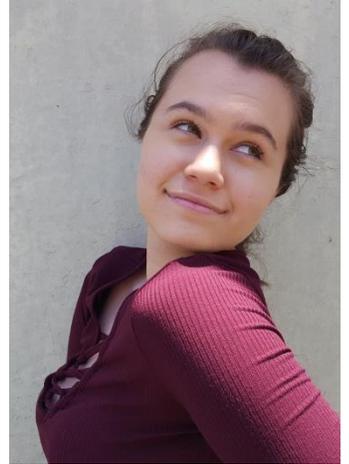


From Fear to Feminism

By Megan Keating

Megan Keating, 15, was born in Fort Lauderdale, Florida and lived there until she was 20 months old. She moved from there to Port Charlotte and then Punta Gorda in 5th grade while continuing her schooling at Good Shepherd Day School, the school she attended for 13 years. She is currently dual-enrolled at Florida SouthWestern Collegiate High and will continue her high school and early college career there. In her freshman year, Megan became involved with her first boyfriend who ended up being nothing like she thought. In her essay, Megan will explain how this boyfriend pushed her from being naïve and not recognizing her own worth, to a feminist.



I

was not always a feminist. I used to be quite passive about women's rights and my beliefs of what equalities they should have. Feminist was not a word I classified myself as; I saw myself as fair, but never a feminist. Feminism always seemed to be a laughing-stock or something that involved angry women screaming at their old boyfriends for breaking their hearts. Feminism was never something I even thought about because I never thought I needed it. It was not until after dating my past boyfriend that I realized how much of a feminist I truly am.

I still remember laying on my back on top of my friends bed looking at the ceiling as she asked me “do you love him?” I remember answering yes, thinking that the epiphany of love hit me and I was so smart for realizing how ‘in-love’ I was. This, of course, was at the time when he cursed me out and wouldn’t talk to me for about six months. I still look back on this night and wonder what possessed me to say I was in love with him, especially when I knew he was ignoring me. I remember fully believing that I was wholeheartedly in love with this boy and we had only been friends for about five months. After summer, I started to get my volunteer hours from Good Shepherd, as I attended school at Florida SouthWestern. On Columbus Day I had the day off and planned to help out at Good Shepherd. Knowing he was still attending school there (because he was two grades behind me but still the same age), I remember telling my parents that if he ignored me or was rude, I would let myself get over him. To this day, I desperately wish he had not talked to me, but, he did, and I wouldn’t be the person I am today without the chat.

We ended up dating in late November, right after his fourteenth birthday, and before mine. Dating was a whirlwind for. The first week was the only peaceful time I remember. After that first week, it became something completely different. He yelled at me, made me cry, cursed me, made me feel bad about myself, told me I was weak, attacked my appearance, told me he loved other girls, and constantly told me that I was enough for him, no more and no less, but just merely satisfactory for what he wanted. However, there was more to this; there was the pushing me against walls and forcing me to kiss him, the ripping me by my jaw or my throat, the telling me not to spend time with my friends and to only spend time with him, the telling me he would rape me if we were both still virgins by fifteen, and finally, the telling me that no matter what I

did or who I blamed, everything was always going to be my fault. It took me about three months to leave. Why did I stay so long?

According to Sharon Hayes, in *The Big Question: Why Women Stay in Abusive Relationships*, “Social beliefs about relationships, marriage and motherhood typically associate women with acts of undying loyalty requiring them to commit to and work on maintaining their relationships even when they are abusive,” and, “Leaving an abusive relationship may be difficult for a woman because the thought of existing outside an intimate relationship is often more painful than staying in an abusive one. This is because social understandings of romance frequently endorse the intimate relationship as the central reason for women’s existence.” (Hayes 2015) In today’s society women are not always encouraged to speak up over abusive relationships. They are seen as the ‘crazy ex-girlfriend’ or someone who can’t move on if they say something about how the relationship was abusive. In my case, I did not see the signs. I kept telling myself that he was just protective, my friends just didn’t understand. After we broke up, I remember being quite upset and my dad saying, “Why’d you break up? It’s not like it was bad or something.” This was when I realized how much had truly gone wrong. Everything that I said and thought was fine was not. This realization broke the very fabric of who I was before the relationship. It ripped open all of my seams and made me sew myself back up.

After being called worthless so many times by a boy who thought there should never be a woman to do things that are ‘for men only,’ I realized I was worth something. I realized that *women* were worth something. I let myself be lied to, abused, and attacked for absolutely no reason. After the breakup, I was no longer ‘iffy’ on where I stood on women’s equality. I knew where I stood. I was stronger now; and, I was less naïve. I realized I did not need someone; and, I

could do things on my own. This belief that I could be and do anything was when I first realized I was a feminist. For the first part of my life, I did not believe I was a feminist. Being a feminist wasn't something I defined myself as before the relationship. In fact, "many women don't define themselves as feminists because many see them as 'angry' or 'outdated'" (Post, 2016).

The end of this relationship made me a deviant. A *deviant* is someone who goes against societal norms, does something different than most. "I am a deviant of my past self." The ending of this relationship was the beginning of a whole new world to me. I was a deviant in my family, and, my parents are not very big 'feminists' and my father is not really a feminist at all. To define myself as such in my household is something that is not entirely accepted. Many men and women in my family believe that times were simpler when women did not have somewhat equal rights, or that feminism is ridiculous and should not be promoted. The philosophy amongst the family is "women have the vote, what more do they want." To deviate from my family is something I never thought I would end up doing. It was so shocking to me that something I feel and felt so deeply rooted in, something I could finally hold onto, was something that my father hated.

Towards the end of 9th grade, I wrote a poem about feminism for an English assignment. I have never been more proud of anything in my whole life. I was finally able to say things that I wanted to say for months, things that I finally realized, things that I wanted to change. I shared it with some girlfriends and they loved it, even some boys loved it. When I got a group together and presented it, I realized that I did not want just my classroom to hear it, but the entire school. We auditioned for the talent show, and they absolutely hated it. We did not make the talent show because we were told "stuff like that doesn't happen," "high school isn't like that," or "nobody

does that.” I have since realized that some people are never going to agree with feminism. I will never understand why some people would rather shut me up rather than hear me out. “30% of women and 50% of men do not consider themselves feminist” (Post, 2016). Many people also see feminism as an attack on men, as it is often compared to ‘man-hating.’ Fifty-two percent of men consider feminism an attack on them, and forty-four percent of women also see it as an attack on men.

“[feminism]...has become distanced from the material realities of women’s lives and too relativistic to be of use for women’s concrete political struggles” (Davis, 2008) Many people see feminism as something useless, something that will never cause any change. Many do not want to be considered a feminist because it (in their minds) will not prompt any change. Feminism as a whole has also been given a bad rap; the media has publicized social justice warriors who scream for the end of men. Many men and women call themselves ‘egalitarians’ but refuse to call themselves a feminist. “If, on the one hand, feminists are considered of man-hating, self-righteous women, it is unlikely that people will even want to consider themselves a feminist.” (Pham, 2015) Many people associate feminism with *ethnocentrism*, or the emotional attitude that one’s gender, culture, race, country, etc., is better than another. A lot of men I have spoken with see feminism as a personal attack, the idea of man-hating, and, due to the media covering the extremist groups who claim to hate men, many men do not want to be considered a feminist.

Feminism is not 'man-hating;' feminism is the push for women's equality. Before I met my old boyfriend, I was not a feminist; I didn't believe in my own potential. I was hurt, mistreated, abused and after all that I realized how strong I could be and how strong I was as a woman. Being a woman is difficult, but I am here. I am here to unite fellow women in believing in our full potential, getting what we deserve, and celebrating each other. I overcame things that I did not know I would have in my way. As Rupi Kaur said " I want to apologize to all the women I have called pretty before I've called them intelligent or brave... from now on I will say things like *you are resilient* or *you are extraordinary*. Not because I don't think you're pretty, but because you are so much more than that."

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