

International Women's Day 2025

Hayley Smith speech

This evening, I have been asked to talk to you all about 'feminism' and what I hope the future of feminism looks like. As will soon become apparent, I don't have an answer. Not a simple one, at least. *Feminism. It's a word that can easily be defined, but when I'm questioned what it means to me, I'm at a loss for words. I was even hesitant to do this speech as there are so many interpretations of feminism and it will mean something different to each of you here, no matter your gender. Some people say it is all about women and calling out the disadvantages that only women deal with. Nay-sayers will look at these feminists and call them "too loud" and "too proud", but I don't see it in that light. Not anymore. When I was young and saw protests on the news, of mostly women marching and shouting and seemingly creating chaos in the streets, part of me felt that they were 'too much', that they were taking things too far. However, I now look at these women with pride.

Now that I am at the ripe old age of 17, I am intrigued by their power, *enticed by their views and values*. Now that I am grown, I can see how feminism has developed since the word was coined, how there are feminists who decry the lack of masculine voices in the discussion of feminism. This view posits that everyone needs to be involved. That everyone should have a voice in making change and having rights. I believe - both are just as vital in discussing that all too important notion of 'equality'. *The trouble is, I've been asked to speak in front of a room full of people and about what feminism means to me, and I can only answer: 'I think'. I must stress, I don't believe these questions, these uncertainties, make me any less of a woman, or any less of a feminist. If what feminism means is different for everyone and transforms through time, then these questions, along with my own experiences, ought to be essential in finding a solution to the inequality still felt by many. I've struggled with understanding what growing up and going from a girl to a woman means; and how to deal with the shift.

There is a pressure, isn't there, to fit into society's expectations of what a girl should be and do and feel, and what a woman should be and do and feel? A woman, society tells me, should be maternal, caring and nurturing; she should marry - a man, preferably - and have kids, and teach her daughters to follow in her footsteps. I feel this expectation, too. As the eldest sister, I feel a sense of obligation to play the second mother, the child who will help clean and care and grow up too fast. I am more than this. I am a woman in a position of leadership, a school captain this year and recipient of a number of awards. I work hard and, although my sex is not meant to say it, I am a good leader. Yet, I am repeatedly not taken as seriously as my male counterparts, and I truly wonder why.

Everytime I put myself in a position where I have to order people around, I'm labelled 'bossy'. I'm asked to be passionate as a leader, yet when I am I'm "too emotional". Everytime I'm appointed to a role of command, I'm rarely really listened to. So often, I find myself running around, balancing a million things at once - being asked to support people emotionally as well as logistically - and seem to get very little credit. The men, of course, seem to get it straight away. I have to wonder, is this simply because I'm a woman? 'Are we that little evolved in society that such blatant unfairness still exists?' 'Yet I so rarely voice my own grievances aloud, because society told me not to.' 'So is this the point of feminism? Is this what I want to see change? *ADD AS

ENDING: I've been asked to come here to talk about feminism and what I want the future of feminism to look like. I've come to the end of my speech, and I still have more questions than answers. I cannot tell you how you should view feminism or what you should do about it, but I can tell you what I want. I want you to talk to me about your experiences, how you want to see the change be made. We can make change from listening and learning from each other; guiding our future generations into equality.