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What's the Point of Getting Angry?

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When writing this piece for my feminist rhetorics class, I was trying to put into words my particular experiences of feminism, how I have never felt any particular fear in coming off as angry whenever I discuss issues—or discuss anything, for that matter. I didn't know how I would write a full 1500 words about it until I remembered something Sara Ahmed had written. Ahmed asserted that who we learn feminism from is just as important as where. So, I started my journey towards feminism, and I mentioned from whom I learned it, and how that coalesced into why I'm unafraid of being an angry feminist.

In this way, the focus of my piece is on feminist experience, on how anger is a useful tool in trying to argue feminist topics, especially in a world that helps those in power remain out of earshot of those talking about the problems in the world. I also discuss tone policing in silencing feminist argument, especially coming from the voice of a woman.

What's the Point of Getting Angry?

Kaitlin Boggs-Jones

For someone who is scared of people and their perspective of me, I am unafraid of being angry. It's something I find surprisingly liberating. I don't advise that everyone be angry all the time, but everyone should be entitled the freedom to get angry about what they need to and what I need to be angry about (or, rather, what I use my anger for) is feminism.

My introduction to feminism was a long essay detailing the rape culture America has cultivated largely through victim blaming. Prior to that essay, I did not know enough about the definition of feminism to be either for or against it. Instead of witnessing overt woman-hating that even my younger self would have recognized as sexist, I was led to believe that rejecting everything about myself that was feminine would lead others to like me. Though this exploration was a necessary part of self-growth, I will admit that the feminism I found on social media allowed me more freedom than the rebellion I staged by erasing part of who I was. I was able to start this journey of growth through the feminist movement I found on social media. To someone who had spent a long time feeling like I wasn't enough, to be told that I was and always would be, was incredibly helpful.

There is a lot of stigma surrounding social media feminism, and in fairness, it is easy to share a pro-feminist page, and then do nothing afterward. Thus, one dodges the metaphorical "homework" that Sara Ahmed discusses in her work *Living a Feminist Life*. In doing so one ignores the reality that it takes work to modify the way one thinks, it's asking questions about what you say and why you say it. It takes introspection and not just pointing fingers at someone or something and simply labeling it as 'not feminist.'

That's not enough, and to simply do that is not being a feminist. "To be a feminist at work is or should be about how we challenge ordinary or everyday sexism...This is not optional: it is what makes feminism feminist." (Ahmed, 2017).

Despite the bad reputation social media has in supporting passive involvement in the fight for social justice, it is an invaluable a tool to educate and organize.

My introduction to feminism was blunt, angry people speaking their mind and telling me about the nuances of sexism in our society. This included more silent instances such as microaggressions, the pay gap, and the male gaze, not just issues as glaringly violent and sexist as rape and victim-blaming. It was feminists on social media who told me about the spectrum of gender, about the non-binary identity, about how gender can be something that is fluid and I clung to that.

It's been years, and I'm still growing, as everyone should. But I have made strides in terms of personal growth and in using what I have learned to alter how I think, speak, and write.

More than anything I've learned how to be angry, to ask questions people may not like, and I've learned how to be proud of it.

So, when being a feminist came with the attached baggage of the angry, man-hating, and unshaven witch with a tongue like a snake's and a voice like a harpy's, I was unafraid of it. More than that, I embraced it, because it meant that I was allowed, for what felt like once in my life, to let myself be loud, be confident, to make mistakes and acknowledge them, and to allow myself to be imperfect.

I don't want to feel like I have to be gentle to be a feminist. I've been gentle all my life. I don't want to be gentle now when I feel like I can change some minds by being loud, rude, and unavoidable.

Furthermore, gentle doesn't always work. Gentle is the image women have had to cultivate over centuries. To include gentleness in feminism will only backfire. In the words of Jessa Crispin, gentle feminism, feminism that everyone can rally behind with little more than a slight nudge and a soft smile, is not strong feminism, because "for [feminism] to be universally accepted, it must become as banal, as non-threatening and ineffective as possible." (Tolentino, 2017)

Gentle is wonderful when people are willing to listen and to keep listening as new ideas are presented to them. But when people are listening to their own patriarchal biases so loud that they can barely hear the world around them, they won't be able to hear the gentle voice in the defense of feminism. Angry might be the only way they'll even consider listening.

I'm not scared of being loud, even if it means that there are mistakes I make that I must acknowledge. To learn how to realize one's own limited viewpoints is to achieve a form of wisdom, for every time you recognize that you can't know everything, for every time that you ask for help, is to strengthen your own argument. To argue in defense of

feminism is like a team sport. No one is supposed to know everything and to cite your sources just means that you have a team at your back.

In acknowledging I don't know everything, I can admit now, freely, that I know not every woman can be angry. Not every woman is as free as I am. To be angry, to fight, either in defense of feminism or in the terms of stopping assault, as this may mean risking a great deal for some people. It could cost them financial security in the form of a job, it could cost them their reputation, it could cost them a friend or a family member, or it could cost them their lives. I'm not saying that to be gentle, to ease people into the ideas of feminism slowly is the wrong way to go about things—there isn't a wrong way to go about things besides simply stopping and thinking one's work is done.

But I am saying that there is power inherent in the anger of women that people should take advantage of. Women have been so afraid of being viewed as angry because for a woman to be angry is for her to be "overreacting" or "irrational." This is a common example of tone policing, but when a man is angry, it's viewed as being for a good reason. But a woman's anger is silenced, put down, believed unjustifiable. Women are supposed to be gentle. That view of women is not something I want to continue. What I want is for women to start rethinking whether there is truly anything wrong problem with being angry. Because as far as I'm concerned, there isn't. It's a negative emotion, sure, but it's not so different from someone happily chattering on about something they love—it's passion, and passion should be cultivated. We're angry about what negatively affects us or those we love, so we should let it be known that we take it personally. We take bathroom bills and a woman's rights to her own body and the school-to-prison pipeline personally, and we have every right to tell them that if they don't, they should start asking why. These are human rights issues. Get in their face, argue, fight, scream above the din, just make sure that you speak clearly. Because there's nothing more powerful than a good rebranding, and our anger deserves to be valued because it is all too reasonable. Ahmed says it clearly, "if you think that questioning sexism is policing, we are feminist police." (Living a Feminist Life, 2017). If someone's asking why you're getting so angry, tell them. Don't let the world shut you down just because you're angry. Push the issue back on them.

Because why shouldn't we ask questions when they need to be asked? Why shouldn't we get involved when it involves us? Why shouldn't it be personal when it's only ever been personal?

We'll gladly be "feminist police," as long as it takes because we deserve to be.