

Why I am a Feminist

Feminism is not a bad word.

Feminism is being proud to be a woman. It is recognizing that I am beautiful because of my spirit, not just my body. It is refusing to believe that am ugly because I don't resemble the model on the cover of the latest *Glamour* magazine. Feminism is refusing to be degraded by those who perceive that my femininity makes me inferior to men. Feminism is believing that the traits which distinguish me as a woman should be admired and respected. It is rejecting the traits associated with being a woman which are characteristic only to an ideal. An ideal defined by a patriarchal society.

Feminism is realizing that my rage is not irrational. Feminism is the bridge of understanding between the events in my daily life and the confused feelings I have because of these events. Feminism explains and justifies my disgust and anger at being treated like a woman. The rage I feel when I hear "nice ass".

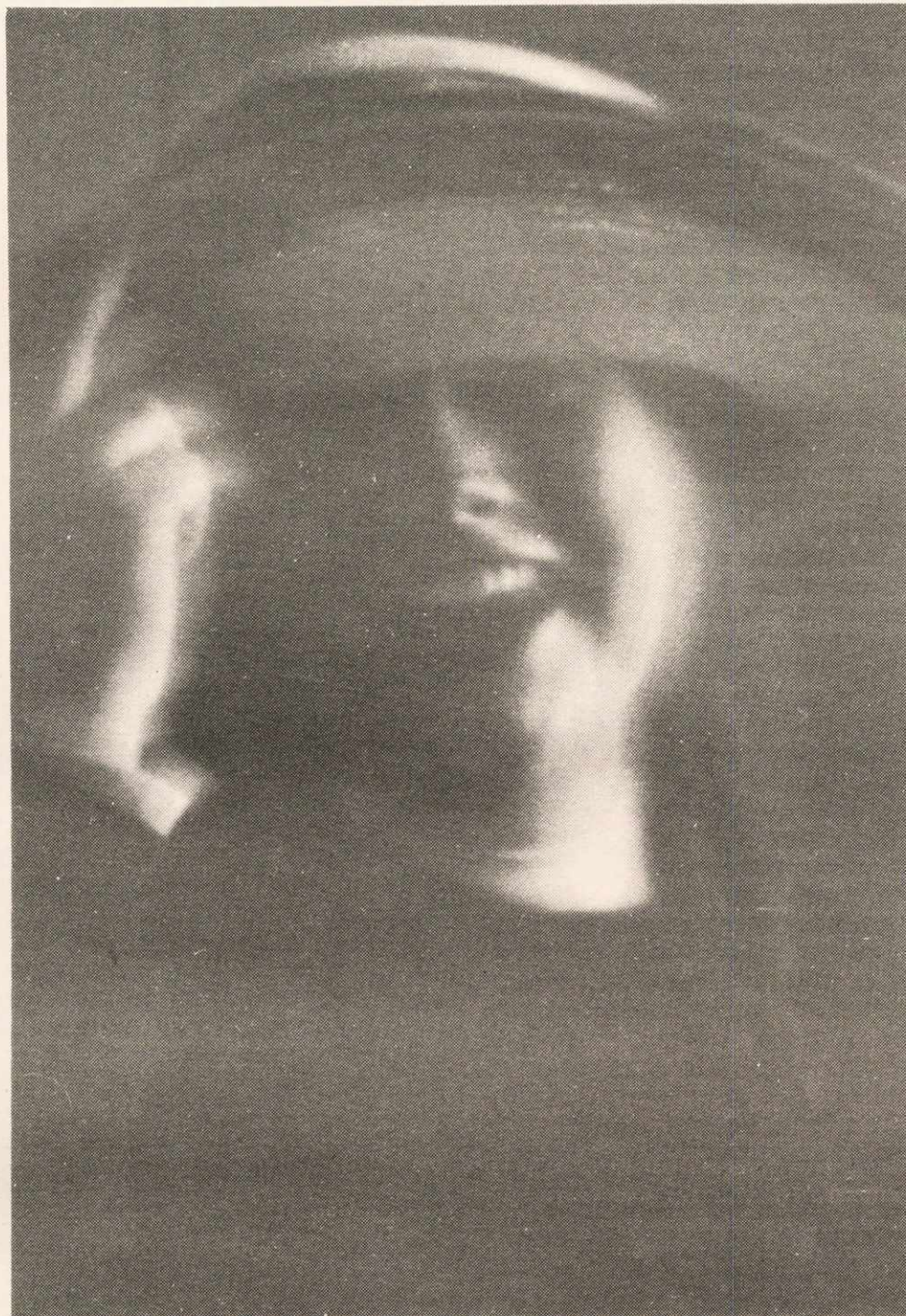
Feminism is strength through understanding shared by sisters who realize that their experiences as women are not unique.

Feminism is struggling to redefine, to myself and a patriarchal world, what it means to be a woman.

Feminism is strength, pride, spirituality and truth.

Feminism is not a bad word.

Joanne Fry



DAL PHOTO: MARIA PATRIQUIN

When I graduated from high school I thought that men and women were equal in every way. Equal abilities, and equal opportunities.

Since then there have been a lot of changes in my life and I have realized that the struggle for women's equality is ongoing.

Incest, rape, abortion have all played a role in my changing attitudes.

My personal experiences are only part of my motivation though. Sharing my experiences with other women has taught me that the abuses other women suffer are daily.

Feminism has offered me a theoretical and practical alternative, a way to deal with my anger and disappointment. It is through reading feminist theory and talking to other feminists that a lot of my questions have been answered. It is also where I gain strength to continue healing myself and speak out against women's oppression.

Feminism also offers me a challenge. Like any other group, feminists are not homogeneous. We bring different experiences to the discussion, and the differences increase as factors of race, class and sexual orientation are considered. I see us linked by our common goal, the struggle for equality.

My notion of equality differs from that of my closest feminist friend, but we continue to work together. I believe we are both working for world in which women will be free to be themselves.

When I finished my undergraduate degree, I received cards saying "The World is Yours" and "You can achieve all you aim for." I was optimistic, determined, and untroubled.

When I entered the workforce, however, things were not what I had been taught. The ovaries in my belly determined how I was talked (down) to; how I was (not) listened to; and the fact that I was, in all circumstances, defined in sexual terms.

I started to look more closely at the world.

I saw that when we think of humanity, the norm is male. People say "he" for the unspecified individual; and "Mrs. Somebody Else." At the gym, where I strive to make my body strong and healthy, the demo exercise pictures portray ideals of men. Imagine the opposite: saying "she" for the unspecified individual; "Mr. Debbie Smith;" and representing the "non-gendered" human norm with female bodies. The message I

received is that I am NOT the subject of human existence. I am "the other." The afterthought. The second sex.

I began to see more.

Women doing the same work as men today in Canada make about two-thirds the money, that is, when they are actually able to access the same kind of work as men. After divorce, men's standard of living increases as women's slides toward the poverty line.

Assertive Focused Ambitious Vocal MEN = admired successful hero

Assertive Focused Ambitious Vocal WOMEN = difficult trouble-making bitch

I am supposed to smile and make myself attractive and be supportive and to titillate. But what about being true to my unique individual self? The self that I like, the one that could contribute something worthwhile to the world?

I saw more.

Women around me have been

touched, beaten, coerced, threatened, entered. And people say it's all their fault.

I must not walk alone in the park. I must check the back seat of the car. I must have my keys ready to open the front door. I must stay in groups at night. I must check who is in the elevator before entering. I must be careful what I wear, what I say, how I walk, where I go. I must wear shoes I can run in. I must be watchful because attackers can be strangers, friends, dates, brothers. I must be an expert on fear.

I have nightmares. I am grabbed, constrained, hand over mouth, no air, can't scream, too weak, no one to help, my body invaded, wounded from the inside out, stolen from me.

I keep looking.

And I see that I am white, middle class, able-bodied, educated. Privileged.

So, I am a feminist.

I believe women and men, together, can do better than this. Let's reflect on that.

Quotes from a 1990 survey of young women attending Nova Scotia high schools

♦ A feminist is an intelligent woman of the 90's who believes she can do or accomplish anything a man can do. A strong-willed woman who knows men and women are equal.

♦ A woman who wants men and women treated equally but often try to get more power over males. They ignore the fact that there is a natural difference between men and women.

♦ I don't think a woman's place is in the kitchen, but I do believe that a woman has a duty to provide a certain element of love and guidance that men, because of their nature, do not have.

♦ Someone who thinks that men and women are equal at everything. They have to face it that that's not true.

♦ A feminist is a female or woman that thinks she is better than a male and keeps calling the male race down.

♦ A person who has chosen to cut off all her ties from males, refraining from sex with men, whether she be a lesbian or not.

♦ A feminist induces images of bra-burning lesbians. However, I guess, a feminist is essentially one who believes in equality (in the sense of opportunities, jobs, education) of women and men and who seeks out the establishment of the sex-role stereotypes embedded in our society.

♦ A gay girl/boy.

♦ Wears dresses all the time, carries a purse, thinks they're superior to men.