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Come Together? Yes, We Can.

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By Courtney E. Martin and Deborah Siegel
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A co-ed in an "I Heart Obama" baby-doll shirt and a middle-aged woman sporting a "Hillary 2008" lapel pin on her boxy suit walk into a bar, sit down at separate tables and start pitching tomatoes. This isn't the opening of a bad joke, but the version of the "woman's vote" presented on the op-ed pages of most major newspapers in the past few weeks.

As, respectively, a woman in her 20s who voted for [Barack Obama](#) and a woman pushing 40 who, yes, voted for [Hillary Rodham Clinton](#), we still play nicely together. And we're sick of the way our presidential candidates' female supporters are being pitted against one another in an electoral mud-wrestling match. When primary season is over, Democrats will need to rally behind the nominee. And it'll be far easier to put our heads together than if we spend less time cracking skulls now.

Of course, there is truth to the portrait of generational difference. Though Obama lost [Ohio](#) and [Texas](#) overall last week, he captured the youth vote: 61 percent to 35 percent and 58 percent to 42 percent, respectively. On Super Tuesday, he beat Clinton among young women, 53 percent to 45, on Super Tuesday. Clinton has consistently won the vote of women older than 40.

It's true that some younger people are turning away from a candidate who reminds them of authority figures. And some older people are proving skeptical of younger leadership. The statistics show that race and sex aren't the only variables in this competition. Generation is an equal-opportunity divider. You wouldn't know it from the media coverage, but this difference is not confined to women.

When men disagree, it's called conversation. When women disagree, it's called a catfight. That's what the media have been calling it for years. This time, it's not a media problem alone; we women are doing it to ourselves -- feminist foremother [Gloria Steinem](#), the controversial Linda Hirshman and others have made divisive arguments. In a well-circulated essay posted on the Women's Media Center Web site recently, Robin Morgan reduced "some" younger women to a bunch of breast-flashing neophytes who are "eager to win male approval by showing they're not feminists (at least not the kind who actually threaten the status quo), who can't identify with a woman candidate because she is unafraid of *eeeweeeu* yucky power, who fear their boyfriends might look at them funny if they say something good about her." On the blog Jezebel, one woman fired back: "Robin Morgan and Gloria Steinem are two of the most irritating voices to come out of second-wave feminism. . . . Can't the Clintons find a feminist under 60 to shill for them?"

Okay, ladies. You've expressed yourselves. Now cease fire. Time to agree to disagree. The idea that all young female Obamaites are anti-feminist and all older Hillaryistas are old school plays into the worst kind of lazy black-and-white thinking. Feminist history has taught us that social change is as complex as the humans who try to enact it.

Take us. The one who voted for Obama believes that he will lead this country with a diplomatic -- not military -- mindset in foreign policy and will be able to persuade Americans to become engaged citizens in a time of undeniable interdependence. The one who voted for Clinton is inspired by the senator's record of accomplishment, her stance on universal health care, her commitment to families and children, and her dignity in the face of humiliation. Both of us are feminists, and neither's opinion threatens our

sense of what that means.

The personal is still political, the political is personal, and we're bound to feel passionately about two such historic candidates. But the question of whether you can be a feminist and still support Obama has about as much integrity as the question of whether you can be a feminist and wear lipstick. Those who ask it play into the divide-and-conquer model that real feminism tries to renounce.

Women are bound to disagree. Feminism itself remains one of the most dynamic movements -- the most debated, fought over, fought for, blamed and reclaimed -- of the past 40 years, in part because so much is at stake. Thoughtful conflict is clarifying. Genuine progress is born of debate -- the kind we are experiencing at kitchen tables, in coffee shops and in classrooms nationwide. How nice it would be if the media highlighted some of these passionate discussions. Can women disagree over candidates during primary season, just as men do, and still find common ground when it's time to elect our next Democratic president? Yes, we can. Yes, we will. Day One starts now.

We can be fed up with the media's treatment of Clinton and still vote for Obama. We can be inspired by Obama's promise and still vote for Clinton. And when it's time to do battle with [John McCain](#), we must be fiercely committed to throwing our weight behind either Democratic leader. So enough with the catfight. Eyes on the prize, people. We've got a much bigger battle ahead.

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