Test Preparation for English 101
Fall 2012

Paul Theroux’s Being a Man
Naomi Wolf’s The Beauty Myth

Preparation by Andrew Gottlieb
Conversation Questions for Paul Theroux’s *Being a Man*:

1. What is Theroux’s view of the “manly ideal?” (1-2)

2. What does Theroux have to say about women? (1)

3. In Theroux’s view, what is the correspondence between the manly ideal, the arts and intellectual pursuits? (1-2)

4. How, according to Theroux, do male stereotypes affect relations between men and women? (1)
Conversation Questions for Naomi Wolf’s *The Beauty Myth*:

5. How does Wolf assess the progress women have made? (1)

6. What is the “beauty myth”? (2-3)

7. What, according to Wolf, was the effect of the sexual revolution? (2)

8. What, according to Wolf, does the beauty myth have to do with competition? (4)
9. According to Wolf, how old is the beauty myth? (4)

10. According to Wolf, what role does photography play in the way women view beauty? (4)

11. In Wolf’s view, is the beauty myth rooted in sexuality or politics? (5-6)

12. How, according to Wolf, does the fear of the women’s movement help to perpetuate the beauty myth? (5-6)
13. What role does greed play in the perpetuation of the beauty myth? (6)

14. How, in Wolf’s view, can women rise above the deleterious effects of the beauty myth? (7)
The Final Paper

In addition to taking the final exam, students are required to write a comparison/contrast essay about the two texts for homework. The following is a step-by-step process for helping students write the final paper.

Step One: Paraphrase
Paraphrase key citations from each text.

Step Two: Summarize
Summarize each essay

Step Three: Similarities and Differences
Write about the similarities differences between the two authors.

Step Four: My View
Express your own view on what the authors have said and relate their comments to your own life or to some current cultural condition or event.
Step One: Paraphrase

Citations & Paraphrases - Paul Theroux’s *Being a Man*

Key citations:

1. Citations:
   “I have always disliked being a man. The whole idea of manhood in America is pitiful, in my opinion. This version of masculinity is a little like having to wear an ill-fitting coat for one's entire life (by contrast, I imagine femininity to be an oppressive sense of nakedness). Even the expression "Be a man!" strikes me as insulting and abusive. It means: Be stupid, be unfeeling, obedient, soldierly and stop thinking. Man means "manly"—how can one think about men without considering the terrible ambition of manliness? And yet it is part of every man's life. It is a hideous and crippling lie; it not only insists on difference and connives at superiority, it is also by its very nature destructive—emotionally damaging and socially harmful (p.1).”

   Paraphrase:
   At the outset of his essay, Theroux expresses his dissatisfaction with the “whole idea of manhood in America.” He finds this concept to be “pitiful” and “destructive.” In Theroux’s view, the American male stereotype is a veneer of stupidity and insensitivity, a “crippling lie.” To be a man, in the colloquial sense is, apparently, something to be shunned.

2. Citation:
   “In a sense, little girls are traditionally urged to please adults with a kind of coquettishness, while boys are enjoined to behave like monkeys towards each other. The nine-year-old coquette proceeds to become womanish in a subtle power game in which she learns to be sexually indispensable, socially decorative and always alert to a man's sense of inadequacy (p.1).”

   Paraphrase:
   Theroux’s view of the traditional female stereotype is no less jaundiced than his view of the conventional model of manhood. Women, Theroux affirms, learn from early childhood to play the role of the coquette and to play a “subtle power game” of seduction entailing an awareness of “man’s sense of inadequacy.”

3. Citation:
   It is very hard to imagine any concept of manliness that does not belittle women, and it begins very early (1).

   Paraphrase:
   One of the worst problems with the American male stereotype, according to Theroux, is that it is inherently demeaning to women.
4. Citation:
   “Any objective study would find the quest for manliness essentially right-wing, puritanical, cowardly, neurotic and fueled largely by a fear of women (1).”

   Paraphrase: Another point Theroux makes is that the need for manliness is rooted in a fear of women.

5. Citation:
   “But indeed all the creative arts are obnoxious to the manly ideal, because at their best the arts are pursued by uncompetitive and essentially solitary people. It makes it very hard for a creative youngster, for any boy who expresses the desire to be alone seems to be saying that there is something wrong with him (pp.1-2).”

   Paraphrase: Another shortcoming of the male stereotype is that it is antithetical to the arts. Theroux says this is so because of the fact that the arts are, by and large, purshed in isolation and as such do not involve what society regards as the more manly kinds of activities involving competition.

6. Citation:
   “Everything in stereotyped manliness goes against the life of the mind (p.2).”

   Paraphrase: Theroux affirms that what is generally regarded as manliness undermines intellectual pursuits.

7. Citation:
   “…one cannot be a male writer without first proving that one is a man (p.2).”

   Paraphrase: He points out that even for American writers success often depends on the capacity of the writer to adhere to the convention model of manhood.

8. Citation:
   “Femininity—being lady-like—implies needing a man as witness and seducer; but masculinity celebrates the exclusive company of men. That is why it is so grotesque; and that is also why there is no manliness without inadequacy—because it denies men the natural friendship of women (p.1).”

   Paraphrase: Another shortcoming of the conventional male stereotype, according to Theroux, is that it tends to nullify opportunities for friendship between men and women.
Citations & Paraphrases - Naomi Wolf’s *The Beauty Myth*

1. Citation:
“At last, after a long silence, women took to the streets. In the two decades of radical action that followed the rebirth of feminism in the early 1970’s, Western women gained legal and reproductive rights, pursued higher education, entered the trades and the professions, and overturned ancient and revered beliefs about their social role. A generation on, do women feel free (p.1)?”

Paraphrase:
Much progress has been made in granting women certain rights, but it is still reasonable to wonder if women today feel free.

2. Citation:
“The more legal and material hindrances women have broken through, the more strictly and heavily and cruelly images of female beauty have come to weigh upon us (p.1).”

Paraphrase:
According to Wolf, the rise in material rights for woman has been accompanied by a rise in the proliferation of images of female beauty that have in their own way become as or more oppressive than the previous absence of rights.

3. Citation:
“More women have more money and power and scope and legal recognition than we have ever had before; but in terms of how we feel about ourselves physically, we may actually be worse off than our unliberated grandmothers. Recent research consistently shows that inside the majority of the West’s controlled, attractive, successful working women, there is a secret “underlife” poisoning our freedom; infused with notion of beauty is a dark vein of self-hatred, physical obsession, terror of aging and dreaded lost control (p.1).”

Paraphrase:
Although women have more money and power than their ancestors, they are suffering from an obsessive preoccupation with beauty and aging which has been shown to undermine their self esteem.

4. Citation:
“We are in the midst of a violent backlash against feminism that uses images of female beauty as a political weapon against women’s advancement: the beauty myth. It is the modern version of a social reflex that has been in force since the Industrial Revolution. As women released themselves from the feminine mystique of domesticity, the beauty myth took over its lost ground, expanding as it wanted to carry on its work of social control (p.1).”

Paraphrase:
Women have been liberated from the “feminine mystique of domesticity,” but are now under the influence of another pernicious cultural image. Wolf characterizes what she refers to as
“the beauty myth” as a “political weapon” used to undermine the progress women have made.

5. Citation:
“Feminists, inspired by Betty Friedan, broke the stranglehold on the women’s popular press of advertisers for household products, who were promoting the feminine mystique; at once the diet and skin care industries became the new cultural censors of women’s intellectual space, and because of their pressure, the gaunt, youthful model supplanted the happy housewife as the arbiter of successful womanhood. The sexual revolution promoted the discovery of female sexuality; “beauty pornography” -- which for the first time in women’s history artificially links a commodified “beauty” directly and explicitly to sexuality -- invaded the mainstream to undermine women’s new and vulnerable sense of sexual self-worth (p.2).”

Paraphrase:
One bad thing sometimes takes the place of another. Such has been the case with advertising as it relates the feminine mystique. Throughout history women have been oppressed by images promoting household products. This domestic stereotype has now been replaced by an equally oppressive images conveying female sexuality. This relatively new archetype has compromised women’s sense of worth in a way the more traditional domestic mystiques did not.

6. Citation:
“The beauty myth tells a story: The quality called “beauty” objectively and universally exists. Women must want to embody it and men must want to possess women who embody it. This embodiment is an imperative for women and not for men, which situation is necessary and natural because it is biological, sexual and evolutionary: Strong men battle for beautiful women, and beautiful women are more reproductively successful. Women’s beauty must correlate with their fertility, and since this system is based on sexual selection, it is inevitable and changeless (pp.2-3).”

Paraphrase:
One aspect of the beauty myth is fertility. For women to feel truly beautiful they are made to feel that they must be fertile. This notion is woven into very fabric of female identity and is therefore a most tenacious component of the new as well as the old female mystique.

7. Citation:
“The beauty myth is always actually prescribing behavior and not appearance. Competition between women has been made part of the myth so that women will be divided from one another (p.4).”

Paraphrase:
One of the most insidious aspects of the beauty myth is that it undermines whatever unity women might otherwise experience by turning them into rivals. There is an old expression: Divide and conquer. The beauty myth accomplishes just that.
8. Citation:
“Though there has, of course, been a beauty myth in some form for as long as there has been patriarchy, the beauty myth in its modern form is a fairly recent invention (p.4).”

Paraphrase:
The beauty myth has been around for a very long, but it has taken on a new form.

9. Citation:
“The beauty myth flourishes when material constraints on women are dangerously loosened. Before the Industrial Revolution, the average woman could not have had the same feeling about “beauty” that modern women do who experience the myth as a continual comparison to a mass disseminated physical ideal. Before the development of technologies of mass production -- daguerreotypes, photographs, etc. -- an ordinary woman was exposed to few such images outside the church (p.4).”

Paraphrase:
One of the foundations for the proliferation of the physical ideal inherent in the beauty myth is the mass production of visual stereotypes in the form of photography. Before the advent of this medium women were exposed to only a fraction of images promoting ideal beauty.

10. Citation:
“The modern arsenal of the myth is a dissemination of millions of images of the current ideal; although this barrage is generally seen as a collective sexual fantasy, there is in fact little that is sexual about it. It is summoned out of political fear on the part of male dominated institutions threatened by women’s freedom, and it exploits female guilt and apprehension about our own liberation -- latent fears that we might be going too far (pp. 5-6).”

Paraphrase:
Though the beauty myth is seen as a “collective sexual fantasy,” it is not at all sexual. The current female stereotypes are generated to offset what male dominated institutions see as a threat to them and are further supported by appealing to women’s feeling of guilt as well as unspoken fear that the women’s movement may be going to extremes.

11. Citation:
“… the unconscious hallucination grows ever more influential and pervasive because of what is now conscious market manipulation: powerful industries -- the $33 billion a year diet industry, the $20 billion a year cosmetics industry, the $300 million cosmetic surgery industry, and the $7 billion pornography industry -- have arisen from the capital made out of unconscious anxieties, and are in turn able, through their influence on mass culture, to use, stimulate, and reinforce the hallucination in a rising economic spiral (p.6.)”

Paraphrase:
The propagation of the beauty myth is propelled in large part by market manipulation by powerful industries. The diet industry, the cosmetics industry, and the pornography industry
rake in tremendous profits by promoting and feeding off women’s dependency on the current female mystique.

12. Citation: (A NEW WAY TO SEE)
“The beauty myth of the present is more insidious than any mystique of femininity yet: a century ago, Nora slammed the door of the doll’s house; a generation ago, women turned their backs on the consumer heaven of the isolated multi-applianced home; but where women are trapped today, there is no door to slam. The contemporary ravages of the beauty backlash are destroying women physically and depleting us psychologically. If we are to free ourselves from the dead weight that has once again been made out of femaleness, it is not ballots or lobbyists, or placards that women will need first, it is a new way to see (p.7).”

Paraphrase:
According to Wolf, the way for women to liberate themselves from the constraints inherent in the current female stereotypes, is not to make overt appeals via political arenas, but to reinvent their way of seeing themselves.

Step Two: Summarize

Summary of Paul Theroux’s Being a Man:

At the outset of his essay, Theroux expresses his dissatisfaction with the “whole idea of manhood in America.” He finds this concept to be “pitiful” and “destructive.” In Theroux’s view, the American male stereotype is a veneer of stupidity and insensitivity, a “crippling lie.” To be a man, in the colloquial sense is, apparently, something to be shunned.

Another shortcoming of the male stereotype is that it is antithetical to the arts. Theroux says this is so because of the fact that the arts are, by and large, pursued in isolation and as such do not involve what society regards as the more manly kinds of activities involving competition. Theroux goes on to say that what is generally regarded as manliness undermines intellectual pursuits as well. He points out that even for American writers success often depends on the capacity of the writer to adhere to the convention model of manhood.

Another point Theroux makes is that the need for manliness is rooted in a fear of women. He affirms that the male stereotype tends to nullify opportunities for friendship between men and women.

Theroux’s view of the traditional female stereotype is no less jaundiced than his view of the conventional model of manhood. Women, Theroux affirms, learn from early childhood to play the role of the coquette and to play a “subtle power game” of seduction entailing an awareness of “man’s sense of inadequacy.” As such, the American female stereotype is inherently demeaning to women.
Summary of Naomi Wolf’s *The Beauty Myth*:

Wolf begins her essay by affirming that the rise in material rights for woman has been accompanied by a rise in the proliferation of images of female beauty that have in their own way become as or more oppressive than the previous absence of rights. Although women have more money than their ancestors, they are suffering from an obsessive preoccupation with beauty and aging which has been shown to undermine their self esteem.

Women, Wolf maintains, have been liberated from the “feminine mystique of domesticity,” but are now under the influence of another pernicious cultural image. She characterizes what she refers to as “the beauty myth” as a “political weapon” used to undermine the progress women have made.

One bad thing sometimes takes the place of another. Such has been the case with advertising as it relates the feminine mystique. Throughout history, women have been oppressed by images promoting household products. This domestic stereotype has now been replaced by an equally oppressive images conveying female sexuality. This relatively new archetype has compromised women’s sense of worth in a way the more traditional domestic mystiques did not.

Another sexual archetype is fertility. For women to feel truly beautiful, Wolf maintains, they are made to feel that they must be fertile. This notion is woven into very fabric of female identity and is therefore a most tenacious component of the new as well as the old female mystique.

One of the foundations for the proliferation of the physical ideal inherent in the beauty myth is the mass production of visual stereotypes in the form of photography. Before the advent of this medium woman were exposed to only a fraction of images promoting ideal beauty.

Wolf goes on to say that, though the beauty myth is seen as a “collective sexual fantasy,” it is not at all sexual. The current female stereotypes are generated to offset what male dominated institutions see as a threat to them and are further supported by appealing to women’s feeling of guilt as well as the unspoken fear that the women’s movement may be going to extremes.

The propagation of the beauty myth, Wolf explains, is propelled in large part by market manipulation by powerful industries. The diet industry, the cosmetics industry, and the pornography industry rake in tremendous profits by promoting and feeding off women’s dependency on the current female mystique.

One of the most insidious aspects of the beauty myth, says Wolf, is that it undermines whatever unity women might otherwise experience by turning them into rivals. There is an old expression: Divide and conquer. The beauty myth accomplishes just that.

According to Wolf, the way for women to liberate themselves from the constraints inherent in the current female stereotypes is not to make overt appeals via political arenas, but to reinvent their way of seeing themselves.
Step Three: Similarities and Differences

Both Theroux and Wolf discuss gender-based stereotypes. Theroux focuses on male stereotypes; Wolf focuses on female stereotypes. In both cases these stereotypes are seen as sources of discontent. Both Theroux and Wolf depict society and its male/female archetypes as oppressive. For both Theroux and Wolf, these images serve to undermine self confidence and freedom of thought. If the two authors were to collaborate on an essay, it is reasonable to assume that they would agree to make use of each other’s views and insights.

Though their viewpoints are inherently the same, one difference is that Wolf presents the problem of gender-based stereotypes in a historical context. She discusses the difference between the beauty myth of today and the feminine mystique of past generations. Theroux does not do this. He depicts the male archetype as a fixture of American society. He makes no mention of whether this archetype has changed over time.

One possible reason for this difference between Theroux and Wolf is that things may have changed more for women than for men. Men never needed or had a man’s movement. They did not have to overcome the oppression women did. The shift from the domestic feminine mystique to the beauty myth of today as depicted by Wolf has no apparent parallel for men. The prerogatives of being a man have likely remained pretty much the same over time. Wolf’s essay is thus more of a history lesson than Theroux’s.

Step Four: My View

In my view, both Theroux and Wolf have given pretty accurate accounts of gender-based stereotypes and their effects. As a man, I can relate most easily to Theroux’s feelings. The male archetypes to which he alludes are ones I have had to confront throughout my life, especially as a teenager in high school where boys who were good athletes were treated better by their peers than those who were not good athletes.

As far as Wolf’s beauty myth is concerned, I can only speak about this in relation to the kind of advertising I have seen and in regard to the way women I have known manage their appearance. It is evident from my observations that women are barraged by images of the perfect woman on a day-to-day basis and that these images have a way of making women feel that they are fat even when they are quite slender. Women seem to feel that if their bodies are not as trim as fashion models they are overweight and unattractive. The image of the very thin, fatless female is relatively new and is culturally based. Paintings by Renoir and Rubens, not to mention images of women in certain cultures today, suggest that women need not be thin to be considered beautiful.

Another fallout of the beauty myth is the preoccupation with aging. I cannot speak from experience about women in the past, but I would imagine that my grandmother’s generation was a bit less preoccupied with wrinkles than the women of today. This does not mean to say that women did not always want to retain their youthful appearance. It’s a matter of emphasis. How much more important is the preoccupation with aging today than it has been in the past? Wolf would probably agree that the preoccupation with aging has been on the rise and would blame mass media and advertising. This strikes me as a valid assessment of the way things have changed.
Writing Assignment

Write about Paul Theroux’s Being a Man and Naomi Wolf’s The Beauty Myth. Summarize the two essays, compare and contrast them, and then express your view of authors’ assertions.

You will first need to write an introduction. This needs to include the following:

- The authors and titles of the two essays.
- A main idea referring to the similarities and difference between Theroux and Wolf.

Sample Introduction:

How we see ourselves depends in part on what we learn from our culture about what is considered favorable or unfavorable. Our sense of identity is influenced by the role models we are conditioned by mass media to admire. Both Paul Theroux in his essay, Being a Man, and Naomi Wolf in her essay, The Beauty Myth, discuss the effects of the gender-based stereotypes promoted by our culture. The goal of this essay is to consider the similarities and the differences between Theroux and Wolf and to consider the validity of their assertions.

The Body of the Essay:

After you write the introduction you can cut and paste your summaries and comments, the similarities and differences, and your view into the body of your essay. The next step would be to delete any redundancies and to reshape and edit the essay to insure that it is a unified and coherent whole. The conclusion of your essay is your view.
The Final Exam:

Students in English 101 are required to take a final exam. The test will be given in the regular classroom at the regular class time and be administered by the instructor. The duration of the exam is ninety minutes. Students must write at least five hundred words to pass. They are expected to bring their copies of the two texts upon which the exam will be based and are allowed to make marginal notes in these texts. Any other notes, documents, or electronic devices cannot be brought to the test. Paper dictionaries are permissible. Students can use a pen or pencil. The writing must be legible and neat. Essays that are unreadable will not receive a passing grade. During the test, students will be given three questions to pick from. They will be asked to write ONE ESSAY in response to one of these. The exam will require students to compare and contrast the two texts.

Preparing for The Final Exam:

Once you have written your essay, you can then start preparing for the final exam. Memorizing key points is always a useful way to prepare for a test. It is wise to do this by selecting certain words and phrases that serve as memory prompts, things that help you remember what you may need to say. On the following page is a sample of memory prompts.
Memory Prompts:

Theroux:

1. The American male stereotype is
   a. a “crippling lie”
   b. antithetical to the arts
   c. undermines intellectual pursuits – the American writer’s success
   d. rooted in fear of women
   e. demeaning to women

Naomi Wolfe:

2. Material gains/Image losses
3. Traditional female stereotypes:
   a. Feminine mystique of domesticity
   b. Fertility, another female sexual archetype – old and new.
4. Beauty Myth
   a. a “political weapon,”
   b. anti women’s movement
   c. undermines unity.
   d. promoted through advertising/photography
5. Liberation can be attained not through politics but through ways of seeing.

Similarities:

6. Gender-based stereotypes (archetypes) – sources of discontent & oppression

Differences:

7. Wolf/historical: beauty myth of today versus feminine mystique of the past
   Theroux: no mention of change over time

My View

8. Being a teenager/the importance of sports
9. Images of the perfect woman/today’s ideal beauty versus past images
10. Preoccupation with aging – the role of advertising/makeup
How to Practice with Memory Prompts

Step One:

Read through each of the memory prompts. As you do, speak in complete sentences about what the memory prompts refer to. For 1a, you would say: According to Theroux, the American male stereotype is a crippling lie. Don’t write down the complete answers. Simply speak them. Remember, the goal is to memorize the key points.

Step Two:

Memorize the memory prompts and then go through them as you did in step one without looking at them. This requires a lot of repetition.

WARNING:

Keep in mind that you will not be repeating exactly what you have memorized when you take the exam. It is crucial to adapt your knowledge to the exam question. Your essay will be evaluated largely on the basis of how well you respond to the question. An essay that is not responsive to the question is likely to receive a D or F.