

Report by Abi: Drawing the fine line between the acceptable and unacceptable

On Friday there was a guest speaker who spoke to the year 13s about the idea that feminism no longer needs to exist. She spoke about issues such as rape, hate crime and equal rights towards men and women. Her views towards these areas were incredibly strong and although I would not consider myself a feminist, I (as well as many others) had issues about the message she was portraying.

She expressed how she did not agree that the term 'survivors' should be associated with women who have been raped. I strongly oppose this view, as many women who have been raped have also been killed in the process and many women who were not killed have the right to suffer post-traumatic stress or anxiety issues as an act such as rape should not be one that is overlooked. By the same token, men who suffered post-traumatic stress after war should not be expected to dismiss their anxieties from their trauma. No person should be allowed to take away the comfort of feeling comfortable in your own skin or take away your sense of security when walking to the shop to get so much as a carton of milk.

She expressed how the individual should be able to get over the situation, however a more appropriate comment would be that the individual should be able to move on from the situation in their own time, and in their own way.

Although this issue may not be as serious as terrorist attacks or acid attacks, as expressed by the speaker, it should definitely not be one that should be thought of as acceptable. The guest speaker also spoke about issues such as sexist jokes as well as physical 'jokes' such as a man touching a woman should be viewed as normal. I do agree that in the correct environment and with people who you are comfortable that this would be seen as not being a big deal, and would simply be considered harmless flirting. However, it becomes harmful when women do not feel comfortable with the behaviour of a man. A man should not be able to believe he has the control of invading a woman's body if she has not given signs that she is comfortable. She argued the point that it is an expression of attraction; I believe this up to a point, however others would more likely believe it is a way for a man to gain a sense of control. As a parent, would you feel comfortable if your daughter came home telling you how a strange man had been grabbing her on her way home?

Talking to the year 13s, both male and female conveyed the view that from her talk sexual harassment could easily be laughed off; speaking to a young age group who are at an impressionable stage could take her views the wrong way, with boys seeing it as acceptable to invade a woman's personal space but also teaching girls that that is acceptable.

I understand that there are many different views on this topic however, as I expressed before I am not a feminist but I am still affected by these issues as, I am sure, many others are. I do not disregard all of what our guest speaker was saying and I do agree that the fear of being raped should not control our lives, and we should also not see all men as predators, since they are simply not. We should not be constantly cautious about the line that draws the acceptable from the unacceptable, as it is quite hard to divide. However, we should be aware of others' feelings and learn to read how people want to be treated. The movement of equality between men and women has massively improved over the years, and I can say that I personally do not feel worth any less than a man.

Report by Taran

The talk last Friday was controversial, no matter your stance on what was said. However, though it may have been disputable, I am going to talk about how some of it was good and eye-opening and how some of it may have been a bit abrasive. I will discuss the topics of whether feminism is still relevant in the Western world today and the idea of people being too easily offended.

Firstly, the speaker talked about whether feminism is still relevant in the Western world today. She was quite certain that feminism was now redundant in the West and how it is now not about women's rights. On this I agree. This is because feminism has achieved all that is possible when it comes to women's rights (I will discuss abortion later). One big argument that feminism thinks is still around is the gender pay gap. However, this can be categorically disproved. The speaker highlighted this with two points; firstly it is illegal to pay a person less based on their gender. This has been the case since 1970 with the Equal Pay Act. Secondly, if it were legal to pay a women less than a man, why aren't there more women in employment? This would surely be the case if gender-based pay discrimination was allowed, there would be many more women in employment and far more men unemployed. Furthermore, there is a difference between unequal pay and being paid less for the same work. On average, women are more likely to choose lower paying jobs than their male counterparts because they prefer it. On average, women choose lower hours than their male counterparts because they prefer it as a lifestyle. On average, women aren't assertive enough when asking for a pay rise. Notice how I say 'on average' as these are for the majority as there are some women out there who do not fit these trends. Another reason for the pay gap is because women have to take time of work for childcare. This has to happen to protect the woman and her baby's health. This leads into women taking more part-time and lower paying jobs as the UK has the highest childcare prices in the world, all of which was touched upon by the speaker.

Secondly in regards to feminism, they say they want true equality to a man, but do they really? By having a movement called feminism, it inherently suggests it is in favour of one gender, excluding the other. Back when 1st and 2nd wave feminism were around, this was a fair title but today, it is not. Feminism's dictionary definition is the 'advocacy of women's rights on the ground of the equality of the sexes'. This might imply that feminism does care a bit about men. Let's not forget the suffragettes got men the vote as well as women (not all men could vote in the early 20th century but the suffragettes changed this), but this is not the case. Male suicide rates are through the roof, as men are 3 times more likely to take their own life than a woman, 84 men take their life a week and 75% of all suicides in the UK were by men (source the Samaritans). These figures are shocking and should be stopped, but feminism never discusses this. Do you ever hear a feminist talk about how men are far more likely to be assaulted or murdered?, with 433 male victims of homicide alone to fewer than 200 for women (source ONS). The list of inequalities that men face compared to a woman is endless, but never talked about by feminism.

Lastly on feminism, I do not believe they truly try and further the rights of women across the world. This is because of the lack of campaigning of women's rights in Muslim countries. Again, the speaker talked about this and her points were incredibly valid. Under Sharia law, a woman is effectively the property of her husband. Female genital mutilation is abhorrent and must be abolished, but in some Islamic countries, it is legal and thought of as good. Even some British Muslim girls get sent away from the UK for this practise to happen, yet a feminist will never talk about it. Whether feminism is too afraid of offending or not being politically correct, they are letting countless atrocities go unaccounted with their lack of coverage on this issue. If feminism wanted to, they could make this issue go to the front pages, I mean just look at #MeToo.

To conclude these 3 points, I do believe feminism is redundant in the Western world. Its purpose has been served and it has run its course. However, I do believe a reformed feminism is needed in Islamic and third world countries where women and genuinely being held back.

Another thing the speaker discussed was whether people are too easily offended these days. And she vehemently supported this idea. I too would agree with her. Being offended is an easy way out. Instead of debating the point, having open dialogue to try and find middle ground or something to agree on, so many people now are content with simply getting offended. This does not help as real offensive behaviours are harder to detect as so many people are getting offended. This may be a slight diversion, but still relevant. The speaker talked about sexual assault and what it is today. This I believe to be incredibly similar to offense today. The speaker talked about how some are trying to make wolf whistling a crime and how a touch on the knee is conflated to the level of rape or genuine sexual assault. Wolf whistling is not a crime and I hope it never becomes classified as a crime. I believe this because wolf whistling is just a harmless act. In the past, wolf whistling was seen as a way for a man to compliment a woman, but today, the easily offended have stigmatised it and made it into a borderline punishable offence. Secondly, the conflation of a touch of the knee to rape or something on that level is simply ludicrous. To assume that an act such as this is as bad as rape should be frowned upon as it dilutes genuine cases of sexual assault. This is because when a woman says they have been sexually assaulted but it only turns out to be a touch of the knee, it turns into a scenario like the boy who cried wolf, people just stop believing. I think this is incredibly dangerous as it pushes genuine sexual assault under the radar as we're too concerned with instances like this. I can concur that a touch of the knee of wolf whistling may be unpleasant, but women are strong enough to get on with it or stand up to the person doing it (man or woman). Even if they are scared of doing so, in today's society, most people would back the subject of unwanted attention and deal with it in an appropriate manner. It shouldn't be put into the same category as sexual assault as it simply is not the same.

Overall, I think the speaker who came in gave some very eye-opening points of discussion. I didn't agree with everything she said (her points about rape victims not being survivors and rather being raped than stabbed) but unlike the people I have discussed in this piece, I am able to get over it and discuss it through reasoned debate and rationale, not resorting to offense as there is no need.

Report by Sasha

It has been argued by many that social media can often lead to an echo chamber effect, where the views that you agree with are echoed by those around you, and there is no exposure to differing opinions. To counter this effect, a speaker known for her controversial opinions, Ceri Dingle, was invited to our tutorial last Friday to explain why she thinks that women's equality has already been achieved. Her opening suggestion was that women "have it better" now than they have ever had it before; in the 1920s, for example, women faced much more systematic inequality. Although this is true, this logic could be applied to almost any period in history; in the 1920s women had it better than they did in the middle-ages, but that doesn't mean that there isn't room for improvement. The core of Dingle's argument throughout her talk is that, however bad we think things are, someone out there is experiencing worse. Women in developing countries struggle far more with inequality than in the west, and it is important to acknowledge the privilege that we have in the UK, a place that is considerably more equal than many other countries. Despite this, I believe that we should be able to campaign for the issues that still affect us, such as catcalling and sexual harassment. Dingle acknowledged these problems but preached having resilience towards them. This may be an

important quality, but it also implies that we should simply 'put up' with these experiences, when nobody deserves to be made to feel uncomfortable or intimidated by a member of the opposite sex in the first place. At times it appeared as though Dingle was saying provocative things simply to provoke a reaction, a growing trend in an increasingly heated political climate. Everyone has the right to express their viewpoints, but it seems as though we live in a time where this is happening less respectfully, as evidenced at points during the talk.