

CASE 9-D

FEMINIST FAULT LINES: POLITICAL MEMOIRS AND
HILLARY CLINTON

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On Sept. 12, 2017, Hillary Clinton released her memoir and eighth book, *What Happened*, detailing her account of the 2016 presidential campaign. The book was promoted as Clinton's attempt to "let her guard down" and to be candid about her life as a high-profile female political figure. The book offered a first-hand evaluation of the historic 2016 election. In it, Clinton assigns and accepts blame for the missteps and ultimate election outcome without partiality. But she also takes aim at Vermont senator Bernie Sanders, Russia, President Donald J. Trump, and former FBI director James Comey.

Media coverage of Clinton's book, and more specifically the fact that she chose to write it, was divided. Responses from news outlets that traditionally cover politics were overwhelmingly critical. Women's magazines, and other typically non-political outlets, published content supporting Clinton's choice to write her account of the 2016 election and lambasted the criticism she and the book received as a reflection and further confirmation of the inherent sexism she faced as the first female candidate to win a major party nomination.

Much like an episode of "Who Wore It Best," these opposing perspectives are illustrated by two articles, one written by Ruth Marcus, deputy editorial page editor for the *Washington Post*, and a second one by Michelle Ruiz, a *Vogue* contributing editor. Marcus' article, published on June 2, 2017, was one of the first to cover Clinton's memoir and offered harsh criticism of Clinton's book and her overall decision to share her experience.

Marcus argues that Clinton's book harms the Democratic Party and women in general. She writes: "Well, Hillary Clinton isn't going gently. That may be understandable, but it's not smart—not for Clinton, not for her party and not for other female candidates" (Marcus 2017). Marcus compares Clinton's response with those of former vice president Al Gore and former senator John Kerry, who "demonstrated little appetite for rehashing their loss in public." Clinton's concession, handled with "grace and optimism" the day after the election, was a much better response, according to Marcus.

While Marcus concedes that it's important to understand what happened in the election, she calls Clinton the "wrong messenger." She also writes that Clinton's book "doesn't help would-be glass ceiling-crackers. Publicly calling out misogyny is probably not the best strategy for combating it, or for encouraging other women to run for office."

Ruiz's article, published Sept. 11, 2017, responded to Marcus' assessment and other similar pieces by highlighting arguments that reinforce the sexism Clinton encountered when running.

"Hillary Clinton doesn't have to go out 'gently'—or be otherwise schooled on how she should or should not handle her particular, unprecedented situation," Ruiz wrote. "She's the first woman to win a major party's presidential nomination in American history; she definitely doesn't have to shut up about it, not now, not ever" (Ruiz 2017).

Arguments such as those from Marcus, Ruiz argues, normalize the election outcome and omit its historic nature—this was the first time a woman secured the nomination for president from a major party and then went on to win the popular vote. Ruiz wrote, "The attempts to silence Clinton are in fact just more proof that the misogyny she writes about in *What Happened* was not imagined, and is still working against her."

Ruiz also marvels at the argument Marcus and other critics present about Clinton's qualifications to provide an assessment of the events of the 2016 presidential election. Ruiz writes that it is ridiculous to label Clinton's first-person perspective "extraneous." Ruiz concludes, "There's something about a powerful woman using her voice—and in a way that is not gentle or measured but bold and pointed—that still doesn't sit well with the general public."

Micro Issues

1. Both the *Washington Post* and *Vogue* articles include the journalist's perspective. Evaluate this approach. Does this context make the articles more or less informative—or truthful—than they otherwise might have been?
2. In the *Post*, Marcus wrote, "Speaking out against the actions of the Trump administration is warranted, even imperative. . . . But enough already, with the seemingly never-ending, ever expanding postmortem. Sure Clinton was responding to questions, but if anyone knows how to duck a line of inquiry, it's her." Given that Clinton was consistently critiqued for "ducking" questions on the campaign trail, evaluate Marcus' critique of the book?

Midrange Issues

1. How does social justice reporting in women's magazines illustrate the fault lines between the second and the third wave of feminism? What influence does the age of the reporters—Ruiz is about 10 years younger than Marcus—have on your answer?
2. Because activism sells, magazines and other publications that rely on ad sales are now able to publish content focused on social justice issues. Should media outlets “sell” social justice? Justify your answer using the five theories of justice outlined in the text.

Macro Issues

1. Julie Wittes Schlack in *Not Your Mother's Feminism: Teen Vogue And The Next Wave of Activism* explains that “we as women have more important matters to discuss than whether we're selling out or preserving the patriarchy every time we apply mascara.” In other words, the women's movement has moved past the oversimplification that fashion is bad for feminism. From the role as magazine editor, evaluate this statement.
2. Which is more important: unbiased reporting or using journalism as a social justice tool? Does this question set up a false dichotomy for news organizations?

CASE 9-E

GOLDIEBLOX: BUILDING A FUTURE ON THEFT

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For more than 100 years, boys' toys have included Legos, erector sets, and Lincoln Logs—toys that help them build math and engineering skills. Girls, on the other hand, play with tiaras, Barbies, and ballet shoes. Debbie Sterling, the founder of the Oakland-based toy company GoldieBlox, sought to change this dichotomy. Sterling started GoldieBlox in 2012, the first girls-only toy company that also develops computer apps and publishes books that focus on keeping girls interested in science (GoldieBlox 2017).