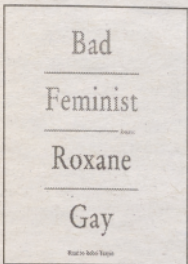


Feminism schism

Author Roxane Gay doesn't quite fit into the feminist mold



Bad Feminist
by Roxane Gay

BY KATHERINE LUCK
CONTRIBUTING WRITER

Feminist author Roxane Gay has something in common with many 21st century women.

"I sometimes cringe when I am referred to as a feminist, as if I should be ashamed of my feminism or as if the word 'feminist' is an insult," she says.

So she came up with a different label for herself. Roxane Gay is a self-professed "bad feminist."

"I am a bad feminist because I never want to be placed on a feminist pedestal," Gay writes in "Bad Feminist," her new collection of essays. "People who are placed on pedestals are expected to pose, perfectly. ... Consider me already knocked off."

Gay's essays are like emails from a funny, edgy, slightly manic friend you lost touch with after college. They're topical, imperfect, sometimes outrageous, but always entertaining. As a cultural critic, Gay covers a wide swath of pop culture ground, from Tyler Perry movies to HBO's "Girls" to the Miss America pageant. Many of the essays, Gay notes, were written while "Law & Order: SVU" played in the background, a TV show that Gay appreciates and loathes in equal measure for its frank portrayal of sexual violence against women.

Gay's resistance to being labeled a feminist — even a "bad" feminist — began during her teens and lasted through her 20s. To young Gay, feminism meant "anger, humorlessness, militancy, unwavering principles and a prescribed set of rules for how to be a proper feminist woman, or at least a proper white, heterosexual feminist woman."

The child of Haitian immigrants, Gay's early years were defined by contrasts: upper middle-class American neighborhoods, the adventures of the idealized blonde girls of the "Sweet Valley High" book series, and a successful career in academia on one hand, repeated rejections because of her skin color, alienation from her parents' homeland and accusations of being an "affirmative action" college student on the other. Today, as an English professor, prolific blogger and author of a novel and

short story collection, Gay has opened herself up to the notion that feminism may not reconcile all the contradictions in her life, but it is a key part of her identity. Still, she has grappled with the demands of what she perceives as traditional feminism.

"I fall short as a feminist. I feel like I am not as committed as I need to be, that I am not living up to feminist ideals because of who and how I choose to be," Gay notes.

Who Gay is and how she chooses to be form the primary subjects of the bulk of her essays, which were originally published by outlets as diverse as the topics they cover: from high-brow literary journals such as Virginia Quarterly Review and Iron Horse Literary Review, to irreverent websites including Bookslut, Jezebel and BuzzFeed. Gay weaves failed relationships, conflicts with her students, her obsession with Scrabble and her middle school sexual assault into analysis of the cultural implications of "The Real Housewives" franchise, rape jokes, "Fifty Shades of Grey," and "The Hunger Games" series. By the end of "Bad Feminist," the reader feels as if she knows Gay like a close friend.

While Gay is deeply insightful at times in "Bad Feminist" and her opinions come across as carefully considered, her scrutiny of today's feminist landscape is not of a consistent high quality. She explains that this is because she tries to keep her "bad" feminism simple and acknowledges, "I am not terribly well versed in feminist history. I am not as well read in key feminist texts as I would like to be. I have certain interests and personality traits and opinions that may not fall in line with mainstream feminism, but I am still a feminist."

Whether Gay's bad feminist moniker will catch on with American women remains to be seen. But for Gay, it's the only label that fits her.

"No matter what issues I have with feminism, I am a feminist," Gay concludes. "I would rather be a bad feminist than no feminist at all."

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Migrants Walk

by G.B.

Step by step
The migrants walk
Bruised and battered feet
Weak and weary bodies
Hot days, cool evenings
Sleep during the day
March during the night
Quick breaks
Dangerous movements
Through the desert, through the sand
Don't be seen
Can't be heard
A hopeful mother, an obedient child
Slaves to a promise, slaves to a dream
The obstacles seem worth it
Better than the violence
Better than the death
Left behind

There has been something

by Ed Edmo

Sometimes it is a song
Sometimes it is a whisper
Sometimes it appears to be an animal
Then other times
Weeping
I hear it
There has been something
That has disappeared
From my mother earth
I'm not sure what it was
But
Sometimes at night
I can hear it in the wind
Or
It comes to me
In my dreams
Like
The smell of salmon
Cooking



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