

The Limits of Normal

By Laura FANNING

I will begin this article with two questions to ponder as you read. 1) Is Feminism Dead? and 2) Is There Still a Need For Feminism in The Academy Today? Ah, here we go with that feminist crap again you're thinking... yet I challenge you to continue reading- you may be surprised at what I have to say.

Privilege is when society (specifically North American society) implies a certain set of standards that generally assumes a male, white, middle class person, and recognises those traits as a set of 'normal' standards to compare all others to. This implies that if you do not fit into this specific 'box' you are considered something other than normal. Realizing that none of 'us' fit into a set of standards for various reasons, it becomes suddenly apparent why it is so important to discuss and recognize differences between people.

Labelling people can never be

completely inclusive, and therefore repeatedly exclude certain groups of people. Race, class, religion, sexuality and gender all influence the ways in which people see the world, the different experiences that they have, and the privilege or lack of privilege that they benefit from.

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say the "Canadian hockey team" we automatically assume we are talking about the men's team right? Why is that? Because normal is male. In order for me to identify the women's Canadian hockey team I must say the "WOMEN'S Canadian hockey team."

Another example of a label that carries certain assumptions is the label feminist, which has developed the negative identity that all feminists are lesbians and hate men. I, for one, quite enjoy men, and find this assumption offensive. Yet even the feminist movement has needed to modify some of its own assumptions about what a feminist is and incorporate difference and privilege into their identity.

This has resulted in a change from feminism to feminisms in order to allow the freedom of diversity to exist within the definition. This allows all women to have a voice or an opinion that may be different from the 'norm.' I believe this is important to maintain the 'privilege' (for lack of a better word) to change your mind and opinions, as your understanding of things develops and changes. The term 'feminisms' allows me to appreciate other womens' standpoint, while at the same time maintaining my own unique outlook on the issues.

In an article called "Envisioning Change" written by Audre Lord, she discusses the difficulty with recognizing difference simply because we see and understand what we know and experience ourselves. If the experiences of others are far removed from those of our own, then it is guaranteed that without thoughtful and deliberate engagement, that people will simply not see difference.

An example of this is closer to home than we think. At UPEI the Dalton building does not have an elevator. How many 'normal' people know that? If you didn't know that there was no elevator in Dalton, then think about why it would not be important for you to find something like that out before you registered for at class on the third floor. Now think about

those people that do not fit into the box of 'normal able-bodied persons.'

Amazing, isn't it, that it is so easy to ignore what doesn't effect us? Although UPEI is very accommodating and willing to change course locations if necessary for people with physical challenges, the fact that people must point out their 'disability' in order for them to be treated equally, is unfair.

In order to initiate change and encourage the recognition of minority groups in an appropriate and equal way, we must actively participate in challenging common standards of what constitutes 'normal.' If we chose not to get involved because we believe that differences are too difficult to challenge or change, or allow them to go unrecognized, then we perpetuate the common belief that they do not exist at all. One of my favourite quotes that was said by Nikki Giovanni's is, "we've got to live in the real world. If we don't like the world we're living in, change it. And if we can't change it, we can change ourselves. We can do something."

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This statement strikes me as especially significant because it empowers people who are oppressed to do something, anything, even if it is simply a maturation in their own understanding of the world.

Unfortunately, many people do not want to recognize the problems within society, because then they must realize that they are accountable. If one group suffers because of the privileges given to another group, then they are implicated in that suffering. In order to initiate change, privileged people must give up some of their power, and recognise that there is no real definition of 'normal,' only the



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