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## Feminism

Why do we need feminism? “I need feminism because a girl was made fun of for not shaving her armpits.” “I need feminism because a boy was harassed for wearing mascara.” “I need feminism because being called a “pussy” should not be the worst thing to call a boy.” (Who Needs Feminism?) I believe that we all need feminism in our lives. The fight for equality between men and women date all the way back to the 18<sup>th</sup> century. The terms “feminism” and “feminist” first appeared as “feminisme” in France around the end of the 1800s. The original meaning of feminisme was “the struggle for equality”. I had always wondered about why something so simple as gender affected one’s equality among society.

I had heard the word “feminist” plenty of times before. I believed that a “feminist” was a *woman* that wore heels and spoke her mind freely. For example, I could label Beyoncé as a feminist because she’s an attractive, wealthy, and independent woman. Plus, it’s Beyoncé she’s perfect. I didn’t know if a man could be a feminist, nor did I know about any, if any, past feminists. To my surprise, there are many men and women who label themselves as feminists. The definition for a “feminist” I had in my head was “a woman fighting for her rights.” After researching, I found out that was completely wrong. My new, personal definition is, “A feminist is

a man or a woman fighting for equality foreseeing gender.” And to quote the Chimamanda’s definition in Beyoncé’s song “\*\*\*Flawless”, “Feminist: A person who believes in the social, political, and economic equality of the sexes.” (Chimamanda).

I needed to understand this topic because the more I read on it, the more frustrated I became. I started to question the things that would occur on a daily basis, but I never acknowledged. Why have men always been superior to women? Why do men get countless opportunities while there’s a limit on a womans? How come men become intimidated when a woman stands up for herself, but when a man does it, the woman often stays quiet? Why are girls often found guilty when they are raped? Why are women labeled as the cooks in the house, but the majority of chefs are male? “But why do we teach girls to aspire to marriage and we don’t teach boys the same?” (Chimamanda). Then I changed my perspective and thought about questions on male discrimination. Not a lot of people acknowledge male discrimination since females try to take the most attention; which is funny considering we’re talking about equality. Why is it that gay men are looked down upon yet seeing a lesbian couple making out is hot? Why are women praised for their virginity, but men not? How come the man is always supposed to pay the check when on a date? Women compliment other women, so why are men looked at weird when they call another man attractive? How come men can’t carry purses? The list goes on for both genders, but my main question is what we can do to change this kind of thinking to prevent future generations from continuing it.

The story behind my research on feminism is like a roller coaster of emotions. I was originally going to continue my previous topic on whale hunting, but

quickly realized that topic didn't catch my interest as much as feminism did. I began searching about the linguistics and then when feminism really came into play. To my surprise, feminism dated all the way back to the 18<sup>th</sup> century. The word "feminism" didn't exist for another century, so these people were just named "the ones who fought for women's rights". I was again shocked when I found out that there were many males who fought for gender equality. Some of the first men who fought for the rights of women were Jeremy Bentham and Marquis de Condorcet.

By 1781, Jeremy Bentham was a known English philosopher and political radical. He fought for natural rights and spoke for complete equality between sexes. He was strongly against the ideas the government had on women. For example, he believed that a woman should be allowed anything a man could do, like vote. Bentham didn't make a major effect during his lifetime, but made a greater influence later on once his ideas were continued by other followers. Another defender of woman's rights was Marquis De Condorcet. Marquis was a French Enlightenment philosopher and mathematician. He was also a fierce supporter of human rights, including the equality of women and the abolition of slavery. "Condorcet's 1790 essay *Sur l'admission des femmes au droits de la cité* [On the Admission of Women to the Rights of Citizenship] stands as one of the most concise and potent defenses of women's rights in the entire history of feminist thought." (Landes, Joan). A man advocating for women's suffrage and fighting for the abolition of slavery was pretty unusual for the 1780s. The woman given the title for the first feminist philosopher was Mary Wollstonecraft. She was an English writer, philosopher, and a women's rights activist. Wollstonecraft was claimed to be the most cited feminist writer

during the 1700s. In 1792, Mary published her most famous work, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*; “a declaration of the rights of women to equality of education and to civil opportunities”(Wollstonecraft, Mary). This book was about the change in women when industrial capitalism came into play. She explains how originally women and men did labor work to make their income, but then jobs made there way to the public workplace. These were jobs mainly for men while the women stayed at home as the typical, boring housewives. This was unfair because not all women wanted to be the average stay-at-home mom.

Moving over to the 1800s, Harriet Taylor was married to John Taylor with 3 children, but was in love with another man whose name is John Stuart Mill. They were attracted to each other mentally rather than physically, (I hope there are still men like Mill out there.) After John Taylor’s death, the two married and wrote many pieces together and separate. They are a significant couple because their ideas weren’t always the same, but they accepted that each would have their own opinions. A few of their works were about how children play a role in marriage and divorce. They wrote about how couples would marry early which resulted in children shortly after marriage. Then after so many years have passed, they contemplate divorce, but don’t follow through with it for the sake of the children. Being only 17, I see this happen a lot. Many girls fall in, what they think is, love with boys who still have their mothers do their laundry. Their “crazy” love, without even thinking, causes a baby. They are then forced to stay together, unhappy, raising a child created by carelessness at a young age. I agree with Mill when he says to marry late, and have children late to avoid disrupting a child’s life with a divorce. Also, both

agreed that a woman needed suffrage to become a man's equal. Mill and Taylor said that voting gives people the power to not only voice political views, but to change certain systems and attitudes that came with the government. I believe that if these concerns were dealt with right away we wouldn't have the confusion today. During this time period, the right to divorce and the right for women to own property were finally allowed. By the end of the 17th century, many more men and women were fighting for their equality and many new laws were being passed.

By the 1900s, there were multiple women's rights groups like the National Organization for Woman (NOW) and Women's Equity Action League (WEAL). These groups were created to improve a woman's status and increase a woman's awareness about women's oppression. Women fought to make marital rape a crime, which was very legal until 1993, which then became prohibited. "I need feminism because anti-feminists are degrading every woman who has accessed a rape crisis center, which wouldn't exist without the feminist movement." (Who Needs Feminism?) It's absurd to think someone would degrade these groups for helping women and even men with sexual assaults. The Department of Obstetrics and Gynecology at the Medical University of Charleston, South Carolina conducted a 3 yearlong survey on rape-related pregnancies. "The national rape-related pregnancy rate is 5.0% per rape among victims of reproductive age, (aged 12 to 45); among adult women an estimated 32,101 pregnancies result from rape each year." (Rape-Related Pregnancy). Many of these rape victims would get abortions once they would find out they're pregnant. This was the exact reason Margaret Sanger opened the first birth control clinic in the United States. Within just a year she was deemed

guilty with being a public nuisance and sentenced to jail for 30 days. Once released, she re-opened her clinic and continued to fight through more prosecutions and arrests. In 1938, relating back to Sanger's case, the judge lifted the federal ban on birth control, which ended the Comstock era. The Baby Boom was an outcome once people had the access to several, different contraceptives. Throughout the centuries, the spread of feminism was growing rapidly.

The fight for gender equality in the 21<sup>st</sup> century is much more complex because many of the major problems back then are resolved now. "Keep Ya Head Up" is one of my favorite songs from a widely known rapper, Tupac Shakur. Tupac wrote this song to encourage women to not let female discrimination affect them. The most impacting part in the song, to me, was when he said: "You know what makes me unhappy? When brothas make babies, and leave a young mother to be a pappy. And since we all came from a woman, got our name from a woman, and our game from a woman. I wonder why we take from our women? Why we rape our women; do we hate our women? I think it's time to kill for our women, time to heal our women, be real to our women. And if we don't we'll have a race of babies that will hate the ladies, that make more babies. And since a man can't make one, he has no right to tell a woman when and where to create one." (Tupac, :49-1:22). It really surprised me to see a male rapper in the 1900s acknowledging discrimination on women. In just that short quote he voiced his opinion of men towards women, explained what they need to change, and then warned us what would be the result if the same ideas kept being taught.

There are countless active feminists today, but the main one that caught my attention was Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie. I first heard about her when Beyoncé quoted Chimamanda in her song “\*\*\*Flawless”; I immediately searched for the whole video to watch. I found Adichie’s video “We Should All Be Feminists” on YouTube. I recommended all my friends to take 30 minutes to listen to her wonderful discussion on feminism. Chimamanda is a Nigerian novelist who was born in Nigeria in 1977. She moved to the United States to attend college, graduating Eastern Connecticut State University with a major in Communication and a minor in Political Science. She then got her masters degree in Creative Writing from Johns Hopkins University and a masters degree in African Studies from Yale University. She won many awards due to her wonderful books and short stories. After listening to Chimamanda’s lecture, I pointed out that she likes to focus on the future. Each time she gave an example or stereotype, she explains how we can stop such thinking to prevent the same from later generations. I soon realized that almost everything she said were the answers to my previous questions. Some of the main questions I asked were, “Why have men always been superior to women?” Chimamanda points out that “...this made sense 1000 years ago because human beings lived in a world which physical strength was the most important attribute to survival. The physically stronger person was more likely to lead. And in general, men are the stronger gender. Of course there are many exceptions.” (Chimamanda, 8:02). She explains how we as humans are still continuing the same concept after hundreds of years. People aren’t realizing how advanced society is now; they’re still stuck on gender roles. “But why do we teach girls to aspire to marriage and we don’t teach boys the

same?" (Chimamanda, 14:25) I never thought about the way marriage is being taught. Society teaches girls that their life goal should be to get married and raise a family, but it's not the same picture when it comes to males. Yet families are welcoming when a boy brings home his girlfriend, but when a girl brings home her boyfriend, "God forbid". We teach girls to remain a virgin until marriage, but boys are not told the same. Which is very ironic considering you can't have one without the other. "The language of marriage is often a language of ownership rather than language of partnership." (Chimamanda, 15:23). Chimamanda talks about the ways women respect men, and yet respect is something we aren't always given back. Many men often suppose a woman would rather prefer a family over a career. I believe that way too many women have given up their dreams just to be a housewife while the husband gets his career and family. It's simply unfair. Yes, there are many ways society has degraded women and their rights, but there are several similar questions I had on male discrimination too. Chimamanda talks about the ways boys are pressured constantly to prove their masculinity. "How come the man is suppose to pay the bill every time?" They pay each time as a way to prove this. If we were to look past gender, the smarter decision would be to have the person with more money pay. I realized how society sees a woman complimenting another woman is perfectly natural. "But, why is it that men often feel awkward when making comments on another man's attractiveness?" I think this is just crazy talk. A strong jawline is a great feature to have, so why not just tell your bro-man how you feel. There is nothing wrong with complimenting the same sex and no one should ever hold back what they feel just because it's disliked by the society. My last question

was “Why can’t a purse be in a man’s everyday accessories?” In my opinion, this shows to be very sexist. I’ve noticed that majority of men just keep the belongings in the pockets of their jeans. Women have pockets too yet they get a fashionable bag to carry their stuff in. There have been many men who have said that a purse would be very convenient to them. In my opinion, if I were a man, I would wear whatever I desired without caring if someone called me “gay”. I truly hope that society starts to focus more on one’s ability rather than following the common gender expectations.

I came about the topic of feminism by watching a video on YouTube and now know a lot more than when I started the research. All of my questions were answered which was comforting considering all the researching I went through. There are many feminists and many anti-feminists in the world today, but I believe that it should be in everyone’s lives. Without feminism, future generations will question the true meaning of “equality”.

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