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Molly Goodspeed

## HOW I FOUND FEMINISM AND OVERCAME INSTITUTIONAL SEXISM

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Feminism is defined as the advocacy of women's rights on the grounds of political, social, and economic equality to men. Although this statement is fairly simple, 'feminist' seems to be the most threatening F word in the English language. I've heard many of my peers exclaim that, though they are firm believers in equal rights, they just can't identify with a group of people who are aggressive and man-hating. After taking a women's studies course my freshman year of college, I learned to shake the common misconception that every feminist yells their opinions and doesn't shave their armpits.

I became a 'closet feminist,' if you will. In most cases, I kept my mouth shut when I heard a misogynistic comment from the mouth of a seemingly harmless friend or peer. However, after a few years of transforming into the feminist that I am today, I've become tired of filtering my thoughts. I'm still constantly working to feel proud of my beliefs that have been shaped by the things I've learned, and contrary to what many may think about feminism, I haven't learned to hate or blame. I simply removed the large cloud above my head that was ignorance. I opened my eyes to a multitude of issues that I wasn't even aware existed throughout our society and inside myself. I finally understood the thought processes that are so deeply embedded into my brain because of objectification and double standards. In a state of aggravation and sadness, I took a step forward.



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Institutional sexism exists in a manner similar to that of institutional racism. Our country was built on sexist values. It's ignorant to believe that our society can be shaped in social turmoil and evolve without lingering unfairness and discrimination. Being labeled as sexist has become so unnerving for people some are deterred from acknowledging issues that are blatantly present. Personally, I don't believe that most people spend their free time thinking about their hatred for women.

However, many people promote sexism by overlooking the pressures and difficulties surrounding the female community. For example, our society can't decide whether we will praise or scrutinize a woman for craving attention. On the one hand, women are being told that we need to do whatever we can to obtain validation. On the other hand, we're being advised to be confident, but discreet. There is a societal need for the attention seeking woman to exist to be seen, but not in order to be known or heard.

I FINALLY UNDERSTOOD THE THOUGHT PROCESSES THAT ARE SO DEEPLY EMBEDDED INTO MY BRAIN BECAUSE OF OBJECTIFICATION AND DOUBLE STANDARDS.

My change in mindset began with one thing - education. I encourage you to be mindful of the almost impossible standards of beauty women are bombarded with. I urge you to educate yourselves on gender wage gaps. Most importantly, I hope that all men and women who have not personally felt the burden of sexism understand that there's a large number of women who have. If you're a woman who is conforming to the patriarchal standards that we all have instilled in us, it doesn't mean you don't have respect for yourself. It doesn't make you any less of a woman.

If you're a man who respects your mother, sister, or female colleagues and friends, I realize that it's easy to separate those feelings from a bigger societal issue. However, acknowledge that feminism is not a liberal ideal fed only by women who don't own a skirt. It's not an overreaction. Being involved in the feminist movement is a way to bring light to the undeniable inequalities that women face on a daily basis. It's a way to recognize the crippling effects of rape culture. We need to let go of the blissful state of ignorance and immerse ourselves in reality. What is real is far from easy or fun, but it's unbelievably important.

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