism's evolution.

ty," citing the title essay by Danzy Senna, a "biracial, bisexual, bicultural person who understands how definitions can get muddy. This idea of an affinity based on gender doesn't work for her. But she comes to understand that for her, feminism means being on guard against all discrimination based on difference."

Mocha Jean Herrup is a graduate student in American Studies at the University of Minnesota and author of "Virtual Identity," another of the book's essays to advocate ambiguity.



"What the second wave did was to question what was automatic, what was taken for granted," she writes. "We need to find a way to do that, too."

For example: "It used to be men over here, and women over there, and the goal was women are equal to men. Now the question is, who are men and who are women? What is it that divides us into two sides in the first place? Strength comes from identity, but if we keep sight of the ambiguities, maybe we can ultimately be more effective."

Catherine Orr, a University of Minnesota graduate student who teaches a class in feminism, politics and popular culture, agrees that there is a need for gender-specific classifications. "We don't want to lose the idea of categories, like race and class and sexuality, to analyze oppression. But this idea of 'I'm a woman, and if I call my experience feminist, then it is' — you can't keep broadening until it has no meaning."

### The label thing

Many young women avoid the feminist label because they perceive it as a rigid belief system with limiting connotations, the polar opposite of the increased freedom the term symbolized to second-wavers.

Orr has observed a "rigid perception" of the movement, she said. "In my women's studies courses, half the class is still not used to accepting the term [of 'feminist']. They find out that it's not a monolithic manifesto."

Part of the problem is twentysomethings' resistance to labels of any kind, said Walker. Then, too, they grew up in a comparatively apolitical era, said Cheri Madigan, a University of Minnesota student who wants to help start a local chapter of Third Wave.

Third Wave has about 500 members throughout 33 states. Its most impressive measurable accomplishment to date was registering 20,000 new voters in the summer of 1992, many of them low-income women of color.

For Madigan, the group is "a way for women my age to feel connected," she said. "The second wave's focus was mostly about advancement in the workplace. We're trying to expand on that, to be more inclusive of all ethnicities and sexual orientations."

One advantage women of her generation have, Madigan said, is that feminism "already is an integral part of who we are. What people have to realize is, we don't have to act or look a certain way to work on the issues together."

Neither do young women have to share ideological values to find common ground. Marianne Stebbins, a 27-year-old legal assistant, single mother, abortion opponent and Republican candidate for the Legislature in District 40, does not call herself a feminist. Still, it's "very possible" that she benefited from the feminist movement, she added.

"The law already presented an equal playing field," she said. "The fact that they [second-wave feminists] took the action to go into the workplace probably helped me out. I believe that we have no boundaries but those we place on ourselves. I guess that's what they realized, too."

Both Orr and Walker caution that younger women shouldn't forget the activism that paved the way for them.

"Women now have the right to declare our sexuality any way we want," said Orr. "But most of the poor in this country are still women and children. Women still earn much less than men on average. Day-care was on the agenda back then, and it still is."

"If we show models of liberation — people who feel in control — we can help others feel that way, too," Walker said. "We need to focus on having power, not the lack of it."

## Man writes down 10 rules for how to treat a woman

Dear Abby: I am a single, professional man in my late 20s. For about a year I have been trying to expand my circle of female friends. I have recently seen articles stating that many single professional women do not wish to marry. This scares me, because I am looking for someone.

A few weeks ago, it occurred to me that many men act like jerks by trying to push women around. I think some women would think about getting married if they found a man who treated them as intelligent human beings and not as objects. After giving it more thought, I came up with 10 guidelines on how I believe men should treat women, and if this is printed, I would like some feedback.

### Guidelines for men

1. Respect her philosophies, goals and ideals. She has a brain. Listen to her ideas and remember them. Make her feel appreciated.
2. Talk with her, not at her. Don't push her. Don't boss her around. Don't make her do anything she does not want to do.
3. Ask for her advice and opinions. Let her talk. Don't interrupt. Be a good listener. Include her in decision-making.
4. Be honest. Never lie to her. Be open about feelings. Apologize for mistakes.
5. Give her space. Don't be a control freak. Remember that she has a professional life as well as other interests. Give her some support. Let her spend time with other friends.
6. Be sensitive to her problems. Help her. Show her you care.
7. Don't call her names. Never hit her. Treat her with respect, caring and trust.
8. Don't compete with her. The two of you have different goals. There is absolutely nothing wrong with a man seeing a woman who has more education and a more prestigious job.
9. Do fun things together. Don't bore her. Don't forget to make her laugh.
10. Should you meet that special someone and the two of you marry, I want to add these two cents:

(a) A wife is not a housekeeper. You need to get off the couch and cook, clean and do laundry. Help out. Remember, marriage is an equal partnership.

(b) Should the two of you desire children, you should help raise them: Change diapers, clean up, feed them, get up in the middle of the night. Perhaps you could take some leave from work to stay home with the new baby.

(c) Never force your wife to have sex. That's rape. No means no.

Thanks, Abby. I know this letter is a bit long, but I think it is important. That is how I was brought up to treat people.

—A Gentleman in Texas

## How about "10 Rules for how to treat a man"?

# No, baby, American women have not come a long way

By Lorelei Kraft

Park Rapids, Minn.

I am not a female suffering from "delusions." I am not "unstable," "psychotic" or "schizophrenic."

I was Minnesota's Business Woman of the Year in 1988. I was a delegate to the White House Conference on Small Business in Washington, D.C., in 1986. I was named one of Corporate Report Minnesota's Outstanding Women in Business in 1989.

But 10 years ago, in 1981, I was a divorced mother of two struggling with a small business. I made an appointment to meet with a traveling Small Business Administration representative about available loan programs. When I asked for an application, he rifled through his briefcase, then said, "I must have left that particular application in my motel room. Why don't you meet me there at 5 o'clock to fill it out?" It was clear what he meant.

I tell this story because, like Anita Hill, I did nothing about it at the time. Who'd have believed me, over a man who'd been with SBA for years? Ten years ago there was little redress for those humiliating (and frequent) experiences for women.

What would I do now, 10 years later, if this man was to be appointed head of the SBA? Would I have the courage to speak out, after watching Anita Hill's treatment?

*Let me try to make it easier for men to understand the social conditioning on females to keep their mouths shut.*

Reverse the roles — and imagine growing up as a male in a world where everyone who has power is female: the president, Supreme Court, Congress, governors, judges, police, legislators, doctors, dentists, lawyers, school administrators, clergy.

As a boy, you are taught in church that God is female, that only females who are like God can be clergy, and only girls are worthy enough to be altar girls. You learn in school that the only accomplishments that merit attention are women's, as history

books rarely mention men. You subtly begin to absorb the knowledge that males must not be worth as much as females because they have no power.

As you go through school, your female counselors steer you into the secondary positions; you can be the dental hygienist, but not the dentist. If you protest, you are told you are "unmanly" to want women's jobs. In this world, men earn 59 cents for every dollar women earn and rarely make it to the top, as the "glass ceiling" is firmly in place. Men — no matter how old or what their job — are still called "boys."

As a teacher, you are paid less than female colleagues with the same experience. You then start your own business — and are humiliated when

**Reverse roles and imagine growing up male in a world where all who have power are female.**

you have to get your wife's permission for a bank loan even though she doesn't need your permission. You buy insurance through your business, and are appalled when the policy is issued in your wife's name and you are listed with the children under "dependents."

You want a vasectomy, and have to appear before a committee of women doctors to beg for the right. You got divorced; the awarded child support is not enforced and you struggle to make ends meet. When you look to governmental agencies for help, it is often suggested that meetings continue in motel rooms.

At home, you learn you have no legal protection, as more men get battered in their homes every year than get married. You whisper with male friends about husbands who are being beaten, many by wives who are pillars of the community — but police won't interfere in "domestic dis-

putes." You watch men who press rape or sexual harassment charges get dragged through the mud until they become the ones on trial.

Not a pretty picture, is it? *Yet all of the above happened to me and many women of Anita Hill's generation. These are not things that happen to men, which is why they cannot imagine the intimidating, fearful effect of society's long-term conditioning on women when they are treated like children and second-class citizens with little legal rights.*

And so I remember in humiliation the "good" men over the years who told obscene jokes and described pornography and demanded sexual favors and didn't think as "just warm-blooded males" they were doing anything wrong.

I feel again the utter frustration and anger of having to battle for rights men automatically had. I had not even heard of the word "feminist." I only knew that the discrimination *wasn't right* because I was a human being first and a female second.

Why should Anita Hill have battled the system 10 years ago? The crucifying she suffered in 1991 ("psychotic," "fantasizing," "unstable") by the all-male Judiciary Committee was exactly what she would have faced in 1981. The good old boys of the "kinder, gentler" White House protected their own with a smear campaign of sound-bite character assassination worthy of the defense in any rape trial — which is what prevents many women from coming forward.

And my anger starts to grow again, as I read study after study showing that girls today still have low self-esteem compared with boys. Society is continuing to teach little girls the same things about their lack of value and power that my generation was taught, and women in the workplace are still suffering discrimination in pay, promotion and harassment.

No, baby, we have not come a long way.

*Lorelei Kraft, of Park Rapids, is the owner of Lorelei Studios, a candle manufacturing firm.*

## THE RULES OF COURTLY LOVE

Love is a certain inborn suffering derived from the sight of and excessive meditation upon the beauty of the opposite sex, which causes each one to wish above all things the embraces of the other and by common desire to carry out all of love's precepts in the other's embraces.

1. Marriage is no real excuse for not loving.
2. He who is not jealous cannot love.
3. No one can be bound by a double love.
4. It is well known that love is always increasing or decreasing.
5. That which a lover takes against the will of his beloved has no relish.
6. Boys do not love until they arrive at the age of maturity.
7. When one lover dies, a widowhood of two years is required of the survivor.
8. No one should be deprived of love without the very best of reasons.
9. No one can love unless he is impelled by the persuasion of love.
10. Love is always a stranger in the home of avarice.
11. It is not proper to love any woman whom one would be ashamed to seek to marry.
12. A true lover does not desire to embrace in love anyone except his beloved.
13. When made public, love rarely endures.
14. The easy attainment of love makes it of little value: difficulty of attainment makes it prized.
15. Every lover regularly turns pale in the presence of his beloved.
16. When a lover suddenly catches sight of his beloved, his heart palpitates.
17. A new love puts to flight an old one.
18. Good character alone makes any man worthy of love.
19. If love diminishes, it quickly fails and rarely revives.
20. A man in love is always apprehensive.
21. Real jealousy always increases the feeling of love.
22. Jealousy, and therefore love, are increased when one suspects his beloved.
23. He whom the thought of love vexes eats and sleeps very little.
24. Every act of a lover ends in the thought of his beloved.
25. A true lover considers nothing good except what he thinks will please his beloved.
26. Love can deny nothing to love.
27. A lover can never have enough of the solaces of his beloved.
28. A slight presumption causes a lover to suspect his beloved.
29. A man who is vexed by too much passion usually does not love.
30. A true lover is constantly and without intermission possessed by the thought of his beloved.
31. Nothing forbids one woman being loved by two men or one man by two women.