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by

annie . **k**aufman

feminism is
the movement
to end
sexism

sexist exploitation
and oppression"

- bell hooks

patriarchy
education equality
identity
media
work
health
GLBTA
athletics
politics
people

Feminism

violence
understanding
sexuality
societal norms
reproductive rights
representation
oppression
liberation

What is feminism?

The American Heritage Dictionary says that feminism is the "Belief in the social, political, and economic equality of the sexes," but there isn't really just one definition of feminism. Feminism is a lot more than just a dictionary definition. It means a lot of different things to a lot of different people. It's about equality; it's about rights; it's about society; it's about liberation; it's about women and men not having to be something they aren't. Feminism is no one thing, one type of person, or one way of thinking. Feminism changes and grows and does different things for different people. For me, it's about standing up for what I believe in and thinking about and understanding society. It's liberating and freeing to be able to read, understand, and share what I see, understand, and feel. It's amazing to feel like you are not alone in the way that you think about things. I think that feminism is freeing because it helps you to learn and think about how you feel about things. Patriarchal culture teaches us things that don't have to be true. Little girls like pink; little boys like blue? Gender norms don't have to dictate your life. A skinny, big breasted woman isn't the only thing that is beautiful even though that's what the media wants us to think. Have you ever laughed at a misogynistic joke? Demeaning jokes aren't funny. A stay at home father? A woman who works and doesn't have kids? What's wrong with that? Have you ever seen gender norms play out in a way that lets you see the inequality and ridiculousness of it all? I feel like I can see it everywhere. My parents and other's parents house duties and expectations; when my 5 year old sister tells my dad that he shouldn't do the laundry because that's "mommy's job"; when girls are always seen as worse at sports; when people laugh at sexist jokes; when violence against women hasn't really been decreasing; when discrimination against women is rampant

and women still make way less than men; when there are double standards for what men and women can say and do; when people feel like they can decide that they know what's best for women or anyone; when "beautiful" women are portrayed by the media as one very narrow way and girls and women all over the country suffer from eating disorders and low self esteem. The list goes on. When you think about it, it's everywhere. Who hasn't seen things in their life that they feel is unfair or not right?

Feminism really is for everybody. Feminists aren't just complaining, "bra-burning", lesbian, man-haters. They are addressing issues that affect people everywhere. They are working for human rights and equality. The word feminism makes it seem like feminism is just for women but it's for men too. Patriarchal society definitely affects and undermines women but it hurts men also. It forces men into prescribed ideals that only encourage inequality. It tells men to be "manly," to hide their feelings, that they can't do "feminine" things, and encourages aggressive behavior. Women and men both are forced into standards that aren't necessarily what they, or anyone else, want. They are told to be a certain way.

A year ago, I wouldn't have called myself a feminist. That wasn't because I wasn't; it was because I didn't know or understand enough about it. Now I am proud to call myself one. And who shouldn't be? Feminism is liberating. It allows you to understand yourself, your world, and your life. It helps you to think about and understand what you see. It lets you fight for your rights and see that they do matter. Feminism is powerful and amazing.

By: Annie Kaufman

opion

women

prudish

I interviewed Katie and Amber from In Other Words, a feminist bookstore in Portland. Here's what they had to say...

unreasonable

Are All

What is *In Other Words*? What is your mission? How did this bookstore start?

Feminists ... ?

In Other Words is the last surviving nonprofit women's bookstore in the country. Our ideology is basically that feminism is for everybody. Our mission is to provide a diversity of feminist perspective and work for gender equality. It is a nonprofit bookstore, community space, and resource center for women, feminists, queers, and everybody else. We want to promote gender equality and feminism. We also have educational resources, classes, discussions, events, and more. *In Other Words* opened in response to *A Woman's Place*, another women's bookstore, closing in Portland.

crazy

manly

What has made you passionate about feminism?

ugly

rude

Amber: In college, as a result of women's studies classes, I started being and calling myself a feminist. I got more involved and learned a lot. I read *A People's History of the United States*. I learned about important history that I was unaware of.

man-haters

Katie: I think that I was a feminist since I was little. Early on, I saw the fact that gender roles were being pushed on everyone, including little kids. It bothered me on a personal level that I couldn't do certain things too. In high school and college, I started calling myself a feminist

intimidating

scary

Check them out!

publicly. I think that the strong women in my life showed me the bullshit of gender roles.

What do you think are the main issues right now for feminism? Where do you think the movement is going?

Amber - I think that one thing that should be a main issue right now, but maybe isn't, is feminism in other countries. There are serious issues globally that need to be addressed but we also need to think about what works for other people. We need to think about their cultures and perspectives rather than just telling them that they are being mistreated. What if something that we view as demeaning may be empowering to them?

Katie - Feminism has made a lot of gains for women but it is still important. Some people feel like they are "over" feminism. They say that we don't need it anymore and we should "Be quiet." What we need now is resurgence. People act like everything is fine, but the issues are still there but covered up. Look at the issues that come from patriarchal society like race, class, and size issues. We need to fight all of these different battles that come from the same place and mentality.

What do you think young people and feminists should be doing? Where should they be heading?

Katie - They should be thinking about the problems and reflecting on how privilege plays out in their own lives.

In Other Words
BB NE Killingsworth
Portland, OR

Think about the issues of gender in your own life. Getting involved in organizations, reading books, educating others, and vocalizing are all important.

Amber - You can get the word out to other students. Doing things like feminist groups, book clubs, and reading and discussing can be a good way to promote and discuss feminism.

What do you think people need to understand about feminism?

Feminism is about gender equality not about women being better. People need to have fewer assumptions and understand that feminism is for boys too. People don't think about the fact that feminism really helps boys too. Gender roles hurt boys too and just as badly. People need to recognize what feminism is not. Feminism wants to address the larger societal issues like gender roles. There is inherent inequality that is in place that makes it so we treat people differently.

During the interview, Amber from *In Other Words* talked about wanting to take autoshop in high school. She didn't, partly because she would have been the only girl. We also discussed the larger societal issues surrounding this. This is just one example of how society's assumptions about girls and women can continue to affect them throughout their lives.

Little Kids

- Boys are encouraged to play with trucks.
- Boys "like" cars.
- Girls are encouraged to play with dolls, not trucks.

Society Says...

- Women aren't naturally suited to be mechanics.
- Women don't want to be mechanics.

Adult Life

- Mechanics continues to be a male-dominated field.
- Women aren't encouraged to be mechanics.
- Dads continue to be the ones who know about cars.
- Women sometimes end up at a disadvantage because they don't know as much about cars.

Older Kids

- Dad shows boys how to help with cars and assumes that they, rather than girls, would be interested.

High School - Autoshop

- Mostly boys in the class
- Probably no one would care if there was a girl in the class but the overall feeling could be awkward or uncomfortable.
- Girls might be stigmatized or looked at as weird for taking autoshop.
- Girls end up not taking the class.

- If a girl wants to become a mechanic or take auto classes, she is already in a male-dominated field. Just like in high school, the overall attitude could be unwelcoming.
- Because she might not have taken classes in high school or learned as much from her dad, she's already behind many of the boys in her class and at a disadvantage. She might not know all of the presumed knowledge and will have to catch up.
- It's harder for her to do well because of the way society has treated her because she's a girl.

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and the cycle starts again...

Learn

More!

Feminism is for Everybody by bell hooks is a great introduction to feminism. It helps you to understand the history and what feminism really is. I would definitely recommend this book to anyone who just wants to understand what feminism is or is interested in feminism. Once you read it, it feels like you can say that you understand feminism. It discusses a lot of different topics surrounding feminism and shows that feminism really is for everybody. (South End Press, 2000)

Gail Collins' book *When Everything Changed: The Amazing Journey of American Women From 1960 to the Present* uses many short, editorial like stories to tell the history of American women in the last fifty years. It shows how far we've come and how much farther we still need to go. Since the 60s, the expectations of an ideal woman and the ways of thinking have changed greatly, but they still aren't where they need to be. Did you know that in 1960 a woman was sent out of traffic court for wearing pants? (p. 3) Or that job ads in the newspaper used to be listed as HELP WANTED - MALE and HELP WANTED - FEMALE? (p. 7) Want to better understand feminism and the women's movement in the last 50 years? Read this book. (Little, Brown and Company, 2009)

Read!

Half the Sky by Nicholas D. Kristof and Sheryl WuDunn exposes the inhumane issues that kill women worldwide. Through stories of women and girls around the world and their lives, Kristof and WuDunn show how much things need to change. "The global statistics on the abuse of girls are numbing. It appears that more girls have been killed in the last fifty years, precisely because they were girls, than men were killed in all the battles of the twentieth century. More girls are killed in this routine 'gendercide' in any one decade than people were slaughtered in all the genocides of the twentieth century." (p. xvii) The authors give examples of places where women's lives are threatened every day. "One woman went to the police to report that she had been gang-raped by Akku Yadav and his thugs; the police responded by gang-raping her themselves." (p. 50) There are places in the world where women choose to leave the house knowing that they will be raped, because if they allow the men in the family to leave, the men will be killed. (p. 86) When issues like this persist and this many people are dying for no reason, something needs to be done. (Alfred A. Knopf, 2009)

More Awesome Feminist Resources

BLOGS

feministing.com

bitchmagazine.org

feministe.us/blog

MAGAZINES

Ms.

Bust

bitch