

Girlboys

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My boyfriend frequently calls me a feminist. For some time, I disagreed with him. “I don’t go on marches, and I don’t hate men! I even watch *Love and Hip Hop*, occasionally. Everyone knows most of the men on that show are womanizers!” I once shrieked, contesting another of his allegations, almost on the verge of foaming at the mouth like a rabid animal. Then one Saturday evening at a two-year old’s birthday party, I was called a feminist while talking with my boyfriend and one of our male friends. I became exhausted from defending myself on this subject, when it occurred to me that I hadn’t known what feminism was— just that it had to do with women despising men because most of the women were lesbians. Somewhere in the vicinity of our media-washed existence, I had heard feminists don’t shave their legs and are unafraid to aggressively ambush those who oppose their views. Somehow, I’d come to give feminism a negative connotation without fully understanding why or seeking some sort of evidence to justify my pessimistic attitude. I realized this was wrong and vacuous, so I researched what feminism meant. Shortly, like a sinner coming to Christ, I became awakened when I realized I *am* a feminist, and all of my previous theories about feminism were bullcrap!

The most shocking discovery about this whole thing is that while feminism is the theory of social, political, and economic gender equality, there is a certain masculinity attached to women who believe they can do things just as equally as men. We get thrown into a category of women who think they don’t need a man for anything and that men can be replaced, or for African American women like me who are feminists, we become the epitome of the “strong Black woman,” as if race has anything to do with our independence and thoughts on gender equality. As a feminist, I am still a woman. I still possess the features of a woman. I believe that women can be heads of households; at the same time, I believe households can be run equally. If my husband wanted to take care of me, I’d let him—to a point. Maybe I don’t fit in with the typical chemical makeup of a patriarchal society because I personally don’t want to depend on anyone else to fully supply me with my needs, but I don’t give less credit to men who are the heads of their households nor do I give them any more credit either. I prefer to be safe, and being safe means being accountable for myself. That doesn’t have to do with me being a woman or a feminist; it has to do with me being a human, trying to meet my most basic needs.

During this process, I’ve learned that every feminist has a unique tale of becoming a feminist; mine began as a girl. As a child, I saw the struggle of power between my parents. My dad was the breadwinner, and he made that clear to everyone, but he made that especially clear to my mom. She waited on him and he supplied the money, but she couldn’t do as she pleased freely. I often wondered

why my mom didn't go out and find a job. But my parents lived in a different time. Our home became unhappy. The unhappiness led to physical abuse and drug abuse by my parents. The physical abuse and drug abuse led my dad to acquire HIV and my mom to die at fifty-two. Once I became an age that all of this was comprehensible, I realized I had to exceed society's expectations of me as a woman. I would not be a stay-at-home mom with no money of my own. I would get an education, and I would create a career for myself. I would never allow a man to abuse me, hold money over my head, or make me feel unsafe. I refuse to allow society to tell me what I can achieve, so if that makes me a feminist, then so be it.

Feminist—it's simply a term that sheds light on the imbalance among men and women on social, political, and economic levels. The world doesn't set women up to be strong, confident, independent women. It tells us to play with dolls and ovens as children to prep us for becoming wives fit for a patriarchy. It tells us we belong in a suppressed role. It tells us we can never be beautiful or feminine enough, and it imbues us with what beauty is and what it isn't. The world tells us we can't have careers that are as successful or as financially rewarding as men. If we are mothers, we can't put our personal passions and careers ahead of our children, and we need to be home. We can only be first ladies, not have dreams of becoming the first female president of the United States. And if we are feminists, we are like girlboys, because we've amassed too few feminine traits and too many masculine ideals.

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