Feminism's Quest for Common Desires

Lori J. Marso

One attraction of "choice" feminism has been its refusal to judge the diverse desires of women. Yet for feminism to retain its political vision as a quest for social justice, we must continue difficult conversations concerning how acting on our individual desires impacts the lives of others. In this essay, I argue that feminists can acknowledge women's diverse desires while forging a meaningful feminist community. I make this argument by considering feminism's relationship to time, and particularly how women's diverse desires are read in each moment in time. If we abandon the generational model, wherein each new generation of feminists improves upon the last, for a genealogical perspective where women recognize our feminist origins and empathize with the diverse struggles of other women, we might reaffirm social justice for the community as central to feminist politics. To articulate this possibility, I turn to the work of Simone de Beauvoir to explain her discovery of how her embodiment as a woman and her relationship to femininity becomes a way of grounding a feminist politics. Recognizing the "demands of femininity" in other women's lives allows us to affirm feminist community while retaining the capacity to make judgments that realize social justice as a feminist goal.

> All efforts to escape from the grimness of the present into nostalgia for a still intact past, or into the anticipated oblivion of a better future, are in vain.
>
> —Hannah Arendt

The portrayal of feminist politics within dominant media makes feminism seem more or less irrelevant to women of the twenty-first century. Feminism is either depicted as "dead"—we live in a "post-feminist" world—or so well accepted that we are all feminists now (Girls unite!). In the latter of these portrayals (we are all feminists), which is not necessarily at odds with the former (feminism is dead), all women's choices—to leave the work force to raise children, to marry, to take a husband's name, to forego having children, to get plastic surgery, to stay with an abusive partner, to worship a patriarchal god, to wear a headscarf, to terminate a pregnancy, to set one's goals aside for others—are depicted as potentially or equally feminist. This claim is attractive, even to some bold (or old-fashioned) enough to still call themselves feminists: in one fell swoop it leaves behind a raucous chorus of discordant claims about the substance and the subject of feminism. Aren't we tired of fighting over who is included in the "we" of feminism and what feminism stands for? What is it that feminists want anyway? What is it that women want? If all women's choices can be called feminist, we can leave these unpleasant and divisive battles in the dustbin of history.

But along with these battles, so goes feminism. The very heart of feminist debates concern women's complex desires, the multiple locations and identities women occupy and embody, as well as interests and goals for feminist politics. If all women's choices can be considered equally feminist, as media depictions of feminism would have it, there is nothing for feminists to further discuss. Lacking debate, dialogue, and disagreement (in other words, lacking *politics* as Ferguson argues),[1] there is no context or political space available for a collective discussion of social justice for women. Feminism's past as a social and political movement, its present debates concerning who constitutes the "we" of feminism, and its future as a movement anchored in the improvement of women's lives and lived experiences are all obscured within an unsophisticated language of choice and liberal individualism.

The great appeal of "choice" has been its refusal to fix the identities and desires of women; we certainly cannot (and would not want to) build a movement around a singular set of desires. Yet while I agree with Snyder-Hall that self-determination for each woman should be a concern

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for feminism, I do not agree that it should form the "foundation"[2] since, as I argue, women's choices always impact the lives of other women. For feminism to retain its political vision as a force for social justice, we must continue the difficult conversations concerning how acting on our diverse desires impacts the lives of others. And in order to become conscious of how our desires and choices affect each other, we need some sense of political space and community. I will argue that we can retain feminist community while also retaining diversity. To form a community, we need not appeal to common desires, common identities, or even necessarily the same moment in time.

I make this argument by considering feminism's relationship to time, and particularly how women's diverse desires are read in each moment in time. In contrast to Snyder-Hall's suggestion to replace "choice" feminism with a more nuanced account of "third-wave feminism,"[3] I will argue that this generational metaphor that has dominated feminism has been more problematic than helpful. In fact, it has encouraged each subsequent "wave" of feminism to claim improvement and progress, making it seem redundant to forge future feminisms and caricaturing our historical foremothers and their communities. Feminists who claim membership in the "third" wave, for example, often identify their foremothers as unified but exclusive, similar to how "second"-wave members caricatured the "first'-wave participants of the feminist movement. Concomitantly, however, those who do not identify with feminism in its present manifestation tend to look nostalgically to feminism's past, also identified as unified, but in this instance united around progressive goals. What is obscured in the generational metaphor are the diverse desires at the heart of every feminist moment and all versions of feminism.

As an alternative to the generational metaphor, I sketch a genealogical approach whereby we embrace, rather than seek to disavow and improve upon, our origins. When we acknowledge our debts to feminist foremothers and seek to recognize common struggles across and through time, we are better able to identify both differences and commonalities as well as to affirm the diversity of desires and positions that have always characterized feminist politics. In this way, we acknowledge the diversity of women's desires without sacrificing feminist political community. The community of women constituted through the genealogical method could be said to be *outside* of time, bringing women together across generations in unlikely encounters, yet it models a space for women to come together, as women sharing the *present* moment, to speak about our differences, affirm our common struggles, and critically interrogate the contexts in which our choices are constructed. Appealing to genealogical, as opposed to generational, models allows feminism to constitute itself through an exploration of women's lived experiences, particularly how what I call the diverse "demands of femininity" have impacted life experiences, without reducing our knowledge or identification of these experiences to one uniform model of being a woman.

A central feature of the genealogical approach that I offer here is its focus on communities of women. Opposing the idea that acknowledging sexual difference denies or ignores women's plurality, I argue that we can come together *as women* to acknowledge the power of relationships and differences that exist among us. As a political move, this recognition of power and plurality within a community of women enables us to address and alleviate interlocking structures of oppression as well as improve the lived experiences of individual women. Rooted in community and disavowing from the start that all choices might be equally feminist, women can discover and reaffirm social justice for the community as central to feminist politics. The two most important discoveries we might make within feminist community are how our choices are constrained in ways we may not have previously realized or recognized, and that the choices we make in light of these discoveries, even and especially our personal choices, do *matter.* These choices affect not only individuals and individual lives; they also affect the lives and the choices of other women.

To specify how such a community where we make these discoveries might be possible, in the genealogical spirit I turn to one of our most iconic of feminist "mothers," Simone de Beauvoir. In her own life and work, Beauvoir demonstrates how we might focus on women's freedom as individuals while never losing sight of the potential community of women who come together to understand and speak of common struggles from their diverse locations and in terms of their heterogeneous desires.

Diversity *Is* the Feminist Condition

Although asking what women want, and what feminists might want, necessitates a relationship to past and future, a generational approach to feminism where we look to the past to forge the future in a linear or progressive model disallows us from engaging with feminists across time and with a sympathetic bearing. A nostalgic longing for a more united past or an apocalyptic prediction about the failure to bring forth the desired future discourage any honest reckoning with the heterogeneity of women and the possibility of seeking political coalitions that are not grounded in epistemological or ontological truths.

Moreover, the generational model actively encourages this type of nostalgia and often feeds upon media caricatures of each wave. In its positive rendition, for example, the second wave is seen to have been inherently political and unified, focused on "real" women and their material problems and issues, and oriented toward legal and institutional change. In its negative version, the second wave is characterized as rigid, monolithic, sex-negative, exclusionary, racist, and middle-class. In the positive version of the third wave, it is seen as theoretically sophisticated, open to coalition and

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diverse members, and savvy about, as well as open to, the future. In its negative version, the third wave is depicted as apolitical, exclusively interested in identity and sexuality, divisive and sectarian, and divorced from the concerns and experiences of "real" women.[4] Astrid Henry argues that the generational approach also tends to cast the "mothers" of feminism as white, unified, and puritanical.[5] One of the most troubling implications of this generational rivalry whereby the earlier "mothers" are seen as puritanical and rigid is that once again, and this time within feminist communities, the mother's sexual agency is denied.

The perceived rigidity in the second wave, a perception encouraged by generational readings, is one that makes the current orientation to choice feminism all the more attractive. But feminism has always been about diverse desires—it is the coming together of women in community to speak of how to enact social justice in light of diversity that makes feminist politics exciting and viable. Tellingly, the second wave was also riddled with internal divisions over the question of what women might desire. In a fascinating account of the history of feminism in just one location—Dayton, Ohio—Judith Ezekiel documents the divisions and questions that plagued the Dayton Women's Movement. Worrying about the divisions that might hinder the "revolutionary potential of women's liberation," Ezekial cites an activist's lament: "What happens when the interests of the women under the umbrella of women's liberation clash or are in fact antagonistic?"[6]

But though desires are always diverse, the "everything goes" language of choice too often serves to protect the most powerful and privileged in any society and culture. As Estelle Freedman reminds us, when the language of choice came to dominate the debates over reproductive freedom, it replaced the call for "abortion on demand." Rather than emphasize a justice-oriented political vision whereby all women, regardless of class, race, and geographical location, could receive a safe and free abortion, the language of choice focused on the abilities of women to control their own bodies as individuals who have rights. Feminists soon discovered that "this emphasis on individual rights could, however, easily be extended to the rights of a fetus, the very argument that was gaining support among pro-life advocates."[7] When advocates for abortion adjusted their own rhetoric in response to "pro-life" advocates by claiming their stance as "pro-choice," any larger vision of reproductive justice (which might include not being forcibly sterilized) was obscured by the language of liberal individualism.

Though some might argue that concerns for social justice are not inherently excluded from the language of choice, the liberal individualism motivating this language has tended to obscure the different experiences of women who are not in a position to procure, nor maybe even in a position to desire, an abortion. In her examination of the systematic abuse of Black women's bodies via methods such as slavery and forced sterilization in *Killing the Black Body,* Dorothy Roberts makes it chillingly clear that "Black women's reproductive choices seem to fall outside [any] sphere of protection that is supposed to apply equally to all citizens."[8] Probing the lived experience of Black women in U.S. history, Roberts severely cautions again the language of liberal individualism. It is a language that protects only the few. When we protect our choices, liberty can only guard "against government intrusion; it does not guarantee social justice."[9]

An Un/Timely Intervention

To acknowledge the diversity of desires and locations that has always been central to feminist politics, we must abandon the generational model. Change, rebellion, diversity, and reinvention have always been part of each feminist generation and debates *within* generations about race, class, sexuality, and social justice have kept the movement alive. In light of this, turning to a genealogical model might be one way to get away from the pitfalls of generational revolt.

But genealogies have long been depicted as dangerous for feminists. A central aspect of feminist politics has been grounded in moves away from the lives of mothers. In fact, feminists rarely seek to identify with the lives of their mothers, even when their mothers are progressive and feminist. Instead, we seek to distinguish ourselves from our mothers, rather than note our similarities, overlapping struggles, and issues in common. Carolyn Kay Steedman has expressed the great difficulty feminists have in working with genealogies. Speaking about her own fear of becoming like her mother, she worries that she will somehow reproduce the "circumstances of our straitened unsatisfying life."[10] Astrid Henry worries that the mother-daughter dyad is hopelessly fixated on the notion of difference ("I'm not like you"), and thus detrimental for feminist politics. Moreover, within this dynamic feminist mothers are "inevitably lacking" so that feminist daughters "may succeed where they have failed."[11] As Henry demonstrates, this has created and maintained generational rivalries within feminism. In contrast, the genealogical approach allows us to acknowledge our debt to feminist "mothers" both literal and figurative, but outside of the generational constraints. Without needing to first simplify and then improve upon our "mother's" history, we can see anew the complexities of their lives and recognize struggles in common.

As Alison Stone notes, a genealogical approach offers an anti-essentialist perspective. We can trace how "some contemporary practice [in this case, the demands of femininity] has arisen from an indefinitely extended process whereby earlier forms of the practice have become reinterpreted by later ones."[12] Thereby, genealogical feminism forges bonds of solidarity in the present while keeping an eye trained on how understandings of the past and ideas

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about the future help to shape women's present goals. Yet it attends to these connections without seeking to derive a sense of identity, purpose, or authority in the present from what is known or claimed about the past or future. It is a decidedly political space for feminists, a space where we can acknowledge women's relationships to each other, including power relationships that keep us within structures where we often (sometimes unwittingly) commit injustices towards other women.

Keeping with this genealogical impulse, I turn to the work of Simone de Beauvoir, not in reverence, but rather to seek inspiration on forming a community outside essentialist mandates. Her existentialist method, whereby a person is constituted and meaning is made through acts rather than beliefs, could refocus our energies toward working on dismantling the demands of femininity in their local and specific manifestations. Her focus on gender restraints that limit women's individual acts retains an emphasis on community without epistemological rigidity. Looking to Beauvoir's work, I will argue that we might refocus our energies on increasing the freedom of individual women while never losing sight of the collectivity of women to which we belong. Indeed, when we come together as women, in all our diversity, we discover our differences, as well as our common struggles within the demands of femininity.

To begin to articulate the demands of femininity and how they manifest themselves differently in women's lives reveals a much more complex relationship to issues that we might have formerly assumed affect women in the same ways. Once we probe women's different perspectives on abortion, for example, we find that women are very differently situated in relationship to this question based on their material circumstances. Coming together as women allows us to discover these relationships. I will come back to this particular issue later. First, I turn to Beauvoir to articulate her method of discovering how embodiment as a woman and her relationship to femininity becomes a way of grounding a feminist politics.

Writing the first words of *The Second Sex* back in 1949, Simone de Beauvoir had already decided questions concerning what women might want, and even who women are and whether women exist, might have reached a dead end:

> For a long time I have hesitated to write a book on woman. The subject is irritating, especially to women; and it is not new. Enough ink has been spilled in the quarreling over feminism, now practically over, and perhaps we should say no more about it. It is still talked about, however, for the voluminous nonsense uttered during the last century seems to have done little to illuminate the problem. After all, is there a problem? And if so, what is it? Are there women, really?[13]

Responding to Dorothy Parker's idea that men, as well as women, should simply be regarded as human beings, Beauvoir clarifies:

> But nominalism is a rather inadequate doctrine, and the anti-feminists have had no trouble in showing that women simply *are not* men. Surely woman is, like man, a human being; but such a declaration is abstract. The fact is that every concrete human being is always a singular, separate individual. To decline to accept such notions as the eternal feminine, the black soul, the Jewish character, is not to deny that Jews, Negroes, women exist today—this denial does not represent a liberation for those concerned, but rather a flight from reality.[14]

The same is true today. Even though feminists have come to no firm conclusions concerning who women are, whether invoking women as a political category is inherently exclusive, and what women might want, women still exist and "women's concrete situation"[15] is such that men still "have many more opportunities to exercise freedom in the world."[16] In her reading of *The Second Sex,* Toril Moi writes that Beauvoir shows us there is "no reason to believe that the word woman is always inherently metaphysical or essentialist."[17] To acknowledge that one is a woman and that there are indeed other women in the world is simply to recognize the existence of embodied sexually-different human beings. This recognition helps us to understand "sex or the body as a concrete, historical and social phenomenon, not as an essence."[18]

A Collective of Women

If we might agree with Beauvoir, then, on our ability to recognize that there are women in the world, how and why might women come together in coalition? The simple recognition of being a woman in the world, of noting our embodied and material relationship to the world, need not be either essential or exclusive. As a material and social declaration, being a woman recognizes what Iris Marion Young has called women's material relationship to a "vast, multifaceted, layered, complex, and overlapping set of structures and objects."[19] To say that one is a woman is not to say that being a woman carries with it any special knowledge, or that your own experience of being a woman is the only experience to be recognized. As a social and material reality, being a woman merely places us in specific relationships to our world that change depending on our location and varying situations. For Young, being a woman is simply being part of a specific series that has different modes and tonalities of resonance in varying situations.

When Beauvoir asked the question "Are there women, really?" in the introduction to *The Second Sex,* she found nominalism and essentialism to be inadequate doctrines. She did not claim to deny her sex (nominalism), yet she did not want to be reduced to it (essentialism). Instead, she found that to understand her experience of being a woman in the world, she had to acknowledge that she was a woman, a woman amongst other women in a social world formed and perpetuated by gender norms. Hence the very interpretation of the physical significance of her body was formed in and through social expectations of

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patriarchal gender norms and experiences. The body has material significance, yet that significance is constructed and enabled only through a cultural and social interpretation of the world.

Describing how we become men and women within gendered contexts is vital, yet to make a political declaration claiming membership in a community of women is a strikingly different matter. This is the move that Beauvoir makes, and it is one that has remarkable potential for feminist community. It is an existential act that recognizes oneself as not alone in struggle, but cast immediately into a community of other women. The simple statement, "I am a woman," acknowledges a potential feminist community by recognizing ourselves as political subjects in all our diversity. As such, it can be read as a move towards solidarity. We are immediately located within a political community of other women: though articulated differently in relationship to the demands of femininity, we might be able to speak of and across borders about how to best work towards women's freedom.

The focus on women does not deny that men can indeed be and become feminists. But Beauvoir insists that the recognition that freedom is always constrained by situation (our material and social articulation and intelligibility) is something that women, especially, need to achieve. And we might best achieve this by claiming belonging to a community of other women in the world, across generations and across borders. Here is where constructing a genealogy of women recognizing the specificity of the demands of femininity makes it possible for us to understand our common and different experiences of becoming and being women and work towards bettering the lot of this group. Sometimes maybe the only thing women have in common is that we are always subject to the demands of femininity, though these demands vary based on one's location. Conventional definitions of femininity continuously serve to constrain women even when they desire to be free subjects, engaged in their own projects and pursuing their unique and existential desires.

The question remains, however, as to how to get women to come together within an explicitly political community. Why would women choose to engage in the continuous political labor that is at the heart of feminist movements? This is an especially pertinent question given our knowledge of how women are socially constructed to choose their own femininity, a femininity that does not include political action as one of its features. Sonia Kruks has explored this question in turning to Beauvoir's theorization of women as often complicit in sustaining the normalizing practices through which their subordinating "femininity" is perpetuated. In other words, women often perform their femininity in choosing not to engage in political action that challenges the demands of femininity. Not only do these networks of gendered power "produce de facto relationships of personal privilege and dependency that make compliance a rational strategy for many women," but moreover many women become "invested in their femininity, not only as a material survival strategy but as a mode of lived experience that is integral to the self."[20] So, why would women choose to identify as women within a community that challenges feminine norms?

Political coalitions and the political claims they might engender could spring simply from the recognition on the part of women that our desires for freedom are limited by the constraints of femininity, a gender norm that differently constrains and enables all women's lives. To recognize the impact of the demands of femininity within various histories, cultures and identity categories encourages feminists to think politically about how we are called to be women, how we might articulate ourselves as women within coalition, and how we might move beyond the confines of this designation altogether.

Genealogical Politics for Feminists

The Milan Women's Bookstore Collective offers concrete examples that demonstrate how when women come together as women, we discover differences and power relationships, as well as commonalities and potential avenues for political engagement. Harkening back to the first part of this essay, this specific example from the Milanese women's experience speaks to the paucity of using the language of "choice" to designate feminist goals and desires.

> When we talked about it among ourselves, we discovered how varied our experiences were, depending on our different social locations—for example, what quality medical care one could afford. But even more marked were the individual differences between women. Some had never had an abortion because they were sterile, or because they did not have sexual relations with men, or had them in such a way as not to get pregnant, or because they preferred to carry the pregnancy to term rather than abort; others used abortion as their preferred method of birth control. For some having an abortion was untraumatic, nothing at all, while for others it was a tragedy, a mutilation. These various positions were the phenomenal, superficially diversified aspect of female experience; women had not yet managed to get to the heart of the matter, which was: where they stood with respect to sexuality. It was artificial and forced, therefore, to want the women's movement to unite over the issue of legalized abortion.[21]

When they came together within a "politics of women"[22] to speak about their experiences, the women discovered that they each experienced abortion differently due to their particular circumstances. Ultimately, they felt that to unite solely on the basis of legalizing abortion did not begin to address their relationship to femininity in terms of "all their other problems, from sexuality, maternity, the socialization of children, etc."[23] Moreover, they argue that only this kind of "politics of women" can assure that legalized abortion does not turn out to be "the cynical choice of a state that is starting to see its economic advantages in limiting births."[24] Had early proponents of abortion rights come together as women to discuss their differing

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relationships to the demands of femininity, they might have discovered that Black women were differently situated in relationship to this question due to their experiences of dealing with forced sterilization and the use of the contraceptive drug, Depo Provera. Only in coming together in community as women who are situated in relationship to the situation of their bodies can we begin to articulate and discover how it might be possible to move beyond the demands of femininity and become free *as* women and learn *how to become women* differently.

It is the public dimension of thinking together as women struggling with the demands of femininity that provides collective criteria for judgment. This community, focused on social justice, moves us beyond the kind of feminism whereby women are simply freed to make their own diverse choices. Within a community of feminists we might discover situations wherein leaving the workforce to raise children at home could be articulated as a feminist choice, even in light of the critiques articulated by writers such as Judith Warner and Linda Hirshman. But only when we come together as feminists to defend our diverse choices might we discover such situations and judge them. For example, it could be that a feminist has made the choice to raise her children at home due to misogynist attitudes within her school district that she does not want her daughter(s) or son(s) to be exposed to. This is clear struggle with the demands of femininity that could be discovered within feminist community; in turn the mother might be persuaded to turn her energy towards changing sexist attitudes in the school rather than withdrawing her child. Each situation that arises can be spoken of, judged, and considered in relationship to the situation of other women.

What I find to be most important for a feminist politics is the public dimension of coming together within community to speak about these choices and their consequences. It is the articulation of freedom and of choice within the private sphere that is the most troubling to me as it obscures the need for community and the reality that all choices have public consequences for others. Though Beauvoir values freedom as a good in and of itself, she is clear that freedom exists only within and through community.

As I have argued, this community can be constituted with women across generations, in reading their memoirs and autobiographies, in learning about the struggles and compromises that our foremothers made, and in thinking through what is similar and different about the demands of femininity in each moment. It can be argued that Beauvoir models this kind of community within the pages of *The Second Sex* in that she gives voice to scores of women who speak about the demands of femininity in various locations, moments, and contexts.

Coming together genealogically as a "politics of women" struggling within the demands of femininity is quite different from assuming "sisterhood." Numerous feminist scholars have rightly argued against an unquestioned celebration of sisterhood with its assumptions of commonality and the privileging of white women's experiences. Instead, within genealogies, we discover our relationship to other women in all their complexities. This move frees us in important and compelling ways.

First, as opposed to reading feminism through a generational map, we can look to the past without having to idealize or demonize our feminist foremothers. Instead, we can read their lives sympathetically in their complex diversity. In this way, we need not be beholden to their programs, nor indebted to their legacy. We need not look to the past nostalgically, nor exaggerate the strength or achievements of individual women. We can recognize their struggles and speak of the commonalities as well as the differences between our lives and theirs. This opens up debate and contestation rather than closing off heterogeneity. The anxiety provoked is productive, rather than reactive and disciplinary; it allows connections and insights without a mirroring of goals, desires, and the vision of the future.

Second, seeking freedom beyond the demands of femininity illuminates how gender roles impact the lives of all of us, even the freest-thinking feminists. When we think about the anxiety over media presentations of present day feminism, it is the representations of femininity—mother, wife, whore, good girl, the marrying type, the floozy, the girlie girl, the model—that fill, and possibly, dominate the imaginations and the fantasies of women and girls exposed relentlessly to these images. They proliferate so deeply that mandates of femininity make their way even into feminist scholarship—think of Susan B. Anthony as the "Childless Spinster," Mary Wollstonecraft as either the "Woman of Reason" or the "Rejected Lover," Simone de Beauvoir as the "Independent Woman." Each of these feminist "icons" also had to struggle with the demands of femininity in her own life. Each tried to live her life as a free woman while always subject to conventional expectations, and the constraints of being viewed as a woman while claiming feminist authority.

Third, and finally, genealogical communities of women bring us together to make judgments about how our choices, even ones we might think of as feminist, could adversely affect the lives of other women. Here, we might think about the upper-class woman who has her house cleaned (or her children cared for) by immigrant women so that she can stay in the work force, the "Western" feminist who stridently speaks out against the wearing of the veil as inherently oppressive for Muslim women, or the women who ardently supported Senator Hillary Clinton in her bid for the presidency in spite of Clinton's record on the wars of Afghanistan and Iraq and her position on Iran. Are these women feminists? The point, of course, is not to police the definition of a feminist, but rather to bring women into difficult conversations about how our "feminist" positions may indeed adversely affect other

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women in the world, and even in our own neighborhoods and communities.

If, as I am suggesting, we put aside our despair concerning the past and the future to articulate genealogical communities of women that are across time and across locations, how might we think productively about the anxiety caused when women make choices that reinforce the dictates of patriarchal culture, or that cause real harm to other women? The answer to this question is one that can only be decided within collectivities of women becoming conscious of the demands of femininity and learning from how others, including their feminist foremothers, struggle also with these demands and still try to work politically for social justice. Coming together as women with different desires and interests, a feminist focus on collective political consciousness brings attention to our (often oppressive) relationships to each other as women. This version of feminist politics encourages women to recognize our differences and our diverse desires. The most immediate goal of feminist collectivities is consciousness of how the demands of femininity affect us differently. Once recognized, we might struggle together to win greater freedom and social justice within specific locations.

The most insidious aspect of "choice" feminism, as I have presented it here, is that it forecloses the question of how feminism, considered as a political movement born from debates amongst women about our collective freedom, might alter the political landscape. If all choices are equal, and all desires are valid, there is nothing left to talk about. But it is the debate amongst women that is productive, a debate that can only happen when women come together to discover our differences, our common ground, and our position within systems of oppression. What is at stake when we consider only individual women and their personal choices and abandon women as the subject of feminism, is the loss of the collectivity, a collectivity that is heterogeneous yet united in calling for an end to the systematic oppression of women. This, indeed, is the potential loss that should make feminists most anxious about the future.

Notes

1 See Ferguson 2010.
2 See Snyder-Hall 2010.
3 Ibid.
4 See Purvis 2004.
5 Henry 2004, 2.
6 Ezekiel 2002, 93.
7 Freedman 2002, 241.
8 Roberts 1997, 294.
9 Ibid.
10 Steedman 1986, 94. Also see Marso 2006.
11 Henry 2004, 72.
12 Stone 2007, 23.
13 Beauvoir 1952, xix.
14 Ibid., xx.
15 Ibid., xxxii.
16 Ibid., 627.
17 Moi 1999, 113.
18 Ibid., 4.
19 Young 1997, 28.
20 Kruks 2006, 61.
21 Milan Collective 1987, 61–62.
22 Ibid., 62.
23 Ibid.
24 Ibid.

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