

Bad

Feminist

Essays

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Gay

Introduction

Feminism (n.): Plural

The world changes faster than we can fathom in ways that are complicated. These bewildering changes often leave us raw. The cultural climate is shifting, particularly for women as we contend with the retrenchment of reproductive freedom, the persistence of rape culture, and the flawed if not damaging representations of women we're consuming in music, movies, and literature.

We have a comedian asking his fans to touch women lightly on their stomachs because ignoring personal boundaries is oh so funny. We have all manner of music glorifying the degradation of women, and damnit, that music is catchy so I often find myself singing along as my very being is diminished. Singers like Robin Thicke know "we want it." Rappers like Jay-Z use the word "bitch" like punctuation. Movies, more often than not, tell the stories of men as if men's stories are the only stories that matter. When women are involved, they are sidekicks, the romantic interests, the afterthoughts. Rarely do women get to be the center of attention. Rarely do our stories get to matter.

How do we bring attention to these issues? How do we do so

in ways that will actually be heard? How do we find the necessary language for talking about the inequalities and injustices women face, both great and small? As I've gotten older, feminism has answered these questions, at least in part.

Feminism is flawed, but it offers, at its best, a way to navigate this shifting cultural climate. Feminism has certainly helped me find my voice. Feminism has helped me believe my voice matters, even in this world where there are so many voices demanding to be heard.

How do we reconcile the imperfections of feminism with all the good it can do? In truth, feminism is flawed because it is a movement powered by people and people are inherently flawed. For whatever reason, we hold feminism to an unreasonable standard where the movement must be everything we want and must always make the best choices. When feminism falls short of our expectations, we decide the problem is with feminism rather than with the flawed people who act in the name of the movement.

The problem with movements is that, all too often, they are associated only with the most visible figures, the people with the biggest platforms and the loudest, most provocative voices. But feminism is not whatever philosophy is being spouted by the popular media feminist flavor of the week, at least not entirely.

Feminism, as of late, has suffered from a certain guilt by association because we conflate feminism with women who advocate feminism as part of their personal brand. When these figureheads say what we want to hear, we put them up on the Feminist Pedestal, and when they do something we don't like, we knock them right off and then say there's something wrong with feminism because our feminist leaders have failed us. We forget the difference between feminism and Professional Feminists.

I openly embrace the label of bad feminist. I do so because I am flawed and human. I am not terribly well versed in feminist history. I am not as well read in key feminist texts as I would

like to be. I have certain . . . interests and personality traits and opinions that may not fall in line with mainstream feminism, but I am still a feminist. I cannot tell you how freeing it has been to accept this about myself.

I embrace the label of bad feminist because I am human. I am messy. I'm not trying to be an example. I am not trying to be perfect. I am not trying to say I have all the answers. I am not trying to say I'm right. I am just trying—trying to support what I believe in, trying to do some good in this world, trying to make some noise with my writing while also being myself: a woman who loves pink and likes to get freaky and sometimes dances her ass off to music she knows, she *knows*, is terrible for women and who sometimes plays dumb with repairmen because it's just easier to let them feel macho than it is to stand on the moral high ground.

I am a bad feminist because I never want to be placed on a Feminist Pedestal. People who are placed on pedestals are expected to pose, perfectly. Then they get knocked off when they fuck it up. I regularly fuck it up. Consider me already knocked off.

When I was younger, I disavowed feminism with alarming frequency. I understand why women still fall over themselves to disavow feminism, to distance themselves. I disavowed feminism because when I was called a feminist, the label felt like an insult. In fact, it was generally intended as such. When I was called a feminist, during those days, my first thought was, *But I willingly give blow jobs*. I had it in my head that I could not both be a feminist and be sexually open. I had lots of strange things in my head during my teens and twenties.

I disavowed feminism because I had no rational understanding of the movement. I was called a feminist, and what I heard was, "You are an angry, sex-hating, man-hating victim lady person."

us (try to) become the feminists we would like to see moving through the world.

When you can't find someone to follow, you have to find a way to lead by example. In this collection of essays, I'm trying to lead, in a small, imperfect way. I am raising my voice as a bad feminist. I am taking a stand as a bad feminist. I offer insights on our culture and how we consume it. The essays in this collection also examine race in contemporary film, the limits of "diversity," and how innovation is rarely satisfying; it is rarely enough. I call for creating new, more inclusive measures for literary excellence and take a closer look at HBO's *Girls* and the phenomenon of the Fifty Shades trilogy. These essays are political and they are personal. They are, like feminism, flawed, but they come from a genuine place. I am just one woman trying to make sense of this world we live in. I'm raising my voice to show all the ways we have room to want more, to do better.

[ME]