

## The "F" Bomb

Shield your eyes, this opinion is about the f word, Feminism. What is feminism? Surprisingly, the basic beliefs behind feminism are that women deserve the same social, economic and political rights and opportunities as men. However, when I declare myself a feminist in mixed political or gender company, I usually get looks that resemble pure shock, as if I just declared myself to be an avid heroin dealer. I love asking unsuspecting males if they are feminists. I usually get abrupt "No! Of course not!" responses. I then follow up with a brief explanation of the ideas behind feminism, and then a small "...I guess," answer or a sarcastic taunt about how "Men get more money than women, and that's the way it should be."

Why is there such a stigma attached to this new "f" word? Is it because it is too close to the word "feminine" and men don't want to be viewed as that? Is it because the word has a negative connotation, with a decimal percentage of feminists getting negative attention because of their "man-killing" policies? I attended the National Organization for Women conference this summer with the Women and Girls Foundation of Southwest Pennsylvania. I spotted a few men there in the fathoms of women, and they looked in good health to me, no corpses or blood to be seen.

Is it because many feminists are labeled to be lesbians (gasp!)? To me, this statement makes no sense. Of course, I happen to know some amazing lesbian feminists, along with many more straight ones, some who are married and have children. They both love their spouses, both male and female, as much as anyone else. Sure, many feminist organizations have activities to boost lesbian rights and status, and that may cause some lesbians to be more involved than others, but lesbians are not the only ones. Ok, look at it this way. Try going into an anti-feminist organization or conference, which would have mostly men, and call them all gay. See how that flies. It is also curious why there is such a stigma attached to terms such as "homosexual" and "lesbian", seeing as there is substantial evidence that which gender one loves has to do with the number of testosterone receptors in the brain, not evil heathen practices, but that's an entirely different matter.

I bet the reason the term "feminist" is shushed is because women who are feminists are considered to be "female dogs" (you know the word that I'm referring to). A bunch of strong women coming together to fight for equal pay for equal work is not exactly what society has in mind for females to do. Women are supposed to be pretty, blonde, and big-boobed, and more concerned with fashion, weight, and dating than grades or a career. Similar to the idea that

women who are comfortable and flaunt their sexuality are considered to be dirty sluts, while men who do the same are cool players. Women like feminists are seen as biting off more than they can chew, bossy wenches, and worst of all that “there is no need for them”. True, we have the vote, but I leave you with some impressive figures:

- In Southwest Pennsylvania, women earn 69 cents for every dollar that men make for doing the same jobs (Tribune Review, 3/06). This is, in large part, caused by negative stereotypes about the value of women’s work being lower than men’s
- One out of four women will be raped before she turns 18 (Women and Girls Foundation of Pennsylvania). One out of four to five women will be raped in her college years (End The Violence)
- Women surgeons and doctors make 59 cents per every dollar that men make
- There are only 16 out of 100 women in the senate, and 74 out of 435 in the House of Representatives (Fact Monster).

What can you do?

1. Talk about the issue. People of both genders need to take a part in eliminating the wage gap, and we need to get the issue the attention it deserves
2. A chapter of a high school feminist group called M-Powerment, which has done amazing things at Shaler High School including increasing rape awareness and empowering women via a group of talented male and female students, could be set up at Fox Chapel. See me if you would like to help out with this.