

This student letter was sent to the NYU newspaper. When the campus paper didn't publish the letter, tour organizers made hundreds of copies and distributed them on campus. It was sent out on Facebook and generated much controversy and debate.

Dear NYU,

Feminism. If you are representative of the typical student, you just had a gut reaction to that word. You don't like hearing it, or reading it. Also, if you are in the median of students, you understand on some level that women across the globe are inferior to men. In Eastern Europe and the Pacific Rim they are sex slaves, in the Middle East they are covered with Burkhas, and in Africa a woman has no right to demand that her partner wear a condom, despite the current HIV pandemic. You know these things, but surely none of these atrocities could happen in this country. Here, women are the equals of men. "It can't happen here," where have we heard that before? It is common knowledge that in our forward, progressive society every woman is just as good as every man. Maybe that is why the median student, regardless of their gender, despises "Feminism." After all, feminists must want women to have more than men; they must be ugly trolls who just can't "get any"; they must be "dykes"; they must be "uppity." A second-class minority described as uppity, that sounds familiar too.

The truth is this: in this country, the United States, in 2010, a woman is less than a human being. Her body, her sexuality, and her personality are not her own, they are tools of barter. And the most criminal part of this is that she has been conditioned from birth to believe she has a choice in the matter. She has none, not if she wants to be accepted in her social sphere, not if she wants to be taken seriously in a professional setting, and certainly not if she wants to find happiness in a serious relationship with a man, because we all know marriage, childbirth, and motherhood are the only surefire routes to fulfillment and happiness.

Consider the thong. If you wear a thong, ask yourself, "why?" Maybe it is your choice, maybe you wear it for comfort, or maybe it creates fewer lines in your dress. Do you think the men who like your thong share these lines of reasoning? Did Cysco write The Thong Song because he cares about your day-to-day comfort or lineless dress?

Picture yourself as the poster-girl for a clothing line. Jeans, dresses, stockings, or underwear, any will do. Picture glossy photos of you on billboards. Which parts of you will appear and which will not? Of course your legs, your scantily clothed crotch, buttocks, torso, breasts, and shoulders will all make an appearance. In fact, you may have a great deal of freedom in how much of yourself you choose to reveal, as this is a forward thinking society where women can be as sexual as they feel. Probably the only things you will be forbidden to do are look directly into the camera, or even show your face. Why would this be the case? Why would someone looking at your billboard, admiring your body, not want to look you in the eye? Why do women veil their faces in so many places across the globe?

Think of your sexual partners. Are you ashamed of how many you've had, or anxious at how few? Here's the real question: why does it matter? Why is a woman's worth as a person somehow lessened by her personal, private sexual proclivities? Who decided that her virginity is the sole determinant of whether she is clean or unclean? This is equally applicable to men. Why is a man any more of a man if he has had numerous sexual "conquests?" Why is manhood and virginity mutually exclusive?

I don't ask these questions as an abstract exercise, or as a means of publicly venting; these questions have a purpose. Maybe these questions have never come to mind, or maybe you already have firm and well reasoned responses to them. If you are curious about issues of gender and sex, but will not take a class, because your academic career prohibits such "worthless digressions" into the liberal arts, or because you are a man, and the study of gender is the province of women, you have the opportunity to learn more, or to challenge your assumptions. Sunsara Taylor, founding member of groups "The World Can't Wait" and "Not In Our Name," and writer for Revolution newspaper, is touring the nation with her discussion "From the Burkha to the Thong: Everything Must, and Can, Change! We Need Total Revolution." Sunsara Taylor is a radical communist. Personally, I am not a communist and if you are representative of the average student, you probably are not either, but who else has been willing to stand up and say these things? Every political party, every business and academic institution has capitulated to chauvinism. The indignities forced upon women in all societies, worldwide, have been unduly accepted as 'inevitable,' 'human nature,' or 'just the way things are.' At this moment, Sunsara Taylor is one of only a few who is challenging these assertions, and the Revolutionary Communist Party she represents is in a similarly unique position. Her first appearance will be at NYU's very own Cantor Film Center on Feb. 23, at 7 PM.

I am attending, and if this discussion has struck a chord, or a dissonance with you, then you should attend too. Because although the issues I've described above are complex, and involve matters of sociology and relative culture which exceed the bounds of this letter, your stances towards them ultimately come from one very simple distinction: do you believe women are full human beings, or don't you? That is Feminism, the belief that women are equal to men, not less, and not more. If they are equal, it stands to reason that gender should not be a source of friction, it should be null and void in determining the worth of a person. You should attend, whether you are a man or a woman, because not all feminists are women, and not all misogynists are men.

Hundreds of millions of women are sick to death with this system. In Iran women are sick of covering their heads with hijabs, or else being beaten by police; in the Philippines, families are sick of selling their daughters into sexual slavery to make ends meet; in Japan women are sick of being nothing more than an ethnic fetish to foreign businessmen; in South Africa women are sick of having to insert barbs into their own vaginas to prevent being raped; in Croatia teenage girls are sick of being kidnapped and brought to the United Kingdom, locked in boxcars, and let out only to sexually service men. And they are ALL sick to death with the apathetic people of this country, the last superpower of the world, ignoring their systematic rape and degradation, even as sex slaves are moved through the ports of Boston; even as women walk through Manhattan looking over their shoulders for fear of sexual predators; even as women in Miami and Los Angeles are checking into hospitals, battered while performing in pornographic films. None of these things are intrinsic behavioral patterns, they do not simply happen because of 'human nature.' These injustices happen only with our approval.

It's time to declare yourself a feminist, or a misogynist, out loud. And it's time to tell who's who.

R.J.
NYU Class of 2013
Feb. 14, 2010