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GENDER AND FEMINISM: THE STUDENTS' VIEW

Sara Martín Alegre (ed.)



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Sara Martín Alegre, "Preface: (Still) Teaching Gender Studies in the 21st Century"

ELS NENS I LES NENES¹

Nens i nenes són diferents,
Les nenes més dolces, els nens més impacients.
Cadascú és com és i no se'n pot canviar res,
Tenim defectes però coses bones també.
Ens hem de respectar i no fer mal els de més.
Tant si ets un nen com una nena,
Tenim els mateixos drets.

Lola Martín Pons, December 2014

What better way to start a volume on young persons' view of gender and Feminism than with the words of a 9-year-old poet? 'Els nens i les nenes' shows with absolute clarity that an awareness of gender differences begins very early in life as does little girls' demand for equal treatment, even when the concept of 'equal rights' is only imperfectly known, if at all. The essays gathered here, written by undergrad students born in the early 1990s, further show that there is much to be learned and taught about gender issues today as seen by people under 30.

As I finished the edition of this volume, I came across a worrying piece of news in *El País*² which further justifies the publication of these pages. In June 2014 the Centro de Investigaciones Sociológicas (CIS) published the results of a survey, according to which one third of Spaniards tolerates couple-related psychological abuse: 92% reject physical violence, but not verbal ill-treatment, which they have serious difficulties to see as abuse. A second survey published this week declares that one third of the young persons, aged 15 to 29, regards as "inevitable or acceptable in some circumstances" controlling their partners' schedules, preventing them from seeing family or friends, not allowing them to work or study, and telling them what they can or cannot do. Among this age group, the tolerance of male chauvinist attitudes is on the increase, and not only among boys: 32% of the girls "tolerate" masculinist behaviours as opposed to 29% of all Spanish women, 34% of the boys in comparison to 28% among all Spanish men. It is, then, more urgent than ever to give

¹ THE LITTLE GIRLS AND THE LITTLE BOYS: Little girls and little boys differ,/the girls are sweeter, the boys more impatient./ Each one is the way they are and nothing can be changed,/we have defects but good things, too./ We need to respect each other and never hurt the other./ Whether you're a boy or a girl,/ we both have the same rights.

² Vidales, Raquel. "Una de cada tres jóvenes considera aceptable que su pareja la controle." *El País*, 27 January 2015, http://politica.elpais.com/politica/2015/01/27/actualidad/1422363044_535263.html

voice to the members of these young generations who are completely opposed to any form of abuse, and who demand loudly that gender equality is finally reached.

The 32 essays in the hands of the reader were written in answer to two questions: “Why do we need Feminism today?” and “What worries me most about gender is...”. I gave my students (enrolled in my new elective subject ‘Gender Students (in English)’ 2014-15), no guidance whatsoever so as not to curtail their personal approach to my questions. I did ask them, though, to speak to the older persons in their family, and to other similarly aged acquaintances. As you can see, many followed my advice, composing thus not only a candid generational portrait but, quite often, a simultaneous view of three generations. I am sure they learned as much from talking to their elders as I have learned from reading their sincere, moving essays.

I believe that the main collective contribution we are making here is a vindication of the words ‘feminist’ and ‘Feminism’.³ In my own youth I was very much reluctant to identifying myself as a feminist for, as I understand now in hindsight, a young woman starting her career will naturally reject women’s disempowerment. Now, when I am only two years away from hitting 50, I see things very differently, not so much because I feel personally disempowered but because so many young girls not only reject feminism but are actively supporting patriarchy. It takes much commitment to sustain a sense of your own autonomy and to build your biography on the basis of your own total independence, which is, no doubt, why so many are slipping back into male dependence (romantic and/or economic). You’ll see here that young girls and myself face together the same problem: the meaning of Feminism is poorly understood—the aim is not replacing misogynistic patriarchy with an androphobic matriarchy, but fighting for equal rights for all. I have been calling this struggle ‘anti-patriarchal’ for years and this is what it should be: a common front where men and women join forces to face patriarchy and build a new genderless world.

I am not particularly happy to be teaching Gender Studies, as I am very sorry that they are still needed. I want to go the way of the abolitionists who needed not raise their voices after the end of formal slavery (racist abuse and exploitation, unfortunately, are still here). Teaching Gender Studies involves many problems: it is hard to get the recognition you may earn in less confrontational fields⁴, it often feels like painting yourself into a debased feminine corner and, finally, it too often appears to be an exercise in preaching to the converted (though you’ll see one essay here by someone who is by no means convinced by my discourse). Teaching Gender Studies is, however, also immensely rewarding since it has a very direct impact on young persons’ lives, as you will see, and on my own, as I need to rationalize an anti-patriarchal discourse which is often too emotional for words, too grounded on rage and fear. I am

³ I came across the spelling of ‘Feminism’ with a capital ‘F’ in one of the essays and decided finally to keep them for all to stress the need to vindicate the word and its real meaning. The rest of my editorial intervention has been as minimalist as possible, limited to polishing sentences with awkward phrasing, which are only natural among C1 English level students aiming at producing sophisticated essays.

⁴ See: “Teaching gender studies as feminist activism : still struggling for recognition” (paper presented at the international Gender Spring Conference, Setting a New Agenda for Equality Policies, Centre Francesca Bonnemaison, Barcelona, Spain; 25-27 June 2014.) <https://ddd.uab.cat/record/126586>

just sorry that I am not reaching more men. The proportion you will find here (7 men, 25 women) may seem low at about 25% for the men but it is actually higher than the 15% they occupy in the BA degree I teach, 'English Studies'. Ideally, the proportion should have been closer to 50%, but, well, the Humanities are by no means a favourite choice for male undergrads.

I believe there is a similar proportion of non-heterosexuals writing in these pages, about 25%, including here both boys and girls. There is also a transgender man, whose discreet presence in my class has, nonetheless, provoked me into rethinking my whole approach to gender. The syllabus of my course, which can be seen here: <http://ddd.uab.cat/record/121835>, intended to cover gender in all its manifestations. One day, when I complained that the class was very quiet, a girl told me privately that the silence often manifested shock at the radically new ideas from Gender Studies researchers I exposed my students to. Yet, for me, the presence of my new student was a constant reminder that I am not (yet) radical enough. I may have chosen for my students to see femininity, masculinity, gay, queer, lesbian, bisexual, intersexual and transgender texts but this was not enough. The real challenge, in which I think I partly failed, was altering the order of this list and making my teaching far more queer than it is—even though I think it is very queer indeed, heteroqueer but firmly queer all the same.

I'll finish by thanking my wonderful students from the bottom of my heart for the personal confidences they pour here. And for their boldness, as I am not sure I could have written what some of them offer here. I am very, very proud to have elicited all this valuable insight into gender and Feminism from them.

Enjoy...

Barcelona, January 2015

Sara.Martin@uab.cat

<http://gent.uab.cat/saramartinalegre>

<http://blogs.uab.cat/saramartinalegre>, *The Joys of Teaching Literature*

Jessica Arévalo Hidalgo, “The Tool for Change: Feminism as the Key for Social Reconstruction”

I never considered myself a Feminist until I found out what the term really meant. I did not even think about it as a major problem in society until I began to suffer the real consequences of male dominance and hegemonic power. The problem arises when you explain this to people who do not know what being a Feminist implies; for them you are just a woman who feels inferior and, therefore, hates men. What they do not understand is that the term Feminist has undergone a great change through time and, nowadays, it can comprise a wide range of ideas. In my case, I believe in the equality of the human species, without regarding other categorizations. All human beings deserve the same treatment and the same opportunities and rights in life. Nonetheless, and it is a fact, women have always been oppressed in one way or another.

If we look back, we will be able to see how women have always been at the bottom of the ‘patriarchal pyramid’. Women have always been subjected and surrogated to male hegemonic power and, even though this inequality has been diminished in the past years, it is still present in our society. This is why I strongly believe that Feminism must exist and we should all embrace it. This is what Feminism is for. We have the right to share power and influence; we deserve equal rights and opportunities in every area of life; we need complete financial independence and we should all be able to enjoy equal access to education and professional careers. Feminism is there to identify and bring to a common level the power imbalances between men and women while giving women the autonomy we aim for and that we absolutely deserve. We must be able to be in control of our own lives and bodies without having to think about what others will say, especially men. Isn’t it funny? Men always look for the approval of other men when doing something. Nevertheless, who approves of what we, women, do and supports us? Obviously, men.

A month ago, one of my students—she is 26 years old and we have known each other for four years—asked me about my position regarding Feminism as she was strongly concerned about women’s situation. I told her I was a Feminist and guess what? She looked at me in a strange way and asked me why I hated men. My answer was: ‘I do not hate men. I respect them and I believe they should also respect us. However, women have always been subjected to male power and I believe in the equality of the sexes.’ After that, I asked her about the women who are being killed in Asian countries because of their actions, while men are given the freedom to do whatever they want; she looked shocked at my answer, I guess she did not expect me to be so open about the matter. Two weeks later, she came to me and told me she had been reading about Feminism and now she considered herself a Feminist. I was happy to see that thanks to my clarification and her willingness to learn, she decided to change her view and fight for what we deserve.

What I want to highlight with all this is that Feminism is the tool for change. Nonetheless we are the ones who must use this tool in order to remodel society and make it a proper place to live where men and women, Asian, European, black and white can enjoy the same quality of life and the same opportunities without boundaries. We have got the right to decide for ourselves, but, who are we to judge others for their biological traits?

Furthermore, I would like to emphasize the need for us to fight and do something about it. Many women believe just in their own welfare, and, therefore, do not care about equal rights. I have seen people rejecting Feminism because their lives are perfect, because they do not suffer the consequences of inequality and, consequently, they do not need to bother about the rest; sad but true. Nevertheless, my question is: what would have happened in Spain during the 1900's if we hadn't had Feminism there to demand women's suffrage? What if we hadn't fought against domestic violence in order to discredit it and make it unlawful? I wonder where we would be today and what our rights would be. These things are ones that should be taken into account when embracing Feminism. Moreover, I believe that the common 'stereotypes' regarding feminist women should be erased and we should think of ourselves as free human beings without any specific traits that can label us. Why should we all be labelled? I mean, there is this urgent need to pin down people and give them a particular attribute in order to control every single part of our lives.

This is what Feminism is for. We need to stop identifying people because of their sex orientations, their skin colour or even their decisions in life. Feminism is not there to enhance the superiority of women and disregard men because they are the source of the problem—not at all! Feminism is there to remind us that women have to fight for equal—absolutely equal—rights. Both men and women should have the freedom to enjoy the same opportunities in life without taking into consideration our biological traits. The fact is that many barriers have been broken thanks to brave women and also brave men who have been fighting for equal rights for a long time.

However, these barriers are being put up again by a society that has the need to be in control of everything and needs to give a name to every single human being. Why can we not simply be human beings? Why shouldn't we all be regarded as equals?

Jana Baró González, "Bridging the Generational Gap: On Daily Feminism"

I remember being in my early teens in history class; I had the bad habit of reading ahead, to keep myself from dozing off, and I found a side note about Olympe de Gouges in the textbook. I highlighted it—neon blue—and was horrified to see that we skipped over that paragraph to move on to the rest of the Reign of Terror. I already

had a vague notion of Feminism back then, but it was that particular moment that woke me up, both literally and metaphorically. I suppose this is the reason why I have always perceived Feminism as a kind of self-realisation, not as a movement. This new awareness became part of my love of fiction; I explored Feminism through blog posts, film reviews, literary criticism, and not so silly online comic strips, often written not by academics but by people close to my own age. This meant, of course, that I got a slightly chaotic, maybe even immature, vision of Feminism—but it was also lively, and made me more interested in the same works of fiction that I was becoming increasingly angry at. Throughout all my academic and personal life I have tended to turn the things into narratives—rather than lists or logical concepts—in order to understand and remember them better. I did the same with Feminism. It became, for me, a common thread in all the stories that I read or happened around me; inescapable, yes, but also abstract, belonging in a different plane.

My family and I have never talked much about Feminism or gender issues until now. It is not that we avoid the subject; it just has not happened for some reason.

We had a big family meeting for a birthday, and I decided to ask them about their perspective on gender and society over cake (incidentally baked by a woman, the table set by a man). There were a couple of jokes thrown in my general direction when I told them about the Gender Studies Minor; old, but well-intentioned, I believe. One of my uncles told me that my generation should not have to fight for gender equality as his had done. Before I could reply, however, his own siblings—most of them born in the late fifties or early sixties—corrected him. Their vision of Feminism turned out to be more grounded on daily issues and immediate working-day reality than mine: they talked about parity quotas in political parties and team projects, which they had not made their minds up about yet. They also discussed the amount of time men and women spend in home making; since most of them are divorced or in second relationships, they have had to actively rethink their attitudes.

They all agreed that as children they had been treated differently by their parents; it was only my mother and aunt that had felt an active pressure to clean up after everyone. They implied that this was perpetuated by the women themselves. Of course, it makes sense that it was their mother who told everyone what they had to do at home or not, since it was she who had that particular role, but they insisted that even nowadays it is mostly women who insist on doing the housework, and described this tendency to complain about men “not helping them” while at the same time assuming they have to be helped, instead of sharing it from the beginning, as faux-Feminist and cheap. They mentioned maternity leave as well, praising Scandinavian policies, which not only give new mothers longer leaves of absence but also “allow fathers to be fathers”, as they put it. Their Feminism has very much to do with women, men, their role in the home and parenthood—with a progressive stance on those issues, but not beyond that.

There was one point that we all agreed on: the current trend in Spanish society is not contributing to the equality of the genders. Instead, we are going backwards, as the views on female sexuality that teenagers seem to have and the attempt at a

conservative reform of the law on abortion show. Therefore, we all agreed that Feminism is still needed and very much a part of the times. Even if their position on gender roles was a result of everyday reality and mine was bound up in academic theory, we could see eye to eye on possible ways to continue the way towards equality; we all need to talk about our experiences on gender and related issues, to stand up against abuse and to share the details that show how patriarchy works against us all, making a communal experience out of the feminist struggle.

They also made a very interesting point: that only through language, an articulate, educated discourse, can we understand each other's stances. They said that this kind of linguistic ability, that brings open-mindedness and a true chance at equality, is achieved through culture; not necessarily academia, but reading a variety of books, following the news, watching films, and so on. So far I had applied my still small knowledge of Feminism and gender issues to works of fiction only to find them often lacking in varied representation and mostly conservative in their tropes and narratives. On the other hand, my parents' generation saw fiction as eye-opening; even when I pointed out its general lack of subversive characters or plots they insisted that seeing gender patterns in representation is useful, even when they simply repeat reality (the traditional view of reality, that is), since they open up the audience's vision towards their own daily experience. Their perspective on Feminism turned out to be not so different from mine after all.

I do believe there is a generational gap on visions of Feminism; I did not ask about different gender identities beyond male and female, or about their perspectives on sexuality. I did not ask either directly about street harassment—a particular form of sexism that I have myself suffered, sometimes in front of my family—because I wanted to hear what they would say and what they would turn the conversation to. If I have to be honest, I was a bit afraid of what I might hear and of what conflict it might bring; the last thing I wanted was to hear that catcalling is just a compliment and not be able to enjoy my cake. However, nothing of that kind happened. It was a conversation in which I kept quiet about some things, that is true, and it well may be that at some points they said what they thought I wanted to hear. Nevertheless it was very productive: I learnt from their experiences, and they may learn to recognise unfair representation, and to see that it is indeed important. Maybe one day, in a future family meeting, we can all get angry about Olympe de Gouges together.

Francesca Blanch Serrat, “Three Generations of Women: Changing Patterns”

It has been almost two years since Oxford's WomCam (Oxford University Students' Union Women's Campaign) started the so-called “White Board Campaign”. Feminists from this student's organisation went around Oxford asking the passers by a simple question: “Why do we still need Feminism?” They gave them a white board and

a pen and asked them to complete the sentence “I still need Feminism because..”. The participants were photographed in front of popular sights from the famous city holding their signs. The answers went from “I need Feminism because I’m sick of being quiet” to “I need Feminism because people still ask what the victim was wearing” and “I need Feminism because too much of history has been written by white, bourgeois, heterosexual, cisgender men... like me”. Both men and women expressed their worries, all of them concerned with Feminism, in an attempt to raise public awareness on how alive and still needed Feminism is. So, when first confronted with this essay’s topic, this was the first image that came to mind.

However, my objective is not to imitate the WomCam but to take over their initiative in a smaller scale. I wanted to face three generations of women of my family with this question and see how they would react to it. The targets of my research are my mother, born in the early 50s; my sister, born in the early 70s; and myself, born in the early 90s. Therefore, I shall be analysing, in the following lines, the awareness and impact of Feminism in the lives of three women who have lived in quite different social and historical contexts, each separated by 20 years.

The first question I put on the table was the most essential one: “What is Feminism”? My mother’s reaction was to look at me, slightly embarrassed, and tell me she was not sure she could express her opinions in the way I could. She does not consider herself an educated person, which tells us very much about the social and historical context in which she was raised: poor women in small towns, during the post-war period, were taught to read, write and perform domestic and feminine tasks, such as embroidery. I refused to taint her voice with mine, and I insisted on hearing her own ideas. I quote her because I think it is much more valuable for the purposes of this essay to hear her own words than my translation: “I don’t know how to describe it... It is wanting to do everything men do, to be on their level, rights and duties”.

As for my sister, her first reaction was to ask me what I meant by Feminism, a question that says a lot in itself. When you do not know what something is, you cannot possibly understand it, and much less adhere to it. Why does a woman born in the 70s, who is currently married as well as working and has received an education and privileges her mother could have never dreamt of not know what has made it possible for her to live such a life? Is it because she has never questioned her privileges and has taken them for granted? Is it a carelessness that drives one to a personal distance to social reality and historical background? I am of the opinion that a woman born during the rise of the feminist fight and who was young during the most radical years of the movement got all the advantages her elders fought for, while remembering and attaching the concept of Feminism to the pejorative ideas radical Feminism received.

Secondly, I asked them why we need Feminism, if they thought we did. My mother, very resolutely and even defiantly, said the following: “We need it so we can put ourselves at the same level as men. We need it in order to decide for ourselves what we want to do and what we don’t want to do. Men can’t coerce us”. As for my sister, she very calmly stated that she did not consider we had any need for Feminism, especially not in the present Western world. She made a point of distancing this view

from the reality of women in other parts of the world. She said, and I quote: “In my life, I do not need Feminism”.

My last question, which links with the second one, was whether or not they considered themselves feminists. My mother positioned herself as a feminist, while my sister said she was not. Funnily enough, both gave the same argumentations for their affirmations: we are equal. My mother pointed out that we are all the same, and that no man should be above any woman, and for that, she considers herself a feminist; she wants equality because it is what she considers to be right. On the other hand, my sister argued that “nowadays there is no need for feminists”. She said she is not one because what is important is “the person, not the sex”. This is an argument I never stop hearing: “I am not a feminist, I want equality”, which is the same as saying “I am not a vegetarian, I do not eat meat”. Is this phenomenon due to ignorance? Or is it, on the contrary, the result of the stigma attached to the feminist name? To me, both are connected. Some women fear the very word ‘feminist’. They do not wish to be connected to it, and from that fear they never consider exploring it, learning about it. Knowing what they are running from.

To conclude with, I wish to return to the WomCam project. Three generations of women, each born in the 50s, 70s and 90s, who have lived through different periods of time and experimented different hardships and privileges each position themselves in relation to Feminism. Two, the 50s woman and the 90s woman, hold the board with pride and resolution: We need Feminism. I am a feminist. One either rejects holding the board or holds it with a message as far from reality as it gets: We are equal, we do not need Feminism, I do not need Feminism. But, facing reality, it turns out that we are not. We do need it, and we would never be where we are if other women before us had not sacrificed their lives—either metaphorically or literally—to achieve what we now take for granted.

We cannot forget the past, because if we do, we are not only forgetting who we are but how we got where we are. And what is worse, we may return where we were.

Laura Calvo Zafra, “Stop Harassment”

When I was a little girl I was sexually harassed. I was walking with my father and my brother and an old man called me pretty and groped me. I was shocked and confused and I didn’t say anything. My father and my brother didn’t hear anything because they were talking to each other a little far away from me. When I reached them I started to cry, I felt horrible. My dad asked me what was wrong and I told him, he got very angry and went back to where the old man was. He started to shout at him, telling him that he had no right to do what he had done. I asked my dad to stop

because I was scared and we left. Nowadays I wish I hadn't left, I wish I had gone to the police or done something else, but I was scared.

However, this is not an isolated case. Every day women around the world are sexually harassed, and it is not something new, this has been going on for many years. Sadly, in my family I haven't been the only woman sexually harassed. When my mother was a teenager, around the 1970s, she was sexually abused in the underground, practically in front of everyone. She was also very scared, and she didn't tell anyone. But it was not only fear what she felt, it was also shame. Shame because women are taught that it is her fault that someone harasses them sexually. It is their fault for "showing off" or just for being women. And why do they complain? They should take it as a compliment.

Blaming the victim has always been the easy way to deal with sexual abuse and street harassment and it has made women around the world scared of being around men, including myself or my mother. Just a few weeks ago one of my cousins told me about being continually catcalled by men when she leaves work in Barcelona's city centre. And she is not the only one who has told me this, most of my female friends have been catcalled, and not sporadically. They have been groped, they have been followed and they have been insulted for not being thankful for the unwanted attention.

I need Feminism because this has to stop. Society needs Feminism because it's time we stop teaching girls how to hide their bodies to prevent sexual harassment and start teaching boys that women are people, just like them, and that they deserve respect. I should be respected, my mother should be respected, my relatives and friends should be respected. Every woman in the world, no matter their ethnicity, country, religion, sexuality, age, class or definition, should be respected as a human being. Feminism works to make this come true. Feminism aims at a world in which women and men are respected and equal, and it certainly aims to end sexual harassment and abuse. I need Feminism because only when I started to know more about what is Feminism I understood that I was not alone. I understood that it was not only in Barcelona, or in Spain or in Europe, this happened everywhere and women around the world were united to end it.

Feminism is not a very popular word, and I've had many discussions with friends and relatives because they argued that feminists hate men and seek the superiority of women. I've tried to explain and explain that this is not true, and I've tried to understand why such a negative propaganda of the movement still persists. Recently, I found an article in *The F Word Blog* which explains very well why:

Feminists have always been accused of hating men because it is a very effective way of silencing a very threatening movement. In a society where women's value is based on our ability to please men, and where men hold almost all the cards, the worst possible thing we can do is hate them. So when feminists point out and object to the oppression, abuse and discrimination perpetuated by men against women, this is framed as man hating in an attempt to silence us, in an attempt to

ensure that we are vilified and ignored by the rest of society, so that male oppression of women and male privilege can continue unchecked. (Laura 2012)

Our value as people is limited to satisfying men's desires. In that sense, whenever we try to break away from this repression we are accused of the greatest crime: hating men. If a woman's value is to please a man, she should let that man touch her whenever he wants, she should be grateful that she gets his attention.

This way of thinking about women is rooted in society still nowadays, even though people might say that sexism no longer exists. Sexism still exists, and one of its biggest representations is the constant objectification of women. One example to understand how this sexual objectification of women is growing strong is the leaking of some nude pictures taken by female celebrities. This blatant violation of privacy is sexual harassment; however, society does not consider it so. Celebrities are public images; therefore their bodies are at the service of the public. People make fun of these leakings, they do not care if they are violating someone's privacy. I've heard too many times that if those women did not want their nudes leaked they should have never taken them. They are denying these women their right to privacy and their right of doing whatever they want with their bodies. They are judging them while enjoying their bodies and the scandal that they represent. They are not respecting them as people, they are objectifying them. This is sexual harassment from the person who leaks the nudes to the one who enjoys them (or does not denounce them as a violation of privacy); all are harassing that woman. Yet, the person who leaks these nudes is not judged, they are not criminalized by society.

Feminists are the ones who fight against this abuse. Feminists are the ones who raise awareness on the number of women who are sexually harassed every day and the number of women who are killed because of this. Feminists are the ones who aim to change education and to teach respect to boys and girls. This is one of the reasons why I need Feminism, why my mother needs Feminism, why everyone needs it: to be respected. I want to be respected as who I am, not as an object for pleasure. I want to be acknowledged as a person and not as a little girl to be called pretty and be groped in the street.

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Rubén Campos Arjona, "Coded"

White, male, 24-years-old, Spanish, working-class university student. This bunch of words defines, in a more or less accurate way, everything that can and is

expected from me and any person sharing these same traits. Of course, the experience may vary according to personal circumstances, but this reduced and limited amount of concepts is all that is required to define all the *shoulds*, *musts*, and *have tos* that will in one way or another dictate most of the paths in your life. The choice of traits, by the way, is not at all incidental, nor is it the fact that the word male comes in the second place.

As it happens, all of our paths are determined by this or that label, but more often than not I find that, while age and race are key to the understanding our place in the world, gender is still one of the most controversial and defining aspects of the individual. Most topics, behaviours and attitudes can be coded either typically male or typically female, allowing a very narrow fringe for neutrality which is never completely neutral.

Now, I know that, generally speaking, human beings do not tolerate very well ambiguity and need to know what to expect from most situations most of the times, so in a way I can understand that need for categorization (I myself am not completely free of that sin). It makes us feel safe and in control. We know, or we think that we know what's going to happen, whether it's good or bad, and that's ok, because it fulfils our expectations.

And that's precisely why I find the notion of gender so limiting. Yes, it is true that most human beings are born with either one or another set of genitalia, but that's where the deal ends. No, I'm not saying that all humans are equal. They are not. I'm not talking here about being better or worse or more intelligent or more stupid. I'm talking simply about difference. The problem with the predefined standards is not that they define or how they define you, but rather the fact that they exist at all.

Some months ago, there appeared on the Internet an article claiming that a group of scientists had discovered the perfect human female body and that that body belonged to the model and actress Kelly Brook. The article stated that some scientists from the University of Texas had declared that her body was the ideal feminine standard, one of the main arguments supporting their claim being that she was free of cosmetic surgery. If for a chance you happen to find this article, you will see that it even features some pictures of the actress, who is not your typical catwalk model, for she is rather on the curvy side.

For a while I saw this article in some of my friend's walls in Facebook (most of them female) and the reactions towards the article were an imbalanced mixture of acceptance, celebration and scepticism. Many of the claims in favour of the article argued that she was indeed gorgeous and that hers was a natural beauty, free of the stereotypes we are usually fed. While that may be indeed true, the fact remains that no actual link to the scientific study could be found anywhere in the article, and that the sole mentioning of the word science was enough to give credit to this article.

Now, this article was wrong. And the people who supported it were also wrong. "Oh boy, hold your horses, what do you mean by wrong? Are you saying that the

woman was not beautiful?" Well, while I do think that she looked indeed pretty, the truth is that what I actually think does not really matter, just as it does not matter what these people thought, for they were missing entirely the point of the article.

Although it is true that the standard presented in this article may be closer and more familiar (and thus more comfortable) to us, everyday people, the fact remains that it is still a standard and therefore, something to strive for, something to achieve. Something that either you are or you are not. In that regard, the trap is still there, for in setting a new set of values the only thing we do is change the range of our choices, not liberate ourselves from them. The moment we decide that something is ideal, the moment we adopt a role or a pattern, everything is judged in terms of likeness and proximity, what we are and what we are not.

The problem is not whether the standard is good or bad but the standard itself.

Of course, I'm not saying that everyone should like everything. That's just as ridiculous as it sounds. But what I do think is that everyone should be able to choose freely what they are and what they want to become, who they are and who they want to be. Without *should*, *musts* or *have tos*.

What I am trying to say is that we are not as free as we like to think. Although the current situation may not be as alarming as say, a century ago, although our choices are much more open now than then, we are still trapped in a kind of in-between in which we know that something has to change, but we still are not very sure about how to proceed.

Personally, I think that there is still too much work to do. Too many walls to break, too many concepts to challenge and too many systems to question, whether they are patriarchy, heteronormativity or any other kind of systems equally absurd and unjust.

So, in the meantime, try to choose what you want to be and if you don't like it, well... you can always choose again.

María Cerdón Sales, "Defending Feminism for Our Future Generations"

I can't remember exactly when I first heard about the word "Feminism". Maybe I heard about it but I didn't quite understand its meaning.

As I grew up I noticed some differences between me and my male classmates, though. They would play with cars, I would play with dolls. I suppose, I just accepted the role that was given to me when I was born. Later on, I started being aware of

Feminism, but my definition of it was totally wrong. When someone said the word Feminism or identified as such, the image that came to my mind was that of the masculine woman with hairy armpits and legs who hated men, because that was what I heard on the street and saw on television. Of course I was wrong.

Nobody came to me and explained what Feminism was about in a clear way. I knew there were women fighting for our rights but it seemed so far away from the world I was living in. I felt as if someone was trying to hide that concept from me because hating men is the worst thing that can happen to a woman. I think that until I was 16 or so I didn't fully understand the true message of Feminism. I started questioning many things that I saw around me: boys were the coolest if they dated many girls, girls were called 'sluts' if they did the same with boys, girls should wear long hair, otherwise they were labelled lesbians or 'tomboys'... My curiosity grew day after day, and I wanted to know more and more about women and their experiences with gender differences.

My grandmother is now 78 years old. She was born in a working-class family with 8 brothers and sisters. She told me many things, but the one that struck me the most was that on Christmas she was given a broom and she used to play and make a competition with her sisters to see who cleaned the yard faster. Her duty after school was to take care of her brothers, who were older than her (she was only 8), cook and clean. Why? Because that was what her mother taught her and what women should do.

However, things changed a little bit when she started working in a tights factory. She was already married to my grandfather and surprisingly she was earning more money than him because her job was more valuable than his. Of course this was not the normal situation for many women; most of them, I'm sure, were not even allowed to work, but if we look at it from a personal perspective, we can see that women felt freer. In fact, when she was talking about it I could see that she very much enjoyed her work because she was valued.

She really sees an improvement in our situation. I myself don't see that the situation has changed that much. It is true that nowadays things are moving towards equality, but it is not strange to see women who have a part-time job, and then they have to go home and take care of the household with no help from their male partner. In fact I see it in my own house. Luckily, both my mother and my father are working, but the amount of time that my mother devotes to keep the house in a 'decent' state, not to be pretentious, is not balanced with the time that my father devotes to household chores. It is not that my father lives as a king, doing nothing and just giving orders; he helps at home, we all help, but I can see how unconsciously, we assign to ourselves the household chore depending on our gender. For instance, my father is in charge of the vacuum cleaner because men are better at managing machines than women; he also cleans the windows because it's risky and dangerous, while my mother and I dust the furniture because women are better at delicate things. Why do we do that? We are constantly gendering our lives, but it is very difficult to try to live in a world of total equality. If it's difficult to achieve equality in a family environment,

imagine trying to achieve it at a worldwide level. These family anecdotes are just a reminder that gender inequality is present in our everyday lives. It is not a foreign subject that affects a remote area which is far away from us.

Women face many problems all through our lives just because we are women. I could give many reasons why I think we need Feminism. We need Feminism because we are denied the right of abortion (which makes me think that we are going backwards instead of onwards, but I still believe that we can change things if we really want). Also because we are paid less for doing the same job as a man; because we are treated as sexual objects in advertising, cinema, television in order to sell more, while men are presented as powerful and fierce; because we are constantly judged by our physical appearance (we have to be pretty, thin and ready to strike a pose); because we are called “bossy” if we get to a higher position or if we have a little bit more power than a man. I could go on and write thousands and millions of reasons, one for each woman in the world.

It’s funny how a simple word can have such big influence on our lives. You are born a woman and instantly society imposes some attributes and stereotypes onto your person that might have nothing to do with your personality. One of these stereotypes is that “women are usually stubborn” or “that we always want to be right”, so why don’t we take advantage of those attributes in a positive way and work hard together until we eliminate gender differences?

It seems impossible, almost utopian to have a society in which women and men have the same opportunities, the same rights and duties, but little by little, each of us making an effort we can achieve it. If we don’t do it for ourselves, let’s try to do it for our future generations.

Álvaro Delgado Ordas, “Gender in Spain: A Personal View”

What worries me most about gender is the apparent rise of sexist behaviours and opinions in Spain. From my point of view, this new revival has been supported and enhanced by several TV shows which are especially popular among the youth. Also, the political focus of the current right-wing Government has been economy for several years, disregarding other social problems like gender issues, which had been quite effectively approached by previous left-wing Governments. Moreover, I think gender inequality and sexist attitudes are far more spread than they are supposed to be. In this essay, I would like to express my opinion concerning these issues, but it won’t be an exhaustive study and thus, it should be considered as a personal, meditated but probably partial view.

I think the best way to illustrate my opinion and approach the problem is through a recent anecdote. I spent last summer at home, as usual. There, I could

watch, in my own living room, on an ordinary August morning, my sixteen-year-old sister enjoying the infamous TV show *Mujeres y Hombres y Viceversa* (MYHYV). I sat down next to her and for about fifteen minutes, I saw one of the most misogynistic, sexist and repulsive things I had ever seen. Two men sitting on their thrones—literally—and several women trying to make them ‘fall in love’. Courtship consisted of those young women insulting one another, walking down a catwalk in front of the men with few clothes on, begging them for a date and being evaluated by the two gentlemen, the public and a few so-called ‘experts in love’. No need to say both the boys and the female evaluators were equally cruel with the girls.

After the horrific experience I engaged in a conversation with my sister about the whole thing and it turned out that all her female friends loved the show, it was largely popular at her high school. I tried to convince her of the danger of such a show being watched by teenagers her age, and she seemed to understand my points but told me she just watched it because she found it funny and she liked to talk about it with her friends. She felt safe from its negative influence. I largely doubt it.

Not only MYHYV, but also many other reality shows recently or currently broadcast on Spanish TV and followed especially by young people (*Gran Hermano*, *¿Quién Quiere Casarse con mi Hijo?*, *Gandía Shore*, etc.) portray and promote ideas and attitudes towards women that should have been already overcome. The objectification of female bodies, the aggressive sexism and, surprisingly, the competition among women (not to obtain a better job, education or recognition but to get a man...) are present every week on TV products consumed by teenagers who will mimic them on their everyday life. In my opinion, the role models they are exposed to are totally at odds with the ideal behaviour concerning gender equality and feminist claims.

Recent surveys show a worrying rise of sexist opinions among the youth in Spain. Gender violence has never abandoned us, including an average of sixty women murdered by their partners or ex-partners per year which does not decrease. This seems not to concern anyone apparently, apart from the feminist groups devoted to specific fights against gender violence and sexism. These groups are even often ridiculed on the social networks by the general public, receiving the disrespectful name of ‘feminazis’ and being laughed at.

Specific acts were carried out by the previous socialist Governments to reduce gender violence, protect women’s rights and educate the youth. A law against gender violence was passed in 2004 and a new mandatory subject, ‘Educación Para la Ciudadanía’, was included in 2007 in the primary education curriculum to teach children a variety of relevant issues; these went from Human Rights and the functioning of political institutions to the rejection of gender violence and discrimination of any kind. Also, a quota system was implemented to promote equality in the Government and there were even conventions organized by Spanish and African female leaders to discuss their situation and future plans. Legislation concerning pregnancy interruption was remade as well to allow more freedom. But then the

economic problems arrived in 2008 and they became the major concern for everybody.

The following–current–conservative Government not only stopped promoting gender equality but eliminated the previously mentioned mandatory school subject, made several declarations against the anti gender-related violence law and is still today debating the possibility of passing a much more restrictive anti-abortion law. Relegating gender issues to a minor political concern could be partially understood as a result of the economic crisis, but actively taking positions against equality only means, from my point of view, a current state of affairs far more pernicious and hostile for feminist ideas and ultimately, women. It should not come as a surprise then, that there is a rise of sexist behaviours and views among young people since those ideas are a reflection of a general lack of measures and positions against inequality, as well as a lack of specific education.

Finally, there is something else that must be taken into account in regard to the gender problematic among the general society. Legislation is a good starting point but without education it is very difficult to achieve a real change. There are, besides, enormous differences between Spanish regions respecting social, economic and educational level. It might be a wrong, personal appreciation, but I strongly defend the view that the survival of sexism is higher in the more depressed communities, where more traditional roles are maintained. I do not specifically refer to gender violence, which is proved to occur in all layers of society but to a general sense of the patriarchal organization, with more women devoted to the household and children's duties and a stronger presence of sexist attitudes and patterns. However, this is a controversial point and it can also be argued that household duties and children's care are still in the hands of women everywhere, generally speaking (and I would overall agree).

In conclusion, the situation in the Spain of 2014 as regards gender is rather pessimistic, from my point of view. There is a lack of concern about the specific problematic of gender, usually simplified down to gender violence. Many sexist attitudes and behaviours are disregarded or even promoted by certain television shows, setting dangerous role models for teenagers, the main consumers of those programmes. Politics has a key role to strengthen gender equality, working on both legislation and education. That path taken a few years ago is now abandoned and we feminists cannot but wait for a better time to come and fight; in the meantime, we need to defend the right to reach a state of real gender equality and the end of sexism.

Màxim Díaz Sánchez, “Contra l’Invisible Patriarcat”

Considero que tot i estar al segle XXI, i que es parli que hi ha igualtat de gènere, ens trobem encara immersos en una societat patriarcal, fal·locèntrica i heteronormativa que intenta camuflar aquesta realitat darrera de falsos discursos

igualitaris. Tenim molts indicis que mostren el contrari, tot i que a alguns països els homes i les dones tenen els mateixos drets, les possibilitats que tenen els uns i les altres són molt diferents. Per exemple, les dones no tenen les mateixes possibilitats de moure's amb seguretat a l'espai públic, o d'aconseguir llocs de feina com a alts càrrecs a empreses o a l'entorn universitari; a més a més, la conciliació familiar i laboral està encara lluny de ser una realitat. És un gran avenç que ambdós gèneres tinguin els mateixos drets, però encara s'ha d'aconseguir que aquests drets es converteixin en possibilitats.

Actualment encara hi ha qui creu que el Feminisme es la versió femenina del masclisme, o que ser feminista és ser lesbiana, fins i tot hi ha dones que adopten aquestes actituds patriarcal. La realitat, però, és que el Feminisme és necessari perquè beneficia els homes i les dones però també a les persones transsexuals, transgènere i a les intersexuals. És fonamental per a articular la convivència i cobrir aquesta manca social.

El patriarcat, de fet, ha fet molt de mal als homes: els ha educat en la fortalesa i en el repudi de les seves emocions. L'estructura actual fomenta la classificació del que ha estat reconegut tradicionalment com a femení (les emocions i la cura, tan pròpia com la dels altres) com a signe de feblesa, i això comporta que els homes tinguin dificultat per a expressar els sentiments, connectar amb les seves pròpies emocions i acceptar la pròpia debilitat.

La igualtat que fomenta el Feminisme ens fa millors persones, perquè suposa trencar amb estereotips que limiten el nostre desenvolupament personal. Els rols ens impedeixen que assolim tot el potencial que tenim com a persones. El respecte cap al Feminisme produiria una millora en diferents aspectes de la vida dels homes i de les dones, però vull destacar un en concret: contribuiria a disminuir o a eradicar la violència de gènere.

El llenguatge en sí ja és sexista. Les campanyes publicitàries venen estereotips de conducta sexual que tracten a les persones com a objectes, en especial les dones. El paper de la dona acostuma a ser sumís i l'home dominant, es tendeix a ridiculitzar tot el que surt d'aquesta conducta. En el cas del llenguatge, per exemple, quan ens dirigim a un grup de persones, tot i que la majoria de les persones siguin dones, si hi ha un home, ja utilitzem el genèric masculí. En el llenguatge col·loquial, sobretot entre joves, quan alguna cosa ens agrada molt diem que és 'la polla', i quan alguna cosa és avorrida, és un 'coñazo'. A les noies per insultar-les se les diu 'putes', i el més trist és que les mateixes noies reforcen aquestes conductes patriarcal.

Això arriba també al sexe. La pornografia està pensada pel gaudi dels homes, i les pràctiques sexuals que es veuen en aquests vídeos són majoritàriament pràctiques on els homes tenen el control. Són pràctiques molt heteronormatives que donen peu a un sexe on predomina el gaudi de l'home davant del de la dona. Relaciono aquest aspecte amb el fet que al trencar amb aquests rols de gènere en el sexe, es pot contribuir a que el cos de la dona deixi de ser considerat com a objecte i a vegades negoci, i de la mateixa manera, es pot reduir l'explotació sexual en la que el 90% dels

casos les víctimes són dones. Per tant, el Feminisme a la mateixa vegada comportarà que els dos gèneres gaudeixin més del sexe i que es disminueixi la violència de gènere al acabar amb la consideració del gènere masculí com el gènere dominant.

Entrem, ja per acabar, en la part que més m'interessa destacar; el per què considero que el Feminisme beneficiaria a les persones transsexuals, transgènere i intersex. Un cop vaig veure una fotografia d'un noi transsexual, i al peu de la foto posava la següent frase: "Necesito el Feminismo para dejar de ser mujer". Entenc aquesta frase a partir del fet que la transsexualitat suposa una oportunitat per trencar amb les normes de gènere ja que la lluita pels drets de les persones trans i de les intersex ha de ser per sobre de tot una lluita feminista, degut a que el Feminisme en sí està en contra de les pressions de gènere i a favor pel dret al propi cos. La intenció és anar més enllà de les categories d'home i dona tradicionals i comprendre que actualment les identitats s'han tornat més complexes a causa de l'opressió, i que les experiències actuals de moltes persones van més enllà d'aquest binomi.

En conclusió, és necessari divulgar la idea de que el Feminisme és beneficiós tant pels homes com per les dones, ja que, entre altres coses, cal destacar que en primer lloc, comporta que els homes es reconciliïn amb les seves emocions i sentiments dels quals la seva educació els ha ensenyat a prescindir. En segon lloc, coopera en la disminució de la violència de gènere, l'abús cap a les dones de tot tipus destacant el sexual i a millorar la convivència en la societat.

I en tercer i a més a més a destacar, per a les persones transsexuals, transgènere i intersex, el Feminisme permetrà trencar amb els rols de gènere tradicional provocant una esquadra en aquests que donarà lloc a que les persones amb identitats sexuals no normatives tinguin cabuda a la societat, i que tinguin poder de decisió sobre el seu propi cos sense que el patriarcat i la seva fal·locentrisme condicioni la seva identitat i el seu benestar.

Conclusió: sense el Feminisme, serà impossible prosperar com a societat perquè les categories binàries limiten el desenvolupament total de les persones. S'ha demostrat que als països on les dones tenen els mateixos drets que els homes, el desenvolupament econòmic i social del país és més òptim, a causa de la millor convivència ciutadana. No es tracta de que un gènere predomini sobre l'altre, es tracta de que totes les possibles identitats convisin, i aprenguin les unes de les altres, sense límits provocats a causa del gènere que ve determinat única i exclusivament pel sexe, per raons biològiques, sense tenir en compte la individualitat de cada persona. I per últim, un amic un cop em va dir: "Pots saber com de desenvolupat està un país a partir de dos indicadors: com es tracta l'avortament i la transsexualitat en aquest. Si en aquest país l'avortament és lliure, però la transsexualitat està penalitzada i patologitzada, és que són transfòbics; si l'avortament no és lliure, és que directament són imbècils". Ell m'ho deia amb un cert toc d'humor però em va semblar molt interessant la seva reflexió, i realment, una societat feminista solucionaria molts dels actuals problemes de diferents països, que segueixen estancats en el passat, carregat d'invisible patriarcat.

Tania Duarte Montávez, “Teaching Feminism at an Earlier Age”

When I started high school back in 2005, we were told that we would be reading a book of our choice for our Catalan class. The idea seemed really exciting as we had never been able to choose what to read in school. However, as the old saying goes, all that glitters is not gold: we would be choosing from a list of books our teachers had put together for us. That happened nearly ten years ago, so understandably I barely remember any of the titles—to be fair, I don't even remember what I ended up reading. What I do recall, though, is that there was a book that most people, including myself, did not want to read: *El diari lila de la Carlota*, by Gemma Lienas. Neither of us had heard about it before, but we knew it had something to do with Feminism, that strange word that we did not really understand, yet for some reason made us cringe.

Indeed, *El diari lila de la Carlota* deals with Feminism, as I would discover first-hand a couple of years afterwards. I am not proud to say that I decided to read it not because I wanted to, but because I had read most of the books on that year's list and it seemed like a perfectly valid book to write a short essay on. I still thought Feminism was a boring topic, something that I was not really interested in. I had been in high school for three years, and I still had three more years to go, and in six years we never heard a word about Feminism. We were forced to sit through two-hour-long documentaries and lectures on global warming, sex education and Catalanism, but for some reason it never occurred to anyone that learning about gender equality was just as relevant.

One could argue that in the Internet era we live in, Feminism is just a Google search away and, of course, that would be true, but I do not know many fourteen-year-olds that would look up social issues on purpose. There are many things that we would not know if they were not taught in school, so why can't Feminism be one of them? Girls should not be growing up thinking that they are worth less than men, that it is alright for them to be paid less than their male counterparts, or that they owe some kind of loyalty to the opposite sex just because they are men. I need Feminism because on that same note, if we were taught what Feminism really means from a relatively young age, some boys would not grow up to be men who very strongly believe that women are ‘the weaker sex’ or generally just not as good as them.

Then again, the fact that learning about gender equality is still not considered relevant enough to be included in our school curriculum makes me think that maybe some people are afraid. Although it is an idea that I definitely do not share, I can see where that would be coming from. Feminism is sometimes wrongly conceived as a movement that promotes the idea that women are actually better than men, that women want to take over the world and destroy every male on Earth. From the point

of view of those people, mostly males, who are terrified of what they think is Feminism, I guess it can be seen as something dangerous to teach young teenagers about. They might be afraid that they will no longer be the lucky, privileged ones and that is another reason why I need Feminism—because Feminism opens the door to a conversation that should not even be necessary at this point, but it is. We need to stop seeing gender equality as a bad thing. Asking to have the same opportunities and to be treated the same way as men is not wrong, but fair.

As a consequence of growing up without having a clear idea of what Feminism is, it becomes really difficult to talk about the topic to some people. I am very vocal about what I believe in and what I think is right, and while I accept the fact that there is always going to be someone who disagrees with me, which is completely fine, it is still really hard for me to understand that there are people out there who do not believe in gender equality, to the point that I have given up trying to discuss Feminism with some people that are really close to me, including relatives. Whenever I mention that I think women should be given the same opportunities as men, somebody always replies that hiring women is more complicated “because they might get pregnant and then ask for a maternity leave”. If I say that it would be only fair for women to be paid the same as men, there is always someone who says that they disagree because men are just better at performing certain tasks—which, for me, has nothing to do with gender. Of course there will be men who are better than some women at doing something, but I am a hundred percent sure that there are also be women who are better than some men at doing the exact same thing. That is why different jobs exist. It is a matter of skills, not a gender issue.

When people cannot learn about Feminism from their teachers or relatives, the other option is the media, which is not always the most reliable source. It is incredibly frustrating to see how many young celebrities can be so confused about Feminism and still state things such as “we're not feminists, we don't hate our men”, as stated by Perrie Edwards from the British girl band Little Mix, or “[I don't consider myself a feminist] because I love men and the idea of 'raise women to power, take the men away from the power' is never going to work out because you need balance” by *Divergent* actress Shailene Woodley. Now, as a 20-year-old woman, it just makes me shake my head and wish people would educate themselves before giving ridiculous answers. For a 14-year-old, I imagine the situation is much more different. Teenagers are very easily impressionable, and while their parents struggle to be listened to, they will probably listen to a young celebrity they look up to. If they are implying that Feminism equals androphobia and you do not know any better, you will probably believe them, and the misconceptions about Feminism will never die out.

I need Feminism because I want to have the same opportunities regardless of my gender, because I want my work to be as valuable as any man's and because I should not be scared of going out alone in fear that I could be the target of a man who might think he has some kind of authority over my body and my decisions, among other things. I need Feminism, but moreover, I also need a real, honest discussion of it to exist. Gender stereotypes are damaging for both men and women and stereotypes about Feminism are not any different.

We, as adults, should not be letting children and teenagers grow up thinking that to be a feminist means that you hate the men in your life or that boys are superior to girls just because they are born male. They are the future of our society, so if we do not change the way they see Feminism from a relatively young age, how could things ever get better? Let's raise a generation of people that are not afraid to speak up for gender equality—a generation that will choose to read *El diari lila de la Carlota* without thinking that Feminism is not for them.

Maria Gallart Vidal, “The Price of Being a Woman”

During my school days, when I was asked about my parents’ job I could not help having the mixed feelings of being proud and uncomfortable due to the difficulty of the answer, as you will see. As a daughter I had always had an excellent relationship with my parents and admired their balance as a team. Due to their demanding jobs, my brother and I have been practically raised by my grandparents, an essential part of my life like for many other contemporary families. Going over my childhood I can just recall happiness, the excellent quality time spent with my grandparents playing and doing homework, as well as the excitement of seeing mom and dad getting home at night.

I loved helping my mother choose her clothes for her constant meetings around the country; I enjoyed trying on her high heels in my tiny feet and how she followed all my suggestions referring her outfit even when they consisted of wearing a necklace made of pasta! But to my surprise, one day when the blind admiration of a little girl for her mother started to blur, I could read in my ‘always-right-and-determined’ mom remorse for not having spent enough time with my brother and I. She was not aware that all that I could feel about her was admiration, and after many years, as a 23-year-old daughter I can state that my mother turned daily habits into amusing adventures, even when she was not aware of it.

It was completely strange for me to see some of my friends’ mothers coming at school to fetch them. I even seriously asked with concern why didn’t they work, and I then learned that working did not mean being away from home for everyone. My mother started her career, as many other women of her generation, as an assistant in an office, and fortunately and contrarily to the present time when two degrees and three masters are not enough to get a decent job, her restless fight promoted her upwards in the financial community in Spain.

I have always felt a controversial dichotomy in my mind referring to the image of women as homemakers and men as breadwinner given my parents’ situation. My parents started dating in their adolescence and while my father carried on with his studies, which were interrupted by his military service, my mother worked full time.

Little by little, my mother was promoted and entered a men's world, as James Brown would say; during the 80s finance was basically directed and coordinated by men while women were restricted to the administration, a dynamic that has not changed that much during the years.

Supported by my mother's experience and my father's studies, in 1985 my young parents decided to start up together as freelancers. This was the beginning of their career together until the present time and it can be also summarized by stating that apart from being a couple they have been working together for more than thirty years, which I am not sure is healthy!

When I decided to interview my mother to develop this article I asked her if she had felt discriminated for being a woman at work, and her straightforward answer was "not in the first person", though it did not take long for her to reveal clear contradictions. One evening she received a phone call from the general director of an important business concern threatening to ruin her career if she did not join his company, a phone call that left her shaking. This time, when I asked her if this could have happened to my father, she showed no doubt at all in her voice when answering a convinced "no". They say that you never know where life will take you, and that man had to acknowledge this when he met my mother 20 years later in her own office.

As a team, my parents defied the badly intentioned threat and risked their job by choosing to associate with another important financial company, with her as the director and he as her right hand. I have always heard those nice words claiming that 'behind every great man there's a great woman', although in this case I would swap roles. I asked for an honest answer about whether she has ever felt pressure from my father for having a more important role than him or earning more money, yet nothing but good words came out of her mouth, and actually I know first hand she's right. My brother and I have witnessed countless times at dinnertime the unconditional support that my father has always provided her with.

The company policy of their new company consisted of placing women into administrative tasks and men as commercial agents and directors; yet my mother was offered the regional directorship for Catalonia, meaning she is the only woman with such a prominent job. She states she did not have to think twice before accepting, even though she had just given birth to her first child and the position implied much more availability and flying to Madrid several times per month. When she explains how she spent officially a month on maternity leave although she went to the office a couple of hours everyday, she feels the urge of justifying herself: it was her only chance.

Leaving home at 8 am and coming back at 9.30 pm with two young children was not easy and I presume that the pressure my mother was carrying on her shoulders was not the same as that of her male colleagues. It took my father many years to realise that my mother could not cope with everything. He was raised as the stereotypical male who had never done the washing up nor cooked and provided zero help at home, not even with the children. My mother still now repeats that when my

brother and I were younger she was never able to see the beginning of any film after dinner because she had to tidy the kitchen up. I cannot imagine...

“Your daughter will never forgive you for your decision”, many male colleagues told my mother when she accepted her position; many others, though, guessed more correctly and told her “your daughter will be very proud of you”. On the one hand, I am proud of her for having reached her goals and for being an inspiring model, always demonstrating that one has to fight for their aims; but on the other hand, at the same time I feel bitter. It is hurtful to see she has suffered in order to achieve what her male colleagues had not even to think about, not being judged publicly for their sex. My point here is, will young women also have to suffer from the same unfair system and regret not being at the first birthday of their child due to professional reasons?

The fight my mother had to endure in order to achieve her personal and professional respect has never ceased; the discouraging comments against women have not completely stopped, either. As a daughter I can state that her persistence has not been in vain, for my need to change the present situation started the moment I realized all the sacrifices she made for me and women in this country.

Ricard García Gelabert, “Moving in Cycles”

There have been plenty of ways to approach gender since it became a study area back in the second half of the 20th century. As modern so-called civilized (wo)men, it seems to us abhorrent that genitalia could ever determine our ways of relating to the environment or of achieving what we understand as success. Yet, the truth is that there is still an everyday hell for the people who strive for actual equality between the sexes: sometimes getting bashed by a misleading lexicon, sometimes getting attention from the wrong sources, sometimes just being misunderstood. Like in any oppressed collective, vehemence is always an understandable response but, as history shows, not every member adhered to a noble cause is actually fighting for it in a noble way—inner frustration and other kinds of personal turmoil can contribute to a wide-scale disaster and big problems that some collectives have to face in the end. If we are to focus on the egalitarian cause, there are some matters we should revise in order to get it straight without any fissure.

To start with, equality must be understood as an unbiased fight. Taking this into account, recognizing the word ‘Feminism’ as a synonym for ‘equality’ is just the same lexical aberration that would be recognizing ‘masculi(ni)sm’ as such. No matter how many historical references could anyone provide to legitimate this concrete use of the term, the fact is that not everyone faced with ‘Feminism’ in a given social context knows about them. Few will move a muscle to be nurtured by information and, in a world polluted by contrary binaries, it is just another way to manipulate weak minds.

As trivial as it may sound, never underestimate the maliciousness that can be inherent in language.

A good deal of what we could call problematic resides in the differential features between men and women. No sane member of a community would argue against equal salaries for both sexes. Still, gender differences play an important role. Specially in these our times, downtrodden by the crisis, when the survival of the fittest seems the norm once again (not that it ever stopped being so, but it is now reappearing in a clearer way to us). It is important to note that only the more apt ones will finally get jobs and, even though not only body-building women can be physically stronger than some men, it seems legit that jobs demanding physical strength show a preference for men. In the same way, we are used to seeing women applying as secretaries or bartenders because of their traditionally acknowledged aptitudes for organization and social charm and/or politeness, respectively. Generalization, of course, is a double-edged sword and, whereas it may act as a shortcut for some employers, it may be missing absolutely flawless candidates for others.

Related to the previous point, let us not forget the behavioural differences between the sexes: consider the way men and women work with other mates of their same sex, something that employers most surely bear in mind. In fact, trying to hide such differential traits both in appearance and performance is not fighting for equality but to nullify gender itself. If we talk about what has been always described as ‘the battle of sexes’ that may be fine—still not everyone considers that those sometimes diametrically opposed manners between the sexes are a matter of discrepancy but, rather, an enjoyable aspect. As always, seas of ink could flow about the psychological aspects that would make us desire any kind of partnership, but pretending that men and women act and react always in the same ways can be also seen as nothing but genocidal. In other words, there is no need to feminize men or masculinise women in order to achieve consent.

History is cyclical, and another important aspect that has to do with any long struggle that it has harboured is reversal. Optimistically, we can laugh at the typical drunken and recently divorced man in their forties or fifties, making over-statements about the opposite sex and complaining about how “all women are whores”—we can also choose the sad end and feel compassionate and worried by his situation. Is it not wonderful to have options? In contrast, a woman wearing an “all men are pigs” T-shirt and ranting with resentment about her ex-partner’s size (something more generally accepted than, for instance, insulting a woman for being overweight which, in fact, is a problem that also affects men) are somewhat ‘fashionable’ and not so pathetic for the general viewer. In fact, TV series show plenty of these cases of apparent self-empowerment. Getting ridiculed and ditched at a disco by the opposite sex is generally not the same for a man as for a woman; yet, it is widely known and socially accepted that at some kinds of provocation women are allowed to react with physical violence whereas a man who would do so would be branded with Cain’s mark on his forefront forever. Not the most clever way to react at social injustices like rapes and humiliations that, sadly enough, the so-called ‘weak gender’ has suffered throughout the centuries.

Justice should be equal, and that must be taken as a given. But we, men and women, do not transgress laws the same way. The generally superior physical strength in men can be used to inflict pain and domestic abuse onto their partners. Equally punishable should be the sometimes superior intelligence of women who know how to psychologically damage and annul their male counterparts, something that one cannot take to court as evidence—and which can also last forever. It seems that our present-day law is not prepared as it should for these matters, as, indeed, abuse works both ways. No general overview can be stated without taking a look at those never-so-axiomatic statistics.

Finally, we must learn to respect the disrespect. Contradictory as it may seem, let us be honest: who laughs at innocent jokes that are not referred to any particular group of people? Who does not use prejudices as shortcuts at least once in his or her life? Let us look at ourselves with sincerity: hate is groovy and we, as human beings, do not seem to find anything as funny as looking for a valid scapegoat to exorcize our problems. Just do not look at your neighbours' with close attention if that affects you. Otherwise, mock their disgrace as well if you can, for this has always been the natural flow of human life and to deny this would be nonsensical.

All in all, getting out of academicism as the first person singular of the topic question allows me, I could not care less for those points I have already mentioned. It is crystal clear enough that we were doomed from the start. There is no way to summarize our social fights other than by invoking what Nietzsche, or most notably Darwin in his magnum opus, and Hobbes with his two famous sentences, had pointed out from different perspectives. Personally, I am already fed up with our modern times, when everything is permitted. I will not crown any male for getting laid with very many different individuals—to me he is equally sluttish and insecure as a woman who would do so, for promiscuity is not a virtue but a vice and it shall forever be so to my eyes (of course, it is my opinion and my opinion only).

If I was to rule the planet, I would rapidly press the red button and all of us inhabitants of the Earth would finally curl up in flames, only to eventually watch it start again, see the cycle of new creatures scrape Earth's precious skin and face the same problems once again. Wherever there is life, there is struggle between the hunter and the hunted, and this does not understand about gender/sex, age, race..., you name it. Wherever a force triumphs, it will get sooner or later suffocated by another one, only to be replaced by the former once again and demonstrate the futility of any further effort.

The only matter that actually worries me is the comfort of my closest beloved ones, both men and women, and my own; and my ultimate piece of advice in these turbulent times where anyone seems to hold his or her own opinion is not to turn the other cheek when it gets smitten.

Laura Giner Martínez, "Demanding Feminism for All"

Over the last year and a half I have been studying in depth Feminism and the truth is that I have encountered many obstacles during this time: the first and most important obstacle has been myself since, prior to finding out what Feminism actually means, I had a vague idea of what it was.

I was never taught the definition of Feminism neither at school or at home. I come from a working-class background and I am the first woman in my family to earn a college degree, so, basically, during my entire life I have experienced the women-in-the-kitchen, men-around-the-TV circumstance and, although I have always disliked that situation, I have gotten used to it.

Last year I took a few workshops on Feminism held by the Autonomous University of Barcelona that really opened up my mind and led me to rethink who I am and what my thoughts are in regard to women and society. What I discovered was quite upsetting yet embarrassing. I started asking my female friends and colleagues what they thought about Feminism and the majority did not even know the definition or they simply did not care; when I asked them if they had ever been sexually harassed or abused by a man, a large majority told me that they had, and when I asked them what they had done in response to such 'attacks', they told me that doing something against them would have meant getting into trouble.

I cannot help but wonder what happened with all those years of women fighting not only for their right to vote but also for having the same privileges as men, and I realise that nothing has changed. It has been only 51 years since the Equal Pay Act was passed in the US. It is true that nowadays there are laws that regulate equal opportunities for women and men; however, what is one thing in theory is completely different in reality, since we know that women are still paid substantially less than men, are still discriminated against in many professions, and still have to live in a culture in which rape and sexual harassment are normalized and misconceived.

To make things worse, I have been noticing more and more often that many young women themselves are sexist. It is quite possible that many women might find this statement incongruous since we do not tend to think of women as sexist, mostly because historically sexism has been something performed by men towards women. Many feminists may reject the notion that women can be sexist towards other women but, in fact, that is very true and it is increasing nowadays.

I might understand that my grandmother, who is 77 years old and was raised by her poor family in a small village in Andalusia, thinks that women are the ones that have to keep house and take care of the family, whereas men are the ones designed to be the breadwinners of the family. However, I do not understand that many women in their early 20s still behave following the patriarchal roles that society has imposed upon us. There are many aspects of our culture that we can blame; for instance, the objectification of women in the media. We see these images of women being

objectified on TV, movies, magazines all the time and we do not stop and think about them, they stick right in our brain and become the way we perceive reality. It is worth paying attention to the roles that the media are dictating to us and to realise that we do not have to fit within them.

In my opinion, the wider problem lies in education since we are not giving children the necessary tools that can make a great difference in our society; primary schools should be teaching gender equality for it is there where children open up their minds. If we fail to create a mass-based educational system to teach everyone about gender equality we agree to continue with the same old-fashioned patriarchal arrangement.

Likewise, many women lack representation for there are plenty of feminist theorists but most of them belong to an educated background that prevents the common people from being identified with them. Most cultural groups such as black women and uneducated women are ignored and, despite the effort that many singers, actresses and popular women in general put into defending their feminist ideas, a real role model is needed in order to prove that it is possible to be a feminist without having a higher-class status or education.

Also men must stand up against sexism, although it must a difficult task for them since, I think, they do not perceive sexism as we women do. Whenever I have asked my male friends about Feminism and discrimination against women, the majority of them told me that they do not notice that women are being pushed into the background in many aspects. Yet, men do not fear walking home at night as women do, they do not get so much pressure to conform to a certain body type as women do and they definitely do not feel the helplessness women feel when they are felt up by strangers in public transport or catcalled on the street. These examples may not seem very relevant or important to men but that is because they do not experience them on a daily basis.

Men, in this patriarchal system, seem to be unwilling to remove themselves from their dominance and privileged status in relation to women. A very dear male friend of mine told me not long ago that he is trying to become a feminist but the fact of facing so many aspects of the patriarchal society we live in was just tough for him. He told me that the role of men must change in order to achieve equal opportunities for all. Luckily, I know more men like him that believe in the removal of patriarchy, but the problem is that they do not stand up, probably because they are embarrassed of doing so, and I find that shameful because they do not realize that it is not only women who are affected by sexism, it is also men. For instance, stay-at-home fathers are often criticised for their decision of leaving their wives be the breadwinners, let alone those heterosexual men who decide to adopt a child without being married.

I think that, after all, Feminism is a game between power and freedom. Women must get as much power as men do, and once we get that power, we will have freedom to live the way we want without being judged or discriminated against.

Susana González Codina, “I Don’t Have Time for This Nonsense: Modern Feminism at Dinner Time”

My mum has always been the strongest female role model in my sister’s life and my own, and I have always looked up to her. She has a PhD in medicine and works at the Vall d’Hebrón Hospital, where she is in charge of a large part of HIV analysis in Barcelona; she is also an advisor on treatment for children with cancer. She regularly travels to Madrid for that. Last month she went to Turkey and Santander to attend various conferences. She is also a maker of children, a provider for the family, an excellent chef, and a general solver of any problem you might have. Moreover, she lives according to the motto ‘dress for success’ like Miranda from *Devil Wears Prada*, flaunting her white hair, always with an Italian bag hanging from her arm.

As for her beliefs, she is a practising Catholic, and believes that marriage and family are the basis of society. Regarding Feminism, all I’ve heard from her is that “men would be utterly lost without us”, and other various mildly angry comments on daily matters. Yet, she rejects the term ‘Feminism’, as she “doesn’t have time for this nonsense”. I wanted to prove to her that she was in fact a feminist, whether she liked it or not. However, a conversation I had with her proved me wrong: my mother believes that women should aim for the highest positions in their professional career and that they should be independent, but that does not make my mother a feminist.

The conversation happened the other night, and it led me to believe I will never know what goes on my mother’s mind regarding feminist issues; also, that human nature is very complicated. While watching the news over a delicious home-made meal, I saw a certain lady member of the Círculo de Empresarios, Mónica Oriol Caza, stating that she would never hire a female worker between the ages of 25 and 45 as she might get pregnant, and therefore, take maternity leave. I looked at my mother in astonishment, to which she replied: “Certainly, maternity leave is a nuisance. I hired this particular woman because she was the best in Barcelona, and now nobody can cover for her. But I’d still hire her, though. Her talent compensates for her four-month leave”. Facing my sister’s rage and my own, she defended herself: “Do you know how long I got to stay home after my first new-born? Three weeks!” You might think that, as a woman in a position of power, she would try to make it easier for other women, and although obviously she did not try to stop this employee from taking leave, she saw it as a necessary evil.

My father, also a prominent doctor and a great role model who has always pushed her daughters towards excellence, intervened. “Well, I got only one day. Back then, women in power complained that a shared leave was sexist”, to which my mother replied that parental leave equally shared by the father and the mother was precisely the solution. This idea seemed quite revolutionary to me, but my mother stood by it for what I think are the wrong reasons: to me, shared paternal leave implies

that women are not better carers, and that there is no distinction between the father and the mother. There are certain implications behind the word 'mother', which I do not like because I do not think that pregnancy qualifies somebody as a better parent. Moreover, a compulsory split parental leave would take the pressure off men, like my father, who want to spend time with their children but do not dare to take it. Still, my mother only wanted this so as not to lose this precious employee of hers for four months, and to force her to get back to work sooner.

Even though it was for that reason, my sister and I agreed with my mother. And then, the last event that made both of us question whether we'll ever know our parents, occurred: my dad told us that he believes that a child is in better hands with its mother for "A woman knows genuinely how to take better care of a baby". My dad has always been the most loving and caring father, often showing more affection towards us than our mother. In the past years, I've found out I prefer to talk to him about personal issues rather than to my mum. When we were young, he fed us, bathed us and put us to bed as much as my mother did. And yet, he genuinely thinks a woman is better at parenting than he will ever be.

I got several conclusions from that weird conversation at dinner: first of all, I sadly concluded that women in position of power cannot be assumed to be advocates for Feminism. Second, Feminism is still associated with the revolutionary, radical views of the 1970s by my parents; still, a simple change of words, using 'egalitarianism' instead, makes the movement much more acceptable to them. And finally, the fact that my sister was as much outraged as I was by the old-fashioned views on women that my parents have makes me think that the women in our family, with all our flaws and virtues, walk towards a better change, which, with all its advantages and responsibilities, is in the hands of my sister and I.

I want to believe that my daughters and my nieces will have great mothers and aunts who support them and who will do everything in their power to make life easier for them. And of course, these future kids will have awesome grandparents, although I am not entirely sure if I'll let them speak about women's issues at my dinner table.

Cristina González Varo, "Gender Discrimination in Franco's Regime: Women as the Silly, Voiceless Sex"

Before she passed away, my grandmother, who had been dealing with illness for the last year and a half and was aware of her time coming soon, decided to tell me something which sounded as a cliché at first: "Don't you ever be less than what you are today. Be a woman in all senses and be proud of being so". It took me some days, weeks or even months—maybe even now, almost a year since her passing— to realise the importance of such words.

My grandmother was born in 1934, and being the last of 7 siblings, when she reached the age of 6, she was forced to stay at home with her mother in order to help her with the house chores. She never learnt to write nor read, literacy not being crucial to what her mother believed was my grandmother's purpose in life. Just like her, many girls were kept away from an education at that time in Spain. My aim is not to blame mothers back then but the system in which they lived. For women to believe that such an act as preventing their daughters from attending school would have a positive impact on those girls was just the result of a post-war scene, under Franco's regime.

The Francoist Dictatorship had a major impact on women in many different levels. Educationally speaking, it took Franco only one month after his victory in 1939 to ban co-education, clearly stating his interest in keeping both sexes apart. By this, he assured the dominance by men of the feminine gender since women's education was then focused on a traditional basis including, for instance, learning how to take care of your house, how to make your husband happy, how to be a good Christian. The message was loud and clear: women in Franco's world aspired to marriage and motherhood. The way I see it, his regime conveyed the following message: women, the more ignorant the better.

It is not surprising then to find women such as my grandmother, who grew up in a post-war context when gender marked strongly their success. It is through her words that I recall stories of her being embarrassed in public, when she was asked to write the name of the person who was to receive the flowers she had just bought. Or how she had to rely on my grandfather in every single aspect which was not within the house chores duties, such as paying the bills, sending letters to relatives, reading the newspaper, even the magazines which she loved dearly—I later happened to learn that she only enjoyed the magazines because of the "nice photographs and the bright colours".

The progress of education in Spain is easily seen when paying attention to a typical family. In my own family, the following generation—my mother and my aunt—is a clear example of the evolution. Both of them attended school, although co-education was still banned; later on, they continued their studies though they did not attend university, for it was not yet an option open to most people, only to those who could afford it. Their generation was with no doubt progressing, but progressing towards what exactly? My mother studied to be an office assistant, when most of her boy-friends studied to become engineers, mechanics, lawyers, doctors. The gender bias was clearly still around, discretely diminishing women's skills while promoting men's.

I asked my mother to think of any moment in her life when she remembered her mother being scared or unsure about what she was doing because of her illiteracy. It took her seconds to go back to those memories and I could see that she was not okay with them, pain crossing her expression. I reassured her it was fine, I could get the information from someone else, my aunt perhaps. She shook her head and told me it was hard for her to relive those days, when she was aware of my grandmother's fears and she could do nothing to help her, she had no idea how to teach her mother to read. It is true that a skill learnt from an early age becomes unquestionable, you

take it for granted and when asked to explain it, you fail to find the words to describe such a learning process. One of her stories featured my grandmother at the doctor's office, my mother still a child. She remembers perfectly how, after leaving the office with a prescription for her tummy ache, her mother's hands were shaking with her fingers around the little note of paper. They both rushed home and my grandmother started crying and told her daughter that she was a failure as a mother, not being able to decipher the words that could easily take away her daughter's pain.

What follows happened when I was 12, one day when finishing my homework at my grandparents'. I used to spend most of the day there, before and after school. Both my parents worked long hours so my grandparents had a great influence on my childhood. Thanks to that, I could witness first hand that special moment when my grandmother sat with my grandfather and me at the table. Her expression was that of a little girl, shy and nervous. She addressed both of us saying with her shaky voice: "I want you to teach me to read and write". We exchanged looks for a while, and finally a smile was shared among the three of us. That year she turned 70.

While writing these lines I cannot help feeling proud of her. Most people give up upon themselves when a certain age is reached, their minds focusing on remembering the good life they've had rather than trying to improve whatever time they might have left here. She took the chance back then and started taking classes every afternoon. My granddad and I would swap roles, one week he taught her to write the letters, slowly creating short words and giving them sound and meaning, and the next I would teach her to read out loud and for herself.

Gender discrimination is, sadly, a constant in our lives, but it only takes a second to realise how far we have come from the situation lived by older generations. Education is the key to progress, hence the effort to keep women away from it years ago. If all women were to reach out for help, for a voice outside their men-guided sound, such progress would quicken and equality would finally materialize in a not-so-distant future.

Marta Guzmán Prieto, "Equality without Making Anybody Feel Unworthy"

The truth is that I've never been very familiar with what concerns Feminism. I always thought that feminists were tomboys who were angry with the world at large and blamed men for this. My education wasn't very conservative, both my mother and father work and they share duties and opinions. However, I grew up with the idea that women do the housework (even though my dad sometimes 'helped' my mother) and men drive the car. I never really cared about Feminism because I just wanted to stick to the status quo, I guess.

Nevertheless, this year at university I applied to attend a course called 'Gender Studies' organized by professor Sara Martín. This very interesting course just changed my mind. One day in class we listened to this speech and I felt empowered. A Nigerian writer named Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie had defined at a TED talk a feminist as "the person who believes in the social, political and economic equality of the sexes".

Since this very moment many questions came to my mind which I never thought about before. Why do men tend to 'help' with housework instead of just doing it more often? I know that men who do the chores at home are more common today; however, there are still many people who think that housework is for women and, the most shocking fact is that most women have assumed that it is their obligation, not men's obligation too.

What worries me most is women's situation at work. We still have those terrible conditions such as the fact that women are paid less, in many cases they are fired when they give birth and I know personally cases in which they are even psychological and physically abused. Yes, I do have female friends who have been harassed psychologically by their boss.

Regarding politics, I must confess I am not very familiar with their issues but, from my point of view, the law does not help women too much. In fact, I find it appalling to see how the law affects negatively women in many countries. Not to go too far, just last week a Moroccan 14-year-old girl was forced to marry her rapist. The same happened in Dubai. And so on, an endless list of atrocious cases. This sounds awful to me and, now I know this is where Feminism plays a necessary role. We must fight for these women's rights and for all of women in general.

I think Feminism is important because it gives you an identity, it makes you feel empowered as a woman. Women can be independent and they should know that they are able to fend for themselves. Many men should know that women stay with them because they made that choice, a free choice, and not because they felt forced and are dependent. Abusers seem not to understand this point: women must not be submissive, they should stay with their man because they want not because they believe they are not worthy enough without a man.

Thus, this brings me to think about a song titled "Wives and Lovers" by Hal David. I must say that I have never listened to a song as misogynistic and vulgar as this song is. The author advises women by saying that they should take care of their look, they should always look pretty, otherwise their husbands will have an affair with young girls from the office. Pardon? Did I hear what I heard? Honestly, if that were always truth, I would move on to the next thing... Men should know how much we are worth it.

When I talk about Feminism with male friends they always end by saying that we defend Feminism but we like men to pay the bill on a date. The first point is that, at least in my case, I have paid most of the times the bill on a date and, secondly, yes, I like it when the man pays. I like it because I think that this is part of the whole romantic arrangement; it makes you feel protected in a way, not because I can not pay

for my own stuff. I know this is very personal but, still, from my point of view it is more romantic if my man pays the bill and wants to take care of me. I swear I will take care of him, too. It is just the fact that I don't have to worry about anything because he will take care of me and of everything. This is romantic and being a gentleman, not an anti-feminist or a cad.

On the other hand, some girls who define themselves as feminists often are the same girls who love having free access to discos and clubs, without paying just because they are girls. Personally I do not really care about this because I have never liked discos; still, they do not realize that they get free entrance because they are being treated as bait for the ticket-paying boys. They are thus exploited to catch men's attention and therefore make more money off them.

In conclusion, now I know what Feminism implies and means and, yes, I think we need Feminism. We must make the world know that women are worth it, just as much as men are. Women must fight for their rights without stepping on anyone. That is what must define women: the fact that they fight for equality without making anybody feel unworthy. Therefore, yes, if Feminism believes in woman's independence and in gender equality, I guess I am a feminist.

Susan Kidd, "Still Much to Be Done: Fourth-Wave Feminism Looking Beyond Western Culture"

There is an argument to be made that the world will always need Feminism. If we define Feminism as meaning equal rights for men and women, then surely this is something for which we should always be striving. Even if we one day reach the magical day when women and women are entirely equal, it would still serve us well to keep the ideals of equality alive and in our minds. If we truly treat Feminism as equality, there is no need to fear the idea that any gender will become too powerful. However, one thing which is changing for the better is that with each new wave of Feminism, it becomes less of a battle and more of a civilised debate. Can we blame the original feminists for battling? Absolutely not. Back when women were seen as second-rate citizens, the battle was one hundred per cent necessary to get us where we are today.

I can recall vividly a conversation years ago with a friend's mother, which challenged my entire view of Feminism. To contextualise, a conversation was transpiring between a friend and me, in which we declared ourselves feminists, but were mocking extreme Feminism, such as the bra-hating Germaine Greer variety. My friend's mother however, then pitched a strong defence of Greer, saying that this second wave Feminism was necessary in its time, and that women would not be where we are today, without these early feminist movements. With the rise of fourth wave Feminism, our current generation is quick to dismiss earlier feminists, without

considering them within their political context, which was far more male-hegemonic than ours. By considering the history of Feminism, we can see that it began in a far more militant manner, because this was necessary in order for women to even have their voices heard. Thanks to the Feminism of our mothers and grandmothers, we are now in a position where we can have a civilised debate for the most part; in academia, journalism and on the internet. Perhaps if the Suffragettes had never chained themselves to buildings, we would not be in the position today, to vote for the issues which matter most to us as women. Equally, perhaps if the second wave feminists had never spoken of burning their bras, we would not be in the position today, to fight for our right to be more than sexual objects. All fourth wave feminists should take a minute to thank their predecessors.

Only in the West, can women attempt to argue that women truly do not suffer any more, as a gender. Nonetheless, even in the West, it is surprising that women must still make these claims for true gender equality. Unfortunately, all a female needs to do is look around her high school or university, and she can see women being mocked for dressing provocatively or 'sleeping around', which of course, is never an issue for males. Female discrimination in sex and dating is an issue on which my own mother has never failed to enlighten me. She was the first person ever to tell me exactly what is wrong with the term 'slut', raising an awareness of the importance of allowing women to openly express sexuality without judgement. In a recent discussion of dating, she gave me valuable advice on the importance of self-worth. When having a recent frank discussion of things which she would change if she had her college years back, she informed me that her biggest regret is wasting so much time worrying about an imperfect physical appearance. It is a challenge to find a young adult female who has never devoted time to thinking about her physical 'flaws' and what she would change given the option. Dressing up and looking good is undeniably fun, but we need to realise that looks are only genetics plus make-up, so if our exterior is being uncooperative, this in no way diminishes our worth as females.

To delve deeper into why we still need Feminism, it is only necessary to look beyond Western culture, and consider the grim realities which some women still face. Women are still stoned to death under Sharia Law, for acts such as committing adultery. In Saudi Arabia, women are banned from driving. When we look at activists such as Malala Yousafzai and her campaigns for female education, we realise that the world is far from gender-equal. In many third world countries, women are still openly considered to be inferior, and despite the importance of fourth-wave feminist debates, we must remember that there are countries in which women are still fighting for basic human rights. In addition, there is a common delusion, that only Western women face the darker side of sexual discrimination. There was a recent statistic that 1 in 5 US women are raped, and it is common knowledge that domestic violence is still highly prevalent in developed nations. While unfortunately, it is near impossible to completely end these horrors, if Feminism can save even one woman from rape, violence or death, we can surely argue that this is worth the effort.

To conclude, there are several reasons for why we still need Feminism. Firstly, we need Feminism, because gender equality is not something which we should ever

lose sight of. Even as gender equality becomes more commonplace, there are always improvements which can be made. Another important reason is that we still do not live in a gender-equal world. In developing countries, women are deprived of education and basic rights, and are often the victims of violent crime. It would be illogical to bring Feminism to a halt when such horrors still exist.

Even on a lighter level, the Western female psyche still suffers at the hands of male hegemony. Women are made to feel like lesser beings if they do not conform to air-brushed ideals of what beauty truly is. They are labelled 'sluts' and 'whores' if they partake in too much sex, or wear the wrong clothing. Every wave of Feminism has made the world a better place, by bringing us closer to eradicating these forms of physical and psychological abuse which women suffer, and it is my wish that the fifth wave of Feminism will take inspiration from its predecessors, when thinking of new ways to make the world a little more equal.

Alexandra Laurie, "The 'Thin' Aspiration Lives on: New Form, Same Content"

Since the explosion of supermodel Twiggy onto the fashion scene in the 1960s, the Western world has been obsessed with one female body ideal—thin. This trend gathered such alarming force that many questioned whether it would end. As more and more images of skeletal models were being flashed across various media platforms, and skinny poster girls such as Kate Moss were quoted saying "Nothing

The 'thin' aspiration lives on: new form, same content.

From this:

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tastes as good as skinny feels", so, too, did one see an alarming rise in the number of teenage girls being diagnosed with anorexia. Pro-anorexia websites provided forums for these women to share tips on how to starve themselves and on how to hide their eating disorders, as well as allowing users to share 'inspirational' photographs that became known as 'thinspiration' or 'thinspo'. It was not until the revelation that many of the supermodels suffered major drug addictions, that their role in promoting unhealthy behaviour was truly questioned and various

health organisations, Government committees and charities formed together to take serious action towards a change in attitude.

Slowly but surely, then, over the last decade one may observe a change from thin to fit and healthy; previous images of 'thinspiration' were replaced by 'fitspiration', images of toned, muscular bodies. The tagline 'strongnotskinny' appeared amongst recovering anorexics and those searching for healthy weight loss alike, the idea being that everybody was working towards one unanimous goal of good health. Whilst on the surface this may appear to be a positive change, this essay will contend that these 'fitspiration' photos are equally damaging to women and could ultimately have more serious repercussions than 'thinspiration'.

One may begin to analyse the impact of such images by first assessing the title that they are presented under. It is clear that 'fitspiration' or 'fitspo' derives its name from 'thinspiration'; whilst drawing this parallel could be seen as an attempt at irony by its creators, one must consider that the functions are essentially the same, to project onto women an ideal form of the female body. When women see this body they are being implicitly told that this is how a person must look in order to fit into society. As 'we are our bodies' one should strive to achieve the best outwards image, so that others will understand one to be an optimal member of society.

If one is then to consider the format of these images of the 'fit woman', they will be aware that in many of the cases she never has a head. This supports feminist criticism that women are 'reduced' to the bodies by society. Furthermore, this presentation links psychologically to the mindset sometimes observed in anorexia sufferers; the mind and body are separate entities, with the mind being dominant over the unfeeling, mechanistic body. It is this mindset that some psychologists have asserted may attribute to the anorexia sufferer's ability to damage themselves through starvation, it is thus alarming to observe the same method of reduction being utilised in 'fitspiration' images.

Nonetheless, the devaluing of the human body is what this 'fitspo' relies in; in order to 'inspire' young women to achieve the leaned, honed torso of the 'fit woman', body shaming methods are employed. Take for example, the image of an average woman gripping onto belly fat accompanied by the caption, "I will not be this girl anymore". The image is undoubtedly a familiar one that many women may relate to, yet the caption implies that there is something wrong. "[T]his girl" implies that this figure is an outsider and suggests that in order to escape being shunned one must be better than other women, triggering a sense of competition within the female gender that turns women against one another.

To examine even further the manipulation of these images, one may note that the 'fit woman' must also be a sex symbol. In the majority of 'fitspiration' pictures, 'fit woman's' hands can be seen tucked into the waistband of her pants, implicitly guiding the viewer's thoughts towards her more intimate parts, thus aligning her with sexual ideas. Just as the 'thinspirational' models were placed on a catwalk to represent sexuality and beauty ideals, 'fit woman' is positioned to dictate the same message.

Whilst the motivational phrases come in various forms, they ultimately provide the same message—obsession is dedication. Take the quote, “Working out is your drug. Get addicted”; one can see the echo of the 'heroin chic' days through the reference to drugs, however this has been cleaned up to create an 'us' and 'them' situation which distinguishes exercise addiction as a positive thing, as it results in the strong, sculpted body of the background image. Unfortunately, when this is seen alongside other quotes such as “Sore. The most satisfying pain”, one may be sure that the result will be injury and ill health, just as it was when 'thinspiration' encouraged starvation. Scientifically speaking it is true that sore muscles after exercise indicate muscle growth, as in order to repair themselves from the minute tears caused by exercise, the body must grow more muscle fibre. However, what the two aforementioned images do when viewed together, is suggesting that one should ignore the pain message of the body saying stop and carry on exercising. This is a parallel that can be seen on the pro-anorexia websites, where women were encouraged to ignore stomach pains as the body ate its fat and tired, aching limbs caused by weakness.

One final image to take into account is that which features the motto, “Strive for progress, not perfection”. Once more, the viewer is supposedly being given a positive, reasonable message, to take a rational approach towards health and fitness; baby steps as it were. Yet this medically advisable approach is undermined by the background image of a slim, toned female with jutting collarbones and a thigh gap. If this is an image of progress but not perfection, where is the average woman supposed to fit in? The answer—she doesn't. The average woman is invisible here because she is not the ideal that society wants and is consequently ignored. Once again, one is reminded that these 'thinspirational' images stem from body shaming and play on fears of not being socially accepted.

Indeed, shame and failure are what the diet and exercise industries rely on, it is they who are promoting 'fit woman', as she represents a difficult to attain ideal that will ensure women turn to extreme methods in an attempt to attain this body, thus ensuring these industries are never out of business. For example, a woman may undertake a juice fast in order to lose weight; as promised said woman loses 5lbs by drinking only juice for three days. The pleasure taken from seeing such results creates a kind of high. Yet when the woman returns to her normal diet, she is more than likely to regain the 5lbs that were lost, plus extra. Disgusted by the weight gain, the woman experiences a kind of depression that makes her crave the high of her previous triumph, thus she embarks on another extreme weight loss plan, only to meet with the same results, creating a vicious cycle of weight loss and weight gain that is underpinned by self-loathing; this self-loathing is also seen amongst anorexia sufferers. What's more, just as anorexic behaviour was condoned and made 'safe' by other sufferers on pro-anorexia websites, by normalising this cyclical weight-loss behaviour through the barrage of 'fitspiration' on social media, one may find it increasingly difficult to seek help, as they do not believe there is a problem.

All of this, one must remember, is taking place in a society where obesity rates are rising at an unprecedented rate. It is often difficult to spot when the boundary between an active, healthy lifestyle and an obsessive undertaking to become a 'fit

woman', has been crossed. Increasingly, hypergymnasia or 'exercise anorexia' has been on the rise, with experts commenting that a sufferer will be seen to eat a healthy (if not low calorie) diet, so as not to arouse suspicion from immediate family. However, sufferers will then embark on intensive exercise regimes burning up to 1000 calories alone through exercise. Yet once again the same message proliferates through this kind of 'fit woman' hypergymnasia as it did during the 'heroin chic' era, and it is one I shall lift directly from an advice section of a pro-anorexia blog, "Friends will only get in your way. Avoid them until you reach your goals". i.e. the concern of those close to you over your lifestyle is their problem, avoid them.

To conclude, we need to consider once more the evidence presented for the negative impact of the 'fit woman' stereotype. In an age where social media rules, these images are able to reach a global audience in a matter of seconds, effectively meaning nobody is safe from their influence. Whilst these images could affect healthy diet and lifestyle choices, the fact that it would be born of body shame, teemed with a constant undercurrent of extremism, means that the outcome will be a vicious cycle of diet and self loathing similar to that which surrounded the 'thinspiration' phenomenon. The difficulty of diagnosing and helping a person who chooses to exercise and restrict diet in an extreme way, is dichotomised in the difficulty of helping an obese person lose weight; both are extreme ends of the spectrum forced together into an uneasy space, a society in which balance is becoming increasingly difficult to find. Therefore, it is clear to say that the 'fit woman' stereotype is nothing more than a social construct designed to dictate to women how they must look and behave. The notion of health that seems so central to its message is a dangerous excuse to shame women and nurture extreme behaviour, yet because it is not linked to something socially unacceptable or unnatural, as was the case with the 'heroin chic' look of catwalk models and the starvation it promoted, it is increasingly difficult to control extremist behaviours. It is perhaps this that is the most worrying issue with the 'fit woman' stereotype plaguing today's society, 'fitspo' images promote a lifestyle that is difficult to criticise, ergo it intrinsically lends itself to the formation of insidious, dangerous shifts in mind set that will bear long term effects for all those touched.

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Laura López Lamiel: “Feminism: The Belief that Men and Women Should Have Equal Rights and Opportunities”

Feminism? We do not need it anymore as we live in a (hypocritical) society in which equal opportunities really exist. Seriously? I do not think so. We just need to take a look at the media or our families and friends to see that this is not true. There may be women who have a wonderful life in which they do not feel discriminated against by men and that is fantastic, really. However, there are other girls and women in the world who are not so lucky.

We can take as an example the Pakistani girl Malala Yousafzai who has been awarded the Nobel Peace Prize this year. Malala became from one day to the next a symbol of girls' rights for education through her efforts to fight oppression and extremism. She is currently doing a remarkable job as a symbol of equal opportunities as Malala sees this as a key element of progress for girls and women. But how did we meet Malala? This girl was shot by the Taliban as she rode home on a bus after taking an exam at school. Why did they want to kill a child? Well, the answer to this question is very simple. Malala loved going to school but there was a huge problem: she is a girl and girls, according to the Taliban, cannot study. In some places, women are seen as objects that must be submissive to men. They should remain at home and sadly, many of them cannot express their own thoughts and feelings. We can see that a basic right to education was the reason for Malala's assassination attempt. It seems that the words 'education' and 'women' are not quite compatible in some cultures.

Nevertheless, we do not have to go too far to see the dark and sad situation that many women experience in their domestic life. We often see in the news (or we even know them as they can be a friend or a relative) women who have been abused or killed by their ex- or current partners. The main reason for these murders and abuses is that many husbands are very possessive and they do not want to see how their wives choose their own lives. Many times, this jealousy arises when they see that their partners have their own job and friends and, therefore, men are not always needed. Yet, women, like men, need their independence.

Another subject has been recently quite controversial, showing us that we need Feminism: Spain's abortion law. Let see, we are in the 21st century and we live, apparently, in a world of freedom and tolerance. However, there is a law that claims that women cannot decide over their own body. How is that possible? It is very sad to see things like that as we can see that our society, in which supposedly progress has an important role, is not as tolerant as we thought. Moreover, there are other forms of

abuse and discrimination that can take place outside women's homes and that place is their own work place. It is not a secret that the salary for men and women is very different (obviously, men earn more money) despite both doing the same job. So, I ask you the question again: Do we need Feminism? Obviously, we do.

I believe that some women and men deny the necessity of Feminism because they do not understand its real meaning. A few weeks ago, I asked several men and women from different generations about the meaning of Feminism and if they support it. Their answers were shocking to me.

Many of them, the older and the younger, think that Feminism is composed of women who hate men and want to take control over them. When I told them the real meaning of this word, the younger ones said something like "Oh, you're right. That makes sense". They accepted my explanation and saw the term in a different way. However, the older people (mainly men), maybe influenced by a different education, did not support my definition very much. Men in their 60s and 70s said that feminists believed that women deserved special privileges over men. When I told them that Feminism only wanted equal rights for men and women they asked me questions such as: "So, why do feminists want to empower women?" Well, as you can see, they were very obstinate in their opinions. I told them that feminists do not see women as weak and oppressed human beings and for this reason, they want to give them power. Actually, it is quite the opposite. They know that they are strong. However, they just need society to see that, too.

From my personal experience, I can say that men do not see women as their equals and I can show you this with little things such as the following. Women are stereotyped and, thus, for many men women must have a specific profile. Supposedly, we love watching romantic comedies, wearing lovely dresses and make-up and we do not like sports, science fiction and so on. If this is our description, people may think that women are frivolous and superficial as our only worry is to look perfect all the time. Obviously, this is not true. I love romantic comedies as much as science fiction and I love wearing a beautiful dress as much as practising extreme sports. However, men think that this is not quite compatible. When I told them that I love movies or TV shows such as *Star Wars*, *The Dark Knight* trilogy or *Doctor Who* and sports such as climbing mountains or hockey among others, they look at me as if I was weird. Many of them say that I cannot watch those movies because I am a girl and therefore, I cannot understand them or I cannot do some sports because I am not strong and fast enough. I feel that I have to justify myself all the time and I do not like it at all. I bet that I know more about science fiction and sports than more of these guys who do not like my hobbies.

If you are a feminist that does not mean you hate men or you believe that you are better than them. A feminist is a person who believes that women should be treated the same as men, as all of us are human beings and we deserve the same opportunities. I stressed in this essay that we need Feminism but actually, I wish that it was not the case. Feminism exists because there is discrimination against women. In a utopian world in which all of us have the same rights, Feminism would not be

necessary as there would not be the necessity of fighting for them. Nevertheless, this ideal society is just a dream. However, through our efforts and perseverance one day it may be real.

Joan López Salvans, “Love and Sex in the Heterosexual-Homosexual Divide: Religion, Biochemicals and Paradigmatic Historical Discussions”

As a general rule, discussions about sexuality (no matter what specific aspect of it) tend to follow a difference-based approach. Many scientific studies are carried out using contrastive strategies to get to the essence of something, wondering in which ways an object differs from another and why. However, when sociocultural studies apply the same method to ever-changing concepts such as race, gender or sexuality—concepts that are not immutable as physical entities like the human body or the Earth’s strata—establishing a canonical normalcy from which they differ, controversy arises. The only logical conclusion, then, is that following a difference-based approach to publicly study sociocultural concepts creates not only social differentiation but also differentiating social attitudes.

“What is homosexuality?” One question, too many answers. In informal situations, there is a tendency for straight people to remark what it is not and to use the ‘instead of’ phrase, whereas gay people just remark the same-sex nature of it. Often, though, informal discussions about homosexuality also happen to go the ‘why not that?’ route, prompting gay men or women to explain instead why they do not like the opposite sex. Considering this, differentiation does not seem such a big, harmful deal. However, civil rights fights prove otherwise.

In recent years, marriage equality has been one of the biggest issues society has had to deal with. Many marriage equality detractors argue that a heterosexual normative institution such as marriage is in essence just that, a heterosexual practice—also supported by religious beliefs: Adam and Eve, the monogamous reproduction system. The main argument used against same-sex marriage and against homosexuality (or any other kind of non-heterosexual lifestyle) has been for a long time that homosexual practices do not follow any reproductive need, and thus, that homosexuals are not entitled to the sacred institution of marriage.

In less religion-influenced environments, in which marriage equality has not been discussed as a religious problem but criticised for corresponding to a non-normative lifestyle, general assumptions about homosexuality have been made using the premise that homosexual love is different from heterosexual love. ‘Different’ here meaning ‘not as good as’, an argument which still follows hegemonic behavioural patterns and heterosexual hierarchy—also, the idea that non-straight sexual activity is

based on vice and depravation rather than on love (as heterosexual sex is allegedly based on, along with reproductive needs). But really, what is that we call 'love'? And can it actually be experienced differently depending on sexuality?

Many scientific studies have been carried out on the subject of love and the contemporary take on the subject basically states that the feeling of love is just a series of biochemical reactions that happen in our brain. These studies even separate these reactions into different phases and as a result, rather than a feeling 'love' seems to be an organic cause-and-effect process related to the presence or absence of certain specific hormones in our body. This process apparently has nothing to do with being straight, bi, gay or any other labelled sexual identity, given that we all as (healthy) human beings have these hormones in our bodies.

The only heterosexual-homosexual difference that may actually arise in relationships possibly has to do with sex. Theoretically, same-sex oriented sexual experiences should be 'easier' than different-sexed ones, in the sense of there existing a better understanding of the sexual organs and a more thorough knowledge of what is more likely to cause pleasant sensations to the other. This is arguably true when thinking about all the heterosexual young men who have gay friends and have straight-gay sexual intercourse with them. That is to say, sex without all the sexual practices that a gay-gay sexual act would entail and including just those that a straight man might enjoy with a woman (with a gay man performing instead). Of course, I have not run a comprehensive study of this type of contact and I only happen to know a bunch of these cases but the common claim is that, according to an anonymous male heterosexual source, "gays know better how to do stuff".

Other than at the level of sexual differences, it can also be perfectly possible that same-sex love relationships work better at a psychological level, as the members of the couple are more aware of each other's psyches and needs. This may, arguably, be true considering the studies proving that, despite the fact that same-sex relationships (specially between gay men) are regarded as vicious and commitment-fearing, actually they tend to last longer than heterosexual relationships; gays, often accused of only wanting to have as much sex as they can and with whomever they can, do form stable partnerships. All of this suggests that differences between heterosexual and homosexual individuals and relationships (both loving and sexual) are socially constructed instead of being actually determined at a physically detectable level.

These views and studies are all very postmodern but when talking about these issues it is important to bear history in mind. Generations like our grandparents'—say, individuals 70+ years-old'—grew up without any of these scientific facts and contrasted data, that is, without much of the basic knowledge which helps new generations to respect each other more. It doesn't take much asking to know what their views on this homosexual debate are. As an example, my grandma's reaction when watching a scene of *Grey's Anatomy* in which two women kiss: "What are these? Are they two female faggots? Jesus Christ... for the love of God" (literal quote); her words would be actually quite funny if not taken too seriously, as her use of men-oriented insults against

women is quite uncommon. When I asked her head on about it, she explained, vocally disapproving of it, that she regards homosexuality as a disorder.

Younger generations—say, between 40 and 55—have a wide range of opinions to choose from; being raised during and just right after the 60's social movements for change and being young during the 70's and 80's, possibly allowed them more varied sexual and social experiences. Of course every opinion about any subject is bound to a chronotope, to a particular place and time and as a result of this, 40 to 55-year-old people's take on homosexuality varies markedly from that of older generations. Whilst some people of that age I know still argue that homosexuality is a 'disease' they tend to claim that they respect it, in a sort of "don't ask don't tell" fashion. Others—like my parents—see it as a way of life that they don't understand completely but that they don't label as unnatural or as an illness, totally respecting it.

The historical account of how opinion changes is important when considering issues like marriage equality and everything previously discussed above, even if it is just to marvel at how real, genuine change can actually be achieved in modern societies: first, by establishing a discussion; then, searching for knowledge and in the end and gradually, setting up new paradigms to substitute the old, under-informed ones.

Albert Martín Flores, "Gender Issues for Different Generations"

When considering what previous generations were like at the beginning of the 20th century and in our current early 21st century society, it is clear that we are talking about two different worlds in terms of gender equality. It is also important to consider the generation raised between these periods. In other words, the generation of my parents, the ones who were born, more or less, at the end of the Spanish Civil War, the ones who have been through all those historical and social changes. They are certainly living in a social environment very distant from the one received from their parents, my own grandparents.

Back in the 1980s, one day my grandmother told me about her youth, particularly emphasizing how unfair it was that she couldn't go to school just because she was a girl. Her story is rather extraordinary as her father died quite young of tuberculosis leaving behind a wife and six children (three boys and three girls). My great-grandmother decided, despite the difficulties of the time and also the fact that they lived in a small village, that, following the ideal canons of the time, the three boys would attend university and the three girls would take care of the house and their brothers. Eventually the three boys moved to the city and got their degrees; one of them became a pharmacist and the other two schoolteachers. In contrast, the life of my grandmother, like that of her mother and sisters, was focused on tending to her

brothers' needs in order to accomplish my great-grandmother's wish that her three boys earned a university degree. My grandmother considered this completely unfair, as she never accepted that her mother's decision was based on gender and not on scholarly merits. In her life there was always a gender line dividing her relatives: the men, most of them with university studies, and the women, who lived at the service of their husbands and children.

Considering how fast things have been transformed recently in Europe as well as in our country, it is important to comment on some of the main changes suffered in our society in the last eight decades in terms of equality. The women of Spain were not allowed to vote in general elections until the Second Republic in 1931. During the Spanish Civil War (1936-9) women had to undertake men's work as they were fighting on the battlefields; this was, then, a time when women had to leave their homes to work, breaking centuries of marginalisation. The war brought women the opportunity to show to their communities how valuable their contribution was and how important the role of woman is in any advanced society. Until that moment, the women had taken part in too few cultural, social or economical aspects of life as they had to remain in a subordinated position just taking care of the household and their families. Additionally, equal opportunities towards education were unimaginable as the access to higher education was mainly controlled by the Church and limited to men. Yet, despite the changes suffered in terms of equal opportunities during the Second Republic and the important role of women during the Civil War, Spain went back to its patriarchal social model under Franco, with the man as breadwinner and the woman as homemaker.

May 1968 in France was indeed an important date in modern History as the mentality of the new generations suffered important changes, leaving behind the old parameters and looking forward to a new world of equal opportunities. Those social changes finally reached Spain in 1975 with the end of the dictatorial regime and the arrival of parliamentary democracy. Changes towards gender equality culminated, for instance, with the abolition of the infamous 'Marital License' in 1975. The 'Marital Licence' was the mandatory permission granted by the husband to his wife giving her authorisation in order to work, earn a salary, open a bank account, obtain a driving licence or a passport, or open a business.

Ultimately, other achievements concerning equal rights would be accomplished as time went on but others are still far away from being secured. One of them is putting an end to the differences concerning salary between men and women undertaking the same type of work, which is still a clear example of inequality in our society. Also the maternity leave period and conditions are considerably unequal depending on the country, provoking great distress in the families. Finally, the abortion law which, depending on the party in power, can be the object of debate without taking into consideration the opinion of the women.

In conclusion, we must be aware of how things were like just 100 years ago and how they have changed over time not just in our country but also all over Europe. Also, we need to bear in mind how difficult achieving equal rights was for previous generations and how they eased the way for us. A clear example of this is shown by

comparing pictures from the Spanish Parliament in the late 70s, with just a few women members, and in the present, when more than 30% of the members are women. On the other hand, it is also true that there are still aspects of discrimination that have to be improved (or eliminated), some requiring a hard struggle not to go backwards. We must not forget that in other parts of the world there are societies still living in what we would call medieval times. In the cultures where the religious and political powers prevent their citizens from having equal opportunities the simple idea of gender equality is completely unthinkable. Something to remember.

Clàudia Mas, “Becoming Aware of Gender Differences”

In the earliest years of our life we are given certain codes of behaviour based upon our gender. For the most part, boys can do anything they want since they are born—except being feminine. Girls, however, have to follow certain patterns, especially in their teens, when they start being sexualized. In the 1960s, thus, my mother was taught to be submissive to men; also, not to smoke and play sports because it was not lady-like. She was prepared for marriage at school and her sexuality was denied until she got married. Still today, as a woman I have been told not to swear or play sports because that is not feminine; however, my male cousin could do all this without being questioned. I could not play football because my family told me that it was only for boys, that I should do something more girly. Later on, in my teens, I was not considered a proper girl because I did not use make up nor did I wear skirts or dresses. Nevertheless, if I wanted to dress like a boy it was to certain extent acceptable, yet I was taught that if a boy dressed as a girl this was shameful.

I did not know what Feminism was until a few years ago but I did know before that that I should not be content with women’s position in society. However, when I knew what Feminism was I realized for the first time that the situation was much worse than I first thought. Suddenly I began to see how I was being discriminated in all ways and manners just for being female. That is when I knew that we all need Feminism.

I began then to look for a good female role model or heroine in movies and TV series, but wherever I looked I could not find any. That is because since we are about three years we are taught that a hero has to be a man and a girl is the one that needs to be rescued. There is no place for a strong female character even though they exist and the absence of them on TV and the media is proof enough. I realized that since my early years I was warned against men’s violence because being a girl made me their target. Later, at high school, I was aware for the first time that being a girl was considered shameful: a nasty boy called a male friend of mine ‘girly’ and he got really upset. In my teens I was taught that I had to be flattered if a man catcalled me even though it made me feel uncomfortable. Only later did I realize that they were

objectifying me and that verbal sexual harassment is seen as something acceptable when it is not.

Thus, slowly I saw that as a woman I was not treated equally to men, rather the contrary. Women are paid less than men for doing the exact same job, women are rarely seen in positions of power and the possibilities of employment for women are smaller than men's because apparently women are less reliable. In high school I also saw that if a girl displayed her sexuality freely she would be insulted and sexually harassed. What is more, one in four women are raped or sexually assaulted and the only thing people ask is what she was wearing and that she probably was asking for it. We all should be aware that Feminism is necessary because women are victims of partners or ex-partners, victims of rape and domestic violence and their voices are ignored and silenced. We need Feminism because 'boys will be boys' should not be an excuse nor a justification for their actions.

I realize that I needed Feminism for all the reasons that I mentioned before but also because sadly, I never saw the objectification of women until a couple of years ago. It is sad for a woman not to be aware of her own condition, of being considered inferior to men, due to how normal this is. We really need Feminism because women's body is used and objectified to sell products and that is one of the reasons why women are so obsessed with their own faulty bodies. There should not be so much pressure over female bodies just for male pleasure. Another matter that I am concerned about is that insults such as 'whore', 'slut', 'bitch' and the like are so normalized and accepted that everyone feels entitled to call a girl this for no reason.

It is really important to say that men also need Feminism because to certain extent they are also victims of the patriarchal society. It is necessary to break with stereotypes in order to give freedom to their feelings without being laughed at just for being human. Men should be able to express themselves freely and not being imposed a certain behaviour. What is more, men are also victims of sexual violence and rape even though the numbers of cases are fewer compared to women's. Nevertheless this is also ignored because acknowledging abuse means that their manhood is threatened and that makes men afraid of not being a proper 'man'.

We need Feminism because women also have a voice and there is too much hatred against women. We are human beings as capable of doing anything as a man is. We need Feminism because both women and men will be better with it, we will be more free from the stereotype that is imposed on us. The mere act of fighting for equality is nonsense; we should not be fighting for it, equality should be taken for granted.

Laura Montaña Tena, “You Are Just Confused’: The Problems of Being Bisexual Today”

Being different in Western society today is not an easy thing. Being different in a small town in Spain may be even worse. Nowadays, every person that differs from what is understood by the majority of people as the norm is discriminated. The societal attitude towards different sexual identities in Spain has changed over the years but it is still somehow stigmatized. Nevertheless, when we compare the situation of Spain with other countries, we could say that we are lucky; even more so when we contrast it to the circumstances in which homosexuals lived during the Francoist dictatorship.

Whenever I talk to older members of my family about sexuality, I realize that my generation (I was born in 1992) is quite open about sexual identity if we compare this to how sex was seen when they were my age. It seems to me that there has been a complete change of mind in society in general but that there are still some people who are stuck to the way sexuality was perceived fifty years ago.

When I first came out as a bisexual to my friends, just after I left high-school, they had all kind of reactions. Most of them reacted well, they were surprised but not scandalized, but that was not the case for everyone. I will always remember the moment when I told one of my best friends that I was attracted to girls as well as to boys. He told me: “That’s okay. But you will marry a man, right?” After some time I realized that his reaction was a common one. People are okay with bisexuality as long as it is treated as a phase, but not as something that will last. I must say that his views on the topic have changed since he started attending university and met more people who fell out of the heterosexual/homosexual binary.

My experience in university has been different from what I felt when I was in high-school, still in my home town. In general, none of the people I have met during the course of my degree have had any problem with my sexuality. It is important to say that there is a wide range of different people in university and they are generally much more open about their sexuality than people ever were during high-school. There are obviously some exceptions, people that still see anyone not heterosexual as someone who is not normal, though they have become the minority now.

Even though my friends are okay with my sexual identity, there are always people who are not. Living in a small town, everybody knows each other. Because of this, it is very difficult to go public with your private life and your decisions, because you know everyone will know before you have time to tell them yourself. This did not happen in my case, since though I have never told anyone in my family directly about my sexual identity they have always just known. One of my best friends, though, was outed to her family before she was prepared to tell them about herself.

When I was thinking about this essay, I had a conversation with two of my friends, who are both also bisexual, and we realized that there are some stereotypes and clichés that even people from our generation still believe in. The most common one is the invisibility of bisexuality. For most people, it just does not exist. When a person claims to be attracted to both sexes, people assume it's just a phase that will conclude in the person coming out as homosexual or as a heterosexual that was only experimenting. The second stereotype that we have encountered most often is the fact that bisexuals are seen as having loose sexual morals. Both my friends agreed on the impression that currently homosexuality is better accepted than bisexuality.

Even though this is not my case, my friends, who had relationships with girls during their high-school years, had problems with their classmates. They both had to endure insults and, in general, gossip and whisperings behind their backs. If we compare this situation with the one lived in other countries, where people are abused and physically attacked for being gay, we can see that the situation in Spain has greatly improved from the worst period of Franco's regime 50 or 60 years ago, when this kind of aggression was also common.

Also when preparing this essay, I talked to my father, my uncle and a friend of the family. Each of them told me about how homosexuality, bisexuality and transsexuality were seen when they were my age. My father and my uncle, 56 and 48-years-old respectively, lived in an age when homosexuality began to be visible. Even though they both knew homosexuals and lesbians, their identity was still socially seen as an illness. They told me that when they were my age, transsexuality began to be common but it was not understood by society; transsexuals were seen as aberrations. The adolescence of my interviewees happened right in the middle of the spread of AIDS within the gay community, which promoted the stereotyping of these persons. Bisexuality is a new term for my informers; it was not a concept that existed when they were young in their surroundings.

The first thing that my family friend, who is 70 and knows nothing about my sexual orientation, told me when I asked about what the situation was like when he was young was: "yo no soy maricón" which translates as "I am not a fag". The worst thing about it is that he did not realize he was being offensive in any way, it is just the way he talks. I think this sums up pretty well what older people in my town think about non-heterosexuals. He told me that he remembers one gay man who did not hide himself, and that he was always the talk of the town. He also told me that everyone knew when someone was different, "not normal", and they insulted and harassed them. The concept of bisexuality was not known when he was young, either.

The situation is changing now for young people in my home town. There is a transgender girl who, I am sure, has had to put up with some abuse, mostly all the gossip that exists around her; now she is living her life normally and nobody has reacted really badly towards her. I am weirdly proud to see how, even since I started high-school ten years ago, things have changed a bit for the better and people are a bit more open-minded than they were before.

Although Spain is becoming a quite liberal place to live in, the representation of different sexual identities in the media is still very new. We can see gay, lesbian and bisexual characters on foreign TV shows and movies that are broadcast in our country. Moreover, in the last couple of decades, we have begun to see some gay and lesbian characters on Spanish TV shows like *Aída*, *Hospital Central*, *Aquí no hay quien viva* or *Física o química*. Another matter would be whether this representation is a positive one, since it is often stereotyped. Nevertheless, all these characters are either gays or lesbians, and there is a clear lack of representation of queer characters outside of the sexual binary system. I myself cannot think of even one bisexual character on a Spanish TV show. This might be one of the reasons why some people often misinterpret what bisexuality means or even ignore what the concept describes.

To sum up, although the situation is beginning to change, there is still a long way to go until we reach equality. Homophobia and biphobia are deeply rooted in the patriarchal and heteronormative society in which we live. I hope there is not much time left until things begin to change for real and sexual preference becomes irrelevant when approaching a person.

Laia Munné Torra, “Changing Patterns in (Patriarchal) Family Life”

In the last few months Feminism has become a trending topic, as more and more renowned people position themselves on the matter and speak of it publicly. The term Feminism has been traditionally associated with ideas that have little or nothing to do with what this ideology is actually about. Feminists have too often been simply regarded as anti-men women who never shave. But Feminism is in fact the belief that women should be allowed the same rights, power, and opportunities as men, and be treated in the same way. This is a very powerful message directed to both women and men, and that could dramatically change the role gender plays on our society. The fact that younger generations hear of Feminism and have celebrities they admire explaining what Feminism is about is key to changing the way society perceives this concept and to making people feel more comfortable embracing it.

Our society has been traditionally a very patriarchal one, and since the values of patriarchy are radically opposed to those Feminism defends, many cultural barriers have to be crossed when trying to explain the need for Feminism. In the past few decades our society has been slowly but constantly shifting from a very conservative patriarchal society to one that is slowly progressing into what Feminism defends. There is, nevertheless, a long way to go, and there are still many who emphatically defend patriarchy.

This shifting of patriarchy is something that I have experienced and seen all my life, through the different generations of my own family. My dad’s parents were raised

in a very patriarchal family, and my grand-mother has been as much a defender of those values as my grand-father has. They have a very traditional and conservative notion of life and that is what they have always tried to transmit to me. From comments noting that I should already be married, to my grand-father's famous sentence "Por la boca muere el pez" aimed to remind me that I will never find a suitable boyfriend or future husband if I do not know how to cook as well as my grandma, I have always been exposed to and influenced by patriarchy.

My other grandparents on the other hand, have slightly changed their behaviour as a couple, progressing according to the times, even though they are still quite traditional. My grandmother managed through many baby-steps to change my patriarchal narrow-minded grandfather into a person who gets angry if you try to do the housework that he has assigned himself. Although it may seem a very small achievement, it has influenced the rest of the family.

My parents are indeed radically different from their own parents and so are my uncles and aunts. They have lived hearing of equality and housework division, and they enjoy much more parity in the couple than my grandparents. Nevertheless, the values they were raised with are still very present in their day to day life, and sometimes one cannot help but see how in the end it all goes back to the patriarchal family in which the woman is in charge of the house. In any case, the younger generation of my family has values that my grandparents would never have thought of when they were young. We have been exposed to feminist values without acknowledging them as such.

Learning what Feminism is and what it defends made me realize that I believed in what it stands for long before I understood what that word meant. We as a society need to understand that Feminism fights for the equality of men and women, and try to help the younger generations to grow up in a world free from gender inequality, free from impositions and limitations attached to a gender. Until we manage to free the term 'Feminism' from all the negative associations that patriarchy has imposed upon it out of fear, we as a society will still need Feminism.

Jenifer Padilla, "Educating Children, Reaching Social Consensus"

I may speak for more than one person when I say that, unfortunately, the basics of Feminism are not properly taught. I'll extend my claim to argue that actually Feminism remains partially unseen during most people's upbringing. The truth is that children are never explained its origins and, what is more important, its objectives within society. In addition, even though nowadays Feminism tends to appear in History textbooks it seems to be always part of those final school units which are hardly ever covered for lack of time.

Apart from a general ignorance of how Feminism started and of its purposes, its labelling often leads to a misconception of its core meaning. Due to its etymology, Feminism is mostly thought to be a movement in favour of women's superiority over men. Yet, 'Feminism' must not be interpreted in parallel with 'sexism' or 'masculinism' because one of its aims is to find a balance in the rights of men and women. The way we behave, we understand others and make ourselves understood is facilitated through language and this is where the first flaw lies. There are numerous language referents and indicators which reflect the usual superiority of men over women. We would make fast (though difficult) progress if we broke away from cultural constructions, beginning with language, which defend gender differences between men/women or male/female, differences which I cannot avoid when writing the following lines.

While the incorporation of the word Feminism into everyday language is practically new, since Feminism as such emerged in the 19th Century, the concept was already present in ancient times. Embarrassingly enough for me, I found myself discovering Feminism thanks to 15th century author Christine de Pizan only in my twenties, during a visit to the British Library in London. That little but significant step has permitted me, at the same time, to be able to examine daily constraints, since it is clear enough that there are still many differences between men and women. It is very easy for people to take for granted that some rights which women can currently enjoy are commonly accepted, but if they are so this is owing to the women (and some men) who had the courage in the past to stand for themselves and show that all persons should be treated equally.

Regarding children's education, diverse studies have shown that gender identification takes place as early as four years old, when little boys and girls become aware of gender differences. From then on, children may indeed be educated into treating men and women in different, exclusive ways or educated to become adults who treat everyone in the same way. Society itself is full of distinctions between the sexes and that is why we should remark that the environment is a key factor to their development from the very beginning. Being trained in gender equality from birth has nothing to do with having to find out by yourself as an adult that men's and women's differences are unfair and should have not existed in the first place.

Unless people are urgently taught to rely on Feminism, gender-related limitations will continue. Nevertheless, little by little some unacceptable traditions in relation to gender have been changing. Women are no longer forced to be confined to their homes and take care of the children; men need not be the only breadwinners any more (the current economy does not permit a return to the old ways, anyway). Women can indeed choose their careers and feel satisfied enough by working outside the house. Most men are also glad of this arrangement since fathers are able to spend time with their children and abandon old prejudices. Some might still feel reluctant to accept change, concerned with the negative opinions from other people in their community. However, men are no longer 'lesser men' for staying at home: they can also proudly claim that it is a rewarding choice, their own choice.

The Feminist movement also wants to end with the idea that there are gendered jobs; that is to say, there is no point in maintaining clichés associated with femininity and masculinity as regards work. Work as a nurse or as a secretary, for instance, used to be regarded as a woman's job; work as a doctor or as a car mechanic, as a man's job. Not any more. These examples show that matters can be reversed in time, as people and customs change. Any respectable existent profession can be perfectly practised by both men and women, though, wage dissimilarities still mark a gendered difference.

Ideally, all the countless personal perspectives and identities should be accepted without excluding, marginalizing or downgrading others; yet, this is not the view of the people who reject Feminism. The movement cares about men as well as women and covers different important aspects for the wellbeing of society. The main danger against the solidarity that Feminism supports is the excessively competitive nature of the current economy, which forces workers to compete for jobs which each other, a competitiveness that harms women. Yet, if gender conventions persist, we will never reach the social consensus that gender equality demands.

Annabel Pàmies Mayoral, "What Worries Me about Gender is Dissatisfaction"

What worries me about gender is the fact that very commonly women are educated to satisfy and please others and, consequently, they do not focus so much on satisfying and pleasing themselves. I am particularly worried about how this affects women's sexual satisfaction and their attitude in sexual intercourse. Since the very first moment, we see how women have some sort of obligation regarding men which they must fulfil; an obligation which, if left unfulfilled, will cause their relationships to fail. The problem is that women are so focused on making their relationships work and their partners happy that they forget about themselves.

My grandmother, who is now 82, has been all her life caring about others and trying to satisfy everybody's needs. She has always told me that her childhood was not a happy one. When she was older, she wanted to become a secretary but her parents never allowed her because that was considered an improper job, something to be ashamed of. Nonetheless, she describes with beautiful words the time when she first married and how deeply in love she was with my grandfather. Sadly, he died when my grandmother was only 43. Five years later, she married the man who, for me, was my actual grandfather, as I never met her first husband.

However, she has always told me that at the beginning this was a sort of marriage of convenience for both of them; later, they learned to love each other very much but not in a passionate way. My step-grandfather died when my grandmother was 68. I feel as if my grandmother has been all her life working for others and trying

to satisfy others, always thinking about what others wanted but never about what she wanted. She says that she feels as if someone had stolen the years of her life, as if she had not lived them herself. Still nowadays, if she is not doing something for others she feels useless; she needs to cook for you and to treat you like a child because she feels useful doing that.

My mother's life has been totally different. My parents got divorced when I was 12, but the truth is that I have never seen them as a couple, as they were either fighting or ignoring each other. Two years after divorcing my father, my mother started a relationship with another man. After seven years in this relationship, he broke up with her because he had met another woman. My mother was really devastated and could not overcome the break-up for a long time. Later on, she met another man; they have now been together for two years and are still fine.

I am happy and proud of the evolution of my mother since she first divorced my father. First, she was really depressed and it was hard to cohabit with her, she was always angry and in a bad mood. I remember her telling me that she was not able to be alone, without anyone by her side. Then, little by little, she started getting better. One important thing that I would like to emphasize is that even though she has had two relationships after divorcing my father, she has always refused to cohabit with them. Now, when neither my brother nor I are living with her, she still prefers to live by herself. She says that she does not want to clean and cook for others as she did for my father. However, I do not know if that is something positive because she has become an independent woman or something negative because she does not believe that her partner could cook and clean as much as her. Maybe she is just afraid of being unable to cohabit with a man again and to end up with another failed relationship in her life. Nevertheless, what I really like about my mother is that she is a strong woman. My mother has always had a job, even though she could have chosen not to work. Since I was a child she has always told me not to be economically dependent on a man ever. I remember her encouraging me to study and to be hard-working, to be able to maintain myself in the future.

All in all, it is clear that there are immense difference between my mother's and my grandmother's expectations regarding their life and how it has influenced their sentimental relationships. As far as sexual satisfaction is concerned, there is also a huge difference between my mother and my grandmother, as well.

It still shocks me when my grandmother explains to me how she was a virgin before getting married and the importance of that condition at her time. For her, the wedding night was not a really pleasant one, as she says she suffered much and it took her many days to be able to "enjoy" sex. When I ask her about orgasms during her marriage, she tells me that she has had a few of them but she cannot find the words to describe the sensations or how she reached them. It was a taboo subject at that time and she never spoke about sex with anyone. She also tells me that she had a reduced libido, very often because of "headaches", and that sometimes she forced herself to undertake sexual activity in order to please her husband. Basically, when speaking about sex, my grandmother has not much to explain.

In contrast, my mother has much more sexual experience than my grandmother and she likes to talk about sex. She tells me that when she was with my father they did not have sex very commonly, usually because he did not want to. However, after divorcing my father, she has had very satisfactory sex. She told me that she got her first orgasm by masturbation, when she was very young, and that nowadays she easily reaches orgasm during sexual intercourse, many times. However, she is very clear in emphasizing that this is not because her partner is good at sex but because she knows how to reach orgasm and what to do.

Surprisingly or not, I am thirty-three years younger than my mother and yet it has been much harder for me to find out how to reach an orgasm and enjoy myself than apparently it was for her. When I started having sexual relationships I did not even know that women could also feel an orgasm. Once my partner finished, the sexual act finished too. The worst part of it is not that he did not care about my pleasure, but that I did not care nor even know that I could reach the same pleasure as him. I remember that during sex I was really scared about not being good at it and I just wanted him to enjoy himself. The orgasm was something I just was not aware of.

Later, when I was more or less 19, after having had several relationships, my mother asked me about orgasms. I was so ashamed that I even hesitated to discuss this matter with her and I just told her that I always reached orgasm. If a friend had told me she had had five orgasms during sexual intercourse I would also have said so. However, I started worrying about the matter, as I was not sure whether I had ever had an orgasm or not. Thus, I decided to visit a psychologist and tell him about my sexual experience. It was really disappointing, he just told me that every person enjoys sex in a different way and that I did not need to worry about it. From then on, I just pretended to reach orgasm and, sometimes, I even believed it myself.

My life changed in 2012, when I was 24 and single. One day, I forced myself to explore my body until I could find out what an orgasm was. I finally reached my first orgasm, on my own, and I felt really empowered and proud of myself. It might seem exaggerated but it really meant a huge change in my life, not only because of the fact itself, but because, in general, I started to find out what I really wanted in life. Later on, I realized that until you do not know yourself you cannot be truly happy with anyone or expect others to know what you really like. I do not feel ashamed of having reached my first orgasm at the age of 24, on the contrary, I feel fortunate, because if I had not tried I would not have known what it is like still nowadays. I do have many girl friends of my age who have never had an orgasm. First, I just thought that it was something that just happened to me and that I had some kind of problem but once I started to talk about sex more freely I was amazed by the quantity of girls that do not know what an orgasm is; I even wonder if my grandmother has ever had one.

In conclusion, what I am trying to say is that women are told to focus on so many things that usually it is too hard for them to focus on what they really want. Women from any generation have always had the same needs, however, they have been able, or not, to satisfy them depending on what the society of that time has

dictated. Still today girl magazines give you too many tips about how to please your partner in bed and too few about how to please yourself. This has to change.

Antònia Pascual Santandreu, “Making Choices, Enjoying Freedom: Women's Economic Independence”

Throughout the past decades women have been economically dependent on men as, traditionally, men were the ones who usually maintained their families; they were the breadwinners. Lately, however, society has evolved in a way that women do no need to be economically dependent any more. In fact, women have been fighting for their own rights in the last decades, and currently women are able not only to work, or own a house, but to be self-sufficient in all senses. Why should, then, some women choose to go back to those times when they would not be able to live by themselves and they would be forced to be dependent on men? In my opinion, there are many reasons why women should never depend on men economically.

Firstly, being economically independent means that women are free to make their own choices. They do not have to follow men's orders nor obey men's beliefs, they can create their own lifestyle. Women, thus, are free to save money if they choose and to spend the rest on their own wants and needs. Who said that women have to stay home and take care of the children? Working women are strong women. Women are in short more than able to work, to earn money and to maintain a family as much as a man.

Secondly, a situation in which a woman is economically dependent means that if the day comes when the relationship ends she will find herself unable to survive on her own. Love does not always last forever and women should be ready to face a situation in which they will be alone, without a man paying for their bills and their clothes. A relationship may seem perfect in the present, but nobody knows what will happen in twenty years' time. If a woman has been always economically dependent she will not be able to live by herself under any circumstance. Therefore, women should always work and earn money so they will be able to live on their own if anything happened to their husbands or partners, or if the relationship ended.

Finally, it might seem easier to have someone who is responsible for you. It sounds safer to know that a man will always be there to maintain you. However, it is not fair for the man to be in charge of everything by himself. A relationship does not imply that the man has to be responsible for everything; in fact, being in a relationship should involve sharing everything. That is, sharing love and happiness, but also money matters, responsibilities and commitment. In reverse-role situations, if a woman maintained a man, people would criticise them and even find the relationship scandalous. However, people accept as normal a situation in which the man pays for everything his couple needs.

On the basis of these arguments, it should be rare to find this situation of female dependence on an everyday basis. However, it is still today quite normal for women to be economically dependent. As an example, a friend of mine has been in a relationship with her boyfriend for over four years. He is seven years older than her so when they started living together she was very young, actually still attending high school. The question is that, since they started living together three years ago, he has been paying for everything. This means that with just one salary, he is paying for the flat they are both sharing, the food, the bills, the car's insurance, their pets' needs (both a cat and a dog) and also my friend's college tuition (because she is taking a BA degree now), her books, her other personal needs (tobacco, clothes, parties with friends) and much more.

What does this show? On the one hand, it shows that my friend is obviously economically dependent. She has always been. She has been parent-dependent for many years till she became boyfriend-dependent, economically speaking. Thus, she does not understand, although she has worked some summers (none since they started their relationship), the huge effort of earning money, and how frustrating it is to see your own money being wasted in a flicker by someone else. On the other hand, this situation also shows how unfair it is for her boyfriend to be in charge of everything with no help at all. I am sure that when he started his relationship with this girl he did not imagine that she would not help with the household expenses, and that she would start a degree that he would have to finance.

Next autumn they are going to get married and guess who is paying for the wedding expenses...? Indeed, it is difficult to say when this situation will come to an end. Do not misunderstand my words, I'm very happy for my friend, of course. They are very happy and the fact that this man is taking this care of her means that he is really in love with her. However, I would not be able to be in the situation in which I had to ask my boyfriend for money any time I wanted a coffee with a friend or to buy myself a treat. I would not be comfortable having my boyfriend pay rent for a flat we both would share, without contributing.

To sum up, it is true that every single relationship is different, and that two people can understand each other regardless of money. However, from my point of view, women should not be economically dependent. As I said before, it is not fair for a man to be in charge of everything. I think that relationships in general can only work if both do their part. On the other hand, women have been fighting against this situation for several decades, and now that we have improved it quite a lot, it is useless to go back and let men take control of the situation again. Women are now allowed to work, to study a degree, to have a career, to own a house, to choose their husband or to decide if they want to divorce. Let's then take advantage of these improvements.

I myself am looking forward to finding a job and to being able to afford my own flat, buy my own car, take care of myself and do whatever I want without asking for permission to my parents. The situation does not change just by replacing you parents with your boyfriend. Economic independence is much more than spending your own

money, it's about enjoying your freedom and making your own choices. Choices women were not able to make just a few decades ago.

Laura Ramos, "Feminism is not Really a Thing of the Past"

In my first year at university my professor asked in honour of 'International Women's Day' who would consider themselves feminists. I was ready to raise my hand, but stopped because of all 500 students in that class no one raised their hand. The professor, just as surprised as I was, asked then why no one would call themselves 'feminist'. A girl then answered that it was because Feminism was not needed anymore, it had become irrelevant, just like Women's Day. Her answer was heavily applauded but I could not help but disagree. However, shy and insecure as I was at that time I just shook my head quietly.

When I then looked around, I started to notice how marginalized gender issues had become, so much so that people have started to forget they actually do still exist. Feminism is considered to be a thing from the past, when women were locked up inside their homes and had no rights to vote. After all, we are not living in a patriarchal society anymore, right? However, if you start to think about it, I can only conclude we still do. A more subtle and less dominant version maybe, but a patriarchal one nonetheless. Therefore Feminism is not a thing of the past.

A first indication that the patriarchal society remains strong is the sexual objectification of women. Popular media nowadays chooses to reinforce this image of the woman as a sexual object. In print media and artwork men tend to be portrayed with an emphasis on the head and face and with greater facial detail, whereas women tend to be portrayed with an emphasis on the body (Frederickson & Roberts 1997: 175). This is becoming so apparent that women are no longer offended by the way their body is represented in advertisement. Studies confirm that young, educated women today are far less offended by the portrayal of women as sex objects in advertisement than women in past generations and this seems largely due to our culture (Zimmerman & Dahlberg 2008: 7). We are so used to seeing sexy women on a daily basis that women are not bothered by their presence any more; on the contrary, they support the idea that only perfect-looking women will succeed in life. This to me seems like a very dangerous involution, and a situation that does not get the attention it deserves.

This objectification not only affects the way women view themselves but also the way men view women. Daily, women get verbally harassed on the streets by men merely for being a woman. Instead of teaching society that reducing women down to being just a sexual object is wrong, we prefer to point our finger disapprovingly towards women with short skirts. We tell them not to dress sexily and not to walk alone at night, because this makes them an easy target for rape. This sends the

message that women are to blame for whatever 'accident' happens to them instead of rejecting and correcting the behaviour of those men assaulting women. Feminism tries to change the views on women's body and thus has a key role in the fight against women's objectification, which is turning into a silenced and marginal problem in our society.

Another reason why Feminism today remains relevant is the pay gap between the two sexes. Having equal employment opportunities does not necessarily mean men and women get equally paid as well. On the contrary, women often get paid less than men even though they perform the same job. This pay gap typically widens towards the top of the wage distribution, called the 'glass ceiling' effect (Arulampalam, Booth, Bryan 2007: 162). This pay gap is on average 16 per cent though in countries such as the US and UK the gap is at least 20 per cent for full-time and even higher for part-time employees. It is hard to justify this gap, knowing that women on average graduate with higher grades from higher studies. This makes them equally deserving of a good wage as men, however their gender stands in their way. There is no valid reason why a woman should be paid less than her male equal, not even if the difference is really small. An excuse often given is a woman's possible pregnancy and additional maternity leave, which makes them a less reliable employee. This can however barely count as a valid reason if you think about it. In these modern times there are women who do not possess this generally assumed wish for a child. Is it then fair that women are already judged on a life decision they have not made yet or might not even make?

Also in politics, women remain underrepresented in most Governments and women appointed Prime Minister, or other leading positions, are even scarcer. With women making such a big percentage of a nation's society it would seem normal they are also well represented in the Government; in reality, however, the average percentage of women participating in politics is a mere 20 per cent. Especially in Asian, Middle Eastern and African countries this percentage is particularly low, this is amongst other reasons due to their restricted access to higher education (Gelb, Palley 2009: 33). This restriction leaves women with a disadvantage, making it almost impossible for them to catch up with their male competitors. Even though many women in the West feel that they have the same rights and opportunities as men do, this is not the case for all women in the world, which makes Feminism still very much needed.

In conclusion I can say that my fellow student was wrong and that Feminism is definitely not a thing from the past, but rather a very important contemporary tool in creating the lacking world-wide equality between men and women as well as fighting the still dominant patriarchal society. Despite the fact that many women consider themselves to be equally as free and powerful as men, there are still a lot of signs that society treats women as objects. On top of that, in many parts of the world the patriarchal society is still present and very dominant, diminishing the equality between men and women drastically.

So, next time my professor asks who would consider themselves feminists, I will proudly raise my hand and stand my ground.

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Mònica Reina Martí, "The Real Meaning of the Word 'Feminism'"

For many people today, the word Feminism means the counterpart of 'male chauvinism' as it is understood that both words aim at empowering and favouring one of the sexes, leaving the other in a submissive and inferior position. The word Feminism is often discarded because it includes the root fem-, from female, and its detractors tend to think that it names, accordingly, an ideology that favours women over men. Therefore, many women do not want to be associated with this word and many men just think that it is simply not about them. Both men and women, though, should be aware of gender inequality and feel that it is about all of them, not only about women.

In its origins, back in the 19th century, the first wave of Feminism represented by the suffragettes raised women's consciousness about the many inequalities they demonstrated and demanded the same rights for men and women regarding property, marriage and suffrage. The current definition of Feminism can be borrowed from the speech by actress and UN Women ambassador Emma Watson: "For the record, Feminism by definition is: The belief that men and women should have equal rights and opportunities. It is the theory of the political, economic and social equality of the sexes" (*HeForShe Campaign Event*, 20 September 2014). The word Feminism, then, has never meant women's superiority over men. Nevertheless, and because this connotation exists, many people might think that we no longer need Feminism.

There are two tendencies in reacting against the word Feminism. One of them is based on the claim that equality between both sexes already exists and therefore we no longer need an ideology that defends equality. The other argument is that we do

not need Feminism because we should accept that we, men and women, are different and therefore equality is impossible to achieve. I personally refuse to accept either of them. I firmly believe that equality is possible to achieve in the same way we, as human beings, have been able to destroy other inequalities, not only in terms of sexism but also regarding racism and social class.

Unfortunately, we cannot yet say that total equality already exists; there is still no complete equality between races or social classes, or sexes. Men and women are born to find themselves surrounded by a series of expectations and stereotypes about who they should be and how they should act. As a woman, you are expected to be feminine and as a man, you are expected to be masculine. Even though masculinity and femininity have been proved to be social constructs and, therefore, changeable, many people are still confused and believe they are natural and somehow biological.

Since our childhood, we are unconsciously surrounded by all these stereotypes that will stay in our minds and become our reality, through our parents, the media, education... For instance, boys are most likely encouraged to play sports or to like cars whereas girls are encouraged to like baby dolls or quiet activities such as reading or drawing. And if a young girl happens to like football or a boy happens to like dolls, they are shamed for that and insulted with pejorative terms such as 'tomboy' or 'sissy'. Everything related to women is considered shameful: the colour pink, dresses, make up, dolls.... How come a colour can be used to question a boy's masculinity? Why is this masculinity something to preserve intact? The answer is that men are under pressure, too. Hopefully, we are distancing ourselves a bit more from those stereotypes: boys are now allowed to cry, be afraid and express their feelings as much as girls are but still there are many things to change. This proves that men also suffer from sexism; they are also expected to act in certain ways as 'men'.

The world of the professions is also affected by sexism. Women are still paid less than men and less valued in some professions. Some jobs are gendered, for example, being a kindergarten or a primary school teacher is believed to be exclusive of women because women, as potential mothers, are supposed to be better at nurturing children than men. In this case, a woman would be better considered for the position than a man.

Also during adolescence and adulthood, girls and women's bodies are objectified as sexual objects. The fact is that many boys and men think they have the right to comment on girls' and women's appearance; harassment on the street is certainly disturbing. In cases of rape, the guilt of the rapist is questioned depending on the attitude of the victim: was she wearing provocative clothes? Was she flirting with him in the first place? This shows how men are excused and privileged in society.

For all these reasons we need Feminism.

The differences we make since childhood between boys and girls become fundamental in men and women who grow up to believe that they are inevitably different and completely opposite. How could coexistence work then? I think we

should leave the differences aside and focus on our similarities, that we are all human beings.

If we claim that we do not need Feminism, if we reject this word, not only the word itself but also the ideals it represents will eventually disappear. There is not any equivalent synonym, except perhaps 'gender equality', if you prefer using an alternative. Nevertheless, surely the main problem is that Feminism is not taught within the History subjects in schools. If we taught what the word Feminism truly means there would not be so much confusion and hesitation around this word. On the contrary, if the word itself is avoided, as a consequence its real meaning, the idea that men and women are equal, will also be avoided. That is why we need Feminism.

José Luis Salguero, "Stereotyping Gender Identity (for Ever?)"

Talking about gender today can be often quite difficult. We know that anatomically there are two genders, male and female. However, if we talk in a more precise physical, psychological or even social way there can be many more. It is even more complex to talk about the sexual inclinations or identities that these two anatomic genders can present. There are heterosexuals, homosexuals (gays and lesbians), bisexuals, transsexuals, etc., a variety of labels that questions the gender binary I mentioned. Yet, when discussing all those genders, from a heterosexual man or woman all the way to a transsexual (born man or woman) the stereotypes still prevail and will always do so. This essay is about those stereotypes that human beings push onto each other and about how they affect negatively the equality that Gender Studies is trying to achieve.

Beginning with heterosexuals, the roles of men and women have been historically fixed until very recently: the man has been the breadwinner, the woman the home-making mother. Unfortunately, the society in which we live is still patriarchal in nature; therefore, in spite of all the efforts made by Feminism, these roles still exist. Thus, women find themselves with jobs that are not equally paid, and face problems to reach high-ranking positions because they are forced to choose between maternity and their professional lives. Or simply because certain jobs are only given to men: in Argentina's Navy, for example, women sailors cannot apply for a position in a submarine because the space cannot be adapted to their needs (such as using separate bathrooms...). Regarding sex, the double standard praising the womanizer and punishing the whore persists. If a man has many sexual partners he is usually celebrated, whilst a woman with sexual experience is called the many names that are synonyms of 'prostitute'. Finally, we cannot forget that the worst insult that a heterosexual man can receive is that he is a 'girl' or 'effeminate', again presenting women as something shameful.

As far as homosexuals are concerned, there are very many examples of stereotypes for both gays and lesbians. Possibly the most common one is that in a homosexual couple there is always a 'butch' representing the 'manly' part of the relationship and a 'femme' that would act the feminine part. There is also a widespread impression that *all* homosexuals are promiscuous or at least more than heterosexuals. Thankfully, these days the link between homosexuality, especially in gays, and pederasty is disappearing. Yet, other prejudices persist. For most gay sportsmen coming out is still seen as a major event since contact sports such as basketball or (American) football are supposed to be 'masculine' and gay men are not thought to be 'manly enough' (they also problematise what 'contact' means).

Next we find bisexuals. To label someone 'bisexual' is problematic because unless a person openly declares his/her bisexuality, most people are very much confused about where homosexuality/heterosexuality ends and bisexuality begins. Homosexuals, as I noted, are considered to be too promiscuous; a person who openly accepts his/her attraction for both men and women can be seen from a narrow-minded perspective as just intolerably promiscuous. As this orientation is so open, people identifying with bisexuality suffer from a combination of all the stereotypes affecting both heterosexuals and homosexuals.

Since I have no room to discuss all the possible gendered identities here, I'll focus next on transsexuals and/or transgendered individuals. These persons are possibly the ones that suffer most because of the negative stereotypes and, even worse, the personal discrimination. This applies indistinctively to men dressed as or becoming women and to women dressed as or becoming men. They are, to put it harshly, the queers among the queers. It has become quite fashionable in recent years for many night clubs to employ drag queens as go-go dancers or public relations (less frequently drag kings); they are exploited as spectacle, as if they were some kind of freak show, not really employed to show genuine acceptance of difference. It often seems to me that the only way a transsexual or a transgendered person whose appearance disrupts socially-accepted gender conventions can earn a living and enjoy life the way s/he decides is by becoming a media celebrity.

In conclusion human beings use too many gender stereotypes and what worries me most is that I cannot see a near future without them. Perhaps in a far away future human evolution will reach a point when we will all be equals both anatomically and mentally. Until then, Gender Studies will have to open those minds so narrowly closed and close the gaps among the different branches of the discipline, in order to achieve the goal all of them defend, which is not other than equality.

Teodora Toma, "Feminism: An Endangered Species?"

Being a twenty-something year old female in 2014 in a Western society with all the inherent privileges (and lack thereof) may lead one to take these for granted and to believe the situation has always been the same, though our elders never miss the chance to point out all the improvements we benefit from that they lacked. But one might wrongly tend to put these improvements down to progress. However, on a general level, humankind is not always and not necessarily marching towards progress nor will this ideal progress bring about improvements for all citizens, whether they are male, female, Africans, Jews, Roma, etc.

The importance of the achievements of Feminism in the past is seldom stressed. Women have gradually gained their right to education and work (to being financially independent), as well as the right to decide upon their own body, destiny and career, up to an extent. I think that nowadays too many women are not sufficiently aware of the difference Feminism has made and how privileged they are. For them it is just the status quo, which has always been the same or that cannot be altered, so they just take it for granted.

Over the years Feminism has undergone various metamorphoses. After reaching a peak and being in the spotlight in the early 20th century and then again in the 1960s and 1970s, it has gradually fallen into some kind of standstill. I think this is the ultimate challenge Feminism must face nowadays, along with its main goal, achieving gender equality. In my view, the problem is that apart from the real lack of equal rights for men and women, Feminism must face people's ignorance, unawareness and the rejection that derives from the former.

It is this partial, apparent freedom which blinds many men and women and leads them to think that Feminism has already done its part and there is nothing it can contribute to everyone's life, not to mention the various stereotypes about Feminism and feminists. Just because our situation as women is a bit better now than a hundred years ago, in comparison to the traditional hegemonic patriarchal model then predominant, does not mean there are not issues that can be improved.

We need Feminism because there are still many inequalities at all levels of society. Feminism is still needed to help make a change in many people's mentality, even though at an institutional level it has imposed its demands. And this is probably yet the most important and difficult battle Feminism must fight. It is not enough that women can hold leading positions in business companies if there is still a majority of people who believe they are not skilled to do so or, simply put, that their place is in the kitchen. We need Feminism because women and men are still unaware of what Feminism is and what it has fought for, hence the denial of its importance. Moreover, we need gender equality to make sure the privileges we have gained are maintained

and expanded, not only for those who already benefit from them, but also for the citizens who are still struggling with inequalities.

Feminism is necessary because sexism still operates at all levels of society in ways people are unaware of. Many men, not to say most men, are unaware of the fact that the patriarchal model of society we live in affects them in the same negative ways it affects women. There are still many forces which impose beliefs, values, behaviours upon us, which tell us what our place in society is, and we accept them. Men can suffer, for example, from the pressure to be tall and muscular, to push down emotions like fear and pain, to never cry and be vulnerable, to be into sports and have 'manly' habits or to prove their masculinity through violence or sex. Feminism can make a change in the fight against compulsory stereotypes which are harmful to both men and women.

Another reason why society needs Feminism is because it can help improve relationships and networks between and among women. In a patriarchal and capitalist society like ours girls are taught to compete with each other to be better wives, better mothers, to have better bodies, prettier faces, to be (or look) younger, all these to attract the attention of the 'right guy'.

Just because women are apparently free to express themselves, whether through the make-up they wear or their opinions on the Internet, this does not perforce mean that they really have a voice in society and that their needs and rights are being covered. This limited, controlled freedom should actually make them feel outraged. Because even if a girl is free to choose to wear a mini skirt or to post a photo of her nude torso on the Internet, her choices will be judged or even condemned in a way quite different than those of a man. Unfortunately it is not unlikely for a girl to be defamed or objectified for showing her uncovered bosom, although we have enjoyed male nudes for centuries in art and in ordinary life situations, like on the beach. And it is this kind of reactions women should rebel and fight against. It is not specifically the duty of Feminism to convince, force or convert people, but it should indeed help both men and women to become aware of their condition and their position in the world.

Feminism is a part of our identity the same way history and life experience are. By means of which we are not fully conscious about, it has shaped the way we construct ourselves as individuals and as citizens in society. It has given a voice to those silenced and marginalized by the hegemonic power, and has helped improve the life of millions by making society a better place not for the privileged few, but for a larger number of citizens. For all these reasons, and for the help it can bring to face the challenges of the future, we need Feminism.

Sandra Tubau Suárez, “Feminism: Against the Objectification of Women”

The first thing I did before writing this essay was looking up the Internet, just for inspiration. There are so many issues regarding gender and sexuality and so many problems that I really did not know what to write about. Wondering where I could get the information and inspiration I needed, I logged into Tumblr and, instead of checking different tags, I went straight for ‘Feminism’. After a very short time, I was indignant and outraged, mainly because of the massive bubble of ignorance people live in.

Many people ignore or miss out the purpose of Feminism, calling themselves ‘egalitarian’ because for them Feminism is about reversing roles; yet, there are also some that call themselves ‘feminist’ and do support this reversal of roles, so they also miss the point. Then there are those shaming Feminism for being only concerned with women’s issues and problems and disregarding men’s, claiming that there are male victims of domestic violence and rape who are ignored or even laughed at—ignoring that this is all the effect of our patriarchal social history. That is why we need Feminism, for the equality of rights among men and women. It is not women against men, but women and men against (patriarchal) society.

Very soon I ended up in the terrible ‘Rape Culture’ tag, and I say terrible because it is something I am both upset and concerned about. I have read about it before and every time it shocks me how far the objectification of women goes and how nothing is done about it. More so, it is enforced, and that is why it becomes so shocking and dreadful. According to Wikipedia, ‘rape culture’ is “a concept that examines a culture in which rape is pervasive and normalized due to societal attitudes about gender and sexuality”. One of the behaviours that provokes this horror is objectification, and more specifically sexual objectification, which at the same time plays a fundamental role in gender inequality. Sexual objectification reduces women’s worth to that of an object of pleasure for men’s enjoyment; women are exposed to this from a very young age, they are influenced by the established gender roles, which are both the cause and the consequences of sexual objectification.

The first example of gendered regulations affecting girls that comes to mind is the school dress code. The cases I am most familiar with are the ones in the United States, where strict dress codes are applied in public schools. I am not talking about wearing hats or dying your hair green but about girls being banned from wearing certain types of clothes and being shamed for it: leggings, short shorts or shirts that might reveal the bra straps are regarded as unacceptable attire. The reason behind it is that they ‘distract boys’. These restrictive dress codes apply to boys too, but while they get warnings when they break them, girls are told to go home and change or are even expelled. There are testimonies of girls who have been shamed for their clothes, with inspections being carried out in the middle of a corridor, and of girls who were told that their outfits—actually, their bodies—are a disturbance for boys and male teachers,

as they can cause them to have 'thoughts'. A few months ago, a teen girl was kicked out of her prom dance because her dress was making the male chaperones 'uncomfortable'. Girls—not just women, but also young girls—are sexualized, they are being told that their bodies are shameful. This brings to my mind the powerful speech on Feminism by Chimanda Ngozi Adichie:

We teach girls shame. Close your legs, cover yourself. We make them feel as though being born female they're guilty of something. And so, girls grow up to be women who cannot say they have desire. They grow up to be women who silence themselves. They grow up to be women who cannot say what they truly think.

Instead of teaching boys, future men, to respect girls and women, these dress codes teach girls shame and that their bodies are to blame; at the same time, the coded restrictions tell both boys and girls that men are not to blame for their actions. Also, when students break dress codes, as I noted the boys are just given a warning while the girls are directly sent home. This prioritizes the right of the boys to learn over the girls' own right, as if boys had the right to an education without external distractions but not the girls.

Women are told that they and their bodies are to blame, and most of them will really believe that. If they are hooted, catcalled or groped in the street, they will think it is their fault for wearing certain clothes or for walking in a certain way, because that is what society has told them since they were little girls. That is what they have been taught. On the other hand, men will think that it is acceptable to catcall and harass women (because catcalling is street harassment), without any consideration for their thoughts, feelings or comfort, and degrading them to a mere object for others (men) to look at. This is perfectly summarized in Germaine Greer's article "Guilt Poisons Women" (2013):

Women feel more guilt than men, not because of some weird chromosomal issue but because they have a history of being blamed for other people's behaviour. You get hit, you must have annoyed someone; you get raped, you must have excited someone; your kid is a junkie, you must have brought him up wrong.

When women are raped, society blames them. Society meaning the media, the authorities, acquaintances and even other women. When something that dreadful happens to them, they are faced with questions such as "what were you wearing?" or "why were you walking alone?", in what is known as 'victim blaming'. Then, as said before, the pressure of society will make them think that it really was their fault.

That is why we need Feminism, to stop the objectification of women, so they are treated with respect and not as something for others to stare at and enjoy. This sexual objectification that does not let women walk on the street without being catcalled or whistled at, and that might even provoke a sense of fear when walking alone. To achieve not only equality but also respect, we need Feminism.

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Alicia Vázquez Sánchez, "We NEED Feminism"

When I was a little girl, my mother decided to avoid the stereotypical toys for girls. She dressed me in pink and flowers because she liked it, but when it came to Christmas and birthday presents she would buy me dolls but also fire engines, trains, building blocks, and other toys addressed, rather, to boys. It did not work: I chose Barbies, Disney princesses, and I liked the pinkest, glitteriest, girliest things in the stores. Five years later my brother was born. As he grew up, my parents did not try to alter stereotypes as they did with me: he got cars, action men, a huge remote controlled crane. However, most of the time he wanted to play with my Barbie dolls (*and* his Action Men, which I did not like because they were not as handsome as Ken) or to dress up in my clothes. He loved to wear my skirts and princess dresses and to dance ballet with me. I think all these is important because many years later, my 20-year-old brother is astonishingly sexist, while I try desperately not to be so.

I think I was 9 or 10-years-old when I discovered the Spice Girls. I was obsessed and I read magazines and knew all their songs. It was then when I learnt the words 'Girl Power'. I understood that girls did not need boys and were perfectly fine without them. This was followed by that period when I only dressed in blue and/or denim and declared all the boys were stupid. This is funny because a couple of years later, when I became a teenager, boys were almost everything I could think about.

Being a teenager opened my eyes about sexism. I had new responsibilities, and I began to find out that they were more similar to the things my mother did than to the things my father did. I noticed things I had not noticed before, for instance that my dad would leave the table and sit in the couch without putting his plate in the dishwasher, expecting my mother or me to do it. I remember the first day I complained, and told him he had hands and legs and he could put his plate and cutlery in the dishwasher, and he said, apparently joking, that "with two women in the house I don't have to do these kind of things". I was very hurt because I understood that he did not expect my mother to do things because she was 'his wife', but because she was a woman, and now I was one, too. Also I was very ashamed because I had also been expecting my mother to do those things, or assuming that they were what she had to do for being a mother: I had been sexist myself.

Realizing there were differences between what boys and girls were supposed to do or how they were supposed to behave was life-changing. I began saying things like "if boys can do it I can do it", or "if I was a boy you would let me do that". I was very

proud when I behave like that, because I was not like those tomboy girls, I decided which 'girl things'—like buying pink skirts or loving romantic comedies—and which 'boy things'—like dating and having sex with many different people without feeling dirty—I wanted to do. And, of course, I never put my father or my brother's plate in the dishwasher again.

To get some background, my mother is a teacher in a school for children with special needs. She leaves at 7:30 in the morning and gets home approximately at 7 in the evening. Before the divorce my father used to work in a pasta factory. He left at 22:00 and got home at 6:00 in the morning. My mother spent all day working, my father all night, so the one who took care of my brother and me was our father. He would pick us up from school, warm up the meal my mom had prepared the night before, drive us back to school, and later pick us up again. He was a good, loving father; he did not sleep much so that he could look after us. However there was this feeling—a feeling I did not get until I was a teenager, as I said—that doing all this prevented him from doing something else.

My mother would work all day, and then get home and cook that night's and the following day's meals, clean the house, look after us, see if we had done our homework, force us to study, and go to sleep really late so she could have some time for herself at the end of the day. And she was supposed to do all that because she was a woman, she was a wife. But of course it was better that in other households: at least my father cooked, sometimes, and he looked after us, and worried about us, and was involved in school activities, and cared. He would repeat that every time my mother complained. So I guess I grew up in a sexist environment, but it was the normal situation in a 1990s household, so you really could not realize there were problems unless you were quite critical and minimally mature, which I was not.

About sexism, I have always focused on women, I had never considered men as victims of sexism until some years ago, and of course the main woman in my life is my mother. My mother is the eldest daughter of immigrants from Andalusia and Castile-La Mancha. My grandfather came to Catalonia because of the Civil War, and my grandmother came looking for a job. She had been working as a house-maid from a very early age and became a house-wife when she got married. My grandfather was a car body worker, and he would later become the owner of the repair body shop he worked in. My grandmother worried about cleaning the house and looking after their three daughters, while my grandfather was the classic breadwinner. I have never understood why somebody would want to be a housewife, but when I asked my mother she said this made my grandmother happy. She says my grandfather never asked her to do any of the housework; she herself needed the house to be spotless, wanted to cook, chose to be a perfect housewife.

Actually I have found out that my grandmother was the sexist member of the couple. Despite belonging to a working-class family with no university graduates, my mother loved studying and decided she wanted to be a psychologist. When she told her own mother, her answer was "Why would you want to go to university? To get a better job? You'll get married and have to quit, anyway. It's a waste of time". These

words only made my mother work harder. The same year she took her degree she got married... with the neighbours whispering behind her back because she was already 23 and all of their own daughters of the same age already had children. My mother, in contrast, always had my grandfather's support. It is funny to see that her sisters, who preferred their mother's company, did not want to study: one is a former hairdresser and the other one a baker. I have always known that I want to be like my mother: I want to get married and have children, but I also want to have a university degree and a nice job. I cannot say how proud I am to say that, after my parents' divorce, we have been living mostly off my mother's earnings.

Nevertheless, my mother, just as myself, is a result of her time and her culture. We have discussed sexism many times, and even though she is more open-minded than the people in her neighbourhood, or even people her age in general, there are some things that we do not agree on. For instance, I remember when I was 19, she asked me not to say how many boyfriends I've had because people would think I was the kind of girl that I was not. I got very mad, of course, and told her that if I were my brother it would be okay for me to boast—and she agreed. She said that this is how society works, and that even if she does not like it, as my mother she did not want me to get hurt. My answer was that many women got hurt fighting so we can vote, so we can have decent jobs, so things like raping are illegal, so we can have a saying on who we marry, or if we WANT to marry. I told her that I was as much a person as any boy, and that if I wanted to date or have sex with a thousand boys that would not make me a slut. She finished the conversation granting that I was right, but that she did not want her daughter to get hurt for anybody else's sake. By the way, I never got hurt because of this; of course some people tried, but I did not care. At the end of the day what counts is how much you let other people affect you.

Maybe it was because of that conversation but what has always obsessed me most about sexism are heterosexual relationships. As I have said, I dated many boys and my family did have many things to say about that. Yet the truth is that I have been happy like that, I have always done what I felt like doing, and I never forced myself into being with someone I was not comfortable with. I have a cousin who is ten months younger than me, and she has had two really long relationships, the first of them beginning when she was only 12 years old. She has been with her current boyfriend for four or five years now, and she has been thinking of leaving him for more than half that time. She has made fun of my boyfriend list many times, but if I have such a list this is because I've never been afraid of ending a relationship when I was not comfortable, while she, at the age of 24, told me that she is not leaving her current boyfriend because she does not want to be alone.

This is one of the things that most horrifies me about sexism. Maybe today the 'spinster' is not a type as relevant as it used to be, but there is still this idea that in order to be happy a girl needs a boyfriend. When you are young, your success is measured according to whether you have a boyfriend or not; for boys success is about having sex, not having a girlfriend. So girls have this idea that in order to be complete and happy they need a man, who has to be handsome and have the ability of taking

care of them. This idea leads them to endure impossible situations in order to keep their 'man' by their side.

Our culture keeps diminishing women's self-esteem continuously: we need to be beautiful as a model to be successful, we need a man to take care of us to be safe, a proper wife is the one who sacrifices herself for the household, and one that is sexually active in the correct measure: enough not to be frigid, but not as much as to be considered a slut. Women's behaviour is supposed to be built around everybody else's opinion, we are to be constantly observed and judged. Yes, this happens to men, too. But to women this happens at a level in which their personality and will have to be eradicated in order to serve or satisfy the other.

I think we need Feminism because inequality can be found everywhere. I think we need Feminism because we are so used to our sexist culture, that we cannot even identify sexism most of the time. I think we need Feminism because I want my children to be raised in a way that they understand that they have a personality and a will of their own which is as valuable as everybody else's, without distinction for being a girl or a boy. I think we need Feminism because most of my boyfriends told *me* about their problems and feelings, as they thought that if they told their male friends they would laugh at them. I think we need Feminism because if I have a daughter I want her to be free to speak freely about how many boys she has slept with, and if I have a son I want him to understand that women are not just beings he can have sex with, but people just like him, with the same rights, intellectual level and feelings. I think we need Feminism because my brother keeps calling girls 'guarrillas' as if it were a normal thing. I think we need Feminism because most women still need to understand that they can be happy without a partner, that break-ups are not the end of the world, that if you are not comfortable you can leave, that if he hits you he does not love you, that if you do not feel safe you **MUST** leave. I think we need Feminism because I could fill many more pages with reasons why we need Feminism (as long as there are websites called, oh yes, 'Women Against Feminism').

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CONTRIBUTORS

All contributors to this volume are fourth year students of the 'Grau en Estudis Anglesos' (four-year BA in 'English Studies') offered by the Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona.

1. Arévalo Hidalgo, Jessica
2. Baró González, Jana
3. Blanch Serrat, Francesca
4. Calvo Zafra, Laura
5. Campos Arjona, Rubén
6. Cordón Sales, Maria
7. Delgado Ordás, Álvaro
8. Díaz Sánchez, Màxim
9. Duarte Montávez, Tania
10. Gallart Vidal, Maria
11. García Gelabert, Ricard
12. Giner Martínez, Laura
13. González Godina, Susana
14. González Varo, Cristina
15. Guzmán Prieto, Marta
16. Kidd, Susan
17. Laurie, Alexandra
18. López Lamiel, Laura
19. López Salvans, Joan
20. Martín Flores, Albert
21. Mas, Claudia
22. Montaña Tena, Laura
23. Munné Torra, Laia
24. Padilla, Jenifer
25. Pàmies Mayoral, Annabel
26. Pascual Santandreu, Antònia
27. Ramos, Laura
28. Reina Martí, Mònica
29. Salguero, José Luis
30. Toma , Teodora
31. Tubau Suárez, Sandra
32. Vázquez Sánchez, Alicia