



FEMINISM 2.0

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I want to talk to you about a new feminism for the 21st century.

There are three pillars to this new feminism: Dignity. The word “no.” And men.

That’s right, men.

But before I expound on these three ideas, you need to know something about me. I was very involved in the feminist movement, including being on the board of directors of the National Organization for Women. For this I feel much pride and some guilt. Pride because feminism has pushed forward some very important and needed changes; and guilt because it has also done a lot of damage. My work now is to reverse that damage.

So in that spirit, let’s talk about the first pillar of this new feminism: dignity.

Dignity is at the core of what feminism should always be about. Dignity means that a woman should be able to freely choose her own path in life. That’s what feminism once held. But does it still? Ask almost any female college student today what she aspires to be and she’ll list any number of career choices. The one she won’t list is wife and mother. In fact any time someone has the temerity to suggest that a woman might want to look for a husband while in college, as a very successful Princeton grad recently did in a letter to the school’s newspaper, feminists go nuts. A new feminism will value and respect all responsible choices.

And while we’re talking about dignity, I can’t think of anything less dignified for women than the feminist belief that in the sexual arena, women are like, and therefore ought to act like, men. Is this what the truly liberated woman wants? To have casual sex and think nothing of it like men do? That’s what feminism aspires to? Sad to say the answer has too often been yes.

So, let’s add this up: Feminism has downplayed the desire for women to have a family while at the same time hyping the rewards of career and casual sex. Not exactly a recipe for success or happiness.

The second pillar of a new feminism is the word “no.” It’s very much tied in with the first pillar. Throughout history women have made great use of the word “no.” Of course many times women said “yes” when they should have said no, and that’s the basis of more than a few classic stories and novels. But this was the exception, not the rule. There is great power in that word “no.” And women, for the most part, knew how to wield that power. But in the last few decades they’ve lost it. And the consequences have been catastrophic.

Women, who fought not to be treated as sex objects, have become more objectified than ever. You see it everywhere: in music videos, on billboards, in the hookup culture on campuses. And now we have the tawdry spectacle of teenage girls sexually pursuing teenage boys the way boys pursued girls. How did this happen? Because feminism began to advocate that women should behave like men. Whatever men did and however they did it, that's what women should do. Feminists were angry at men -- but they wanted to be like them at the same time. No wonder our society is so confused.

Women are robbing themselves of the ability to say no; the solution is to take that power back. This is especially true for young women. Saying "no" means, I will not be defined by anyone else -- not by feminists, and not by men's sexual desires. That is female power.

This is a good segue to my third pillar of a new feminism -- men. It is easy for feminists to forget this, but it was men who gave up their monopoly on political power and gave women the right to vote, men who invented birth control, the refrigerator, the washing machine, and so many other devices that liberated women.

And men are different from women. Academics like to speculate that men and women are basically the same, that they're only socialized differently, but as George Orwell famously noted: that's an idea that only an intellectual would be foolish enough to believe.

Moreover, the sexes need each other. For example, women civilize men. It's what we are supposed to do. But in order to accomplish this critical task, we must preserve our dignity, Not be afraid to use the word no, and, see men as partners, not as competitors, let alone oppressors.

That's the way to a new feminism. And the way to a better world for both sexes.

I'm Tammy Bruce for Prager University.