

SESSION 8: The Feminine Mystique

Readings to complete before class:

- (1) Friedan, Betty. "The Sex-Directed Educators." Chapter 7 in *The Feminine Mystique*. New York: Norton (1963). ASIN: B000CBJK5I.
- (2) Friedan, Betty. "The Sexual Sell." Chapter 9 in *The Feminine Mystique*.

Optional:

- (3) Film. *Mona Lisa Smile*, Revolution Studios and Columbia Pictures (2003).
- (4) Kayes, Rebecca. "Frowning at Mona Lisa Smile: An Alum Looks Back." *Counterpoint: The MIT-Wellesley Journal of Campus Life* 26, no. 1 (February 2004): 6-7.
- (5) Walsh, Diana Chapman. "Message from the President to Wellesley College Alumnae Concerning the Film, *Mona Lisa Smile*." *Wellesley College Office for Public Information* (January 9, 2004).
<http://www.wellesley.edu/PublicAffairs/President/Announcements/monalisasmile.html>

Discussion notes:

- *The Feminine Mystique* was hugely influential in women's movement.
- Inspired by a questionnaire Friedan (then a suburban housewife) sent to her classmates from the Smith 1942 class.
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- Formalized "The Problem that Has No Name:" 1950s middle- and upper-class white women's restlessness with concerning themselves only with house and home and family, often after college educations, and being told they had achieved perfect happiness.
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- "The problem that has no name - which is simply the fact that American women are kept from growing to their full human capacities - is taking a far greater toll on the physical and mental health of our country than any known disease" (Friedan).
- Questions remain: What about lower-class women or women of color? Were men happy with this situation? Did/can/should women truly fully embrace this domestic role? Men?
- Opening paragraph:
"The problem lay buried, unspoken, for many years in the minds of American women. It was a strange stirring, a sense of dissatisfaction, a yearning that women suffered in the middle of the twentieth century in the United States. Each suburban wife struggled with it alone. As she made the beds, shopped for groceries, matched slipcover material, ate peanut butter sandwiches with her children, chauffeured Cub Scouts and

Brownies, lay beside her husband at night — she was afraid to ask even of herself the silent question — ‘Is this all?’”

- Friedan went on to help found the National Organization for Women, National Association for the Repeal of Abortion Law, and National Women’s Political Caucus.