

Women, Gender, and Sexuality studies grabbed my attention when I took my first course, senior year, and I wish I had discovered it sooner. In the book, *No Turning Back: The History of Feminism and the Future of Women*, quotes Friedrich Engels who said, "that the subjugation of women began only when economic surpluses accumulated; thus, private property, which leads to class hierarchy and the formation of states, is the source oppression of women" (Freedman, E. B. 2003). Unfortunately, women and girls are systemically undervalued because of the focus on men and their experiences; therefore, they are not provided with the information to prosper in an androcentric world. Girls are still, in modern society, guided towards making home life and childcare the measure of their success. Historically, women's contributions to society by the ideals of the patriarchal system it supports, oppressive systems, have never helped women be independent of men.

Raised, in an androcentric family, to become a producer of children and a home caretaker for my future husband was my submersion into patriarchal standards growing up as a child in the late eighties and early nineties. Just after the second wave of the women's rights movement had made significant strides in creating opportunities for young women to break free of these patriarchal systems, or so assumed. Feminist ideas were disregarded by me, partially because of the family structure I grew up in and the antifeminist propaganda surrounding feminist thinking. News and antifeminist media led me to believe that feminism had done its job and that women were equal to men, but it was inaccurate. I have never made as much money as a man throughout my life, and I have not been given opportunities to be successful because I was poor and lived in poverty. My family did not consist of college graduates. My mother was a second language learner who was further discriminated against by those in power who saw her lack of proper English as a sign

of lesser intelligence. My father worked a union job and suffered from layoffs throughout my childhood. I tried to follow the guidelines that society and my parents set for me by marrying young, having a child, and staying at home instead of pursuing higher education.

When I finally enrolled in college, I had the GI Bill benefits from having served in the U.S. military, but that was not enough to pay for my tuition, books, and living off-campus because I was a single mom who had to support my child. In addition, several more obstacles would come into my path, including rental increases, tickets for parking with expired parking passes on campus, the teaching program expecting me to student teach for 8 hours, and somehow not work and support my family. Finally, when the GI bill money had been paid out after four years, it cut off, and my primary source of income was the housing allowance; the lack of funds put me into financial crisis. Furthermore, I reached out to relatives, who were unwilling to help me because I was an adult, and I did not qualify for educational resources for one reason or another. Finally, my father told me that I did not need an education and could continue it sometime without his financial assistance. In addition, I had taken out loans that I did not expect to pay back before obtaining my degree, and they all started to become due for payment now that I was no longer enrolled.

After dropping out of college, I had to take "jobs [that] traditionally performed by women, such as maid, secretary, or nurse, [which] offered lower wages (Freedman, 2003). My loans defaulted and eventually were sent to collections; my credit score dropped so bad that I could not apply for housing, car loans, or credit cards. Five years later, I was homeless and living with friends or in my car because I worked for low wages, paid for childcare, and could not afford it all. Unaware of the forces of oppression that were working against me, I was confused about how I had gotten

to this point when I had tried so hard to be successful. I am not the first woman to struggle with this, and I will not be the last until women's rights are seen as human rights. I seek to be an influential agent of change to improve the lives of women, people of color, and other marginalized communities because I have gained all the knowledge from being in a course in Women, Gender, and Sexuality studies and personal experiences. I believe that every girl and woman should be made aware of the opportunities they are being denied by a patriarchal society that has the cards stacked against them and towards men.

#### References

Freedman, E. (2007). No Turning Back. Random House Digital Inc.

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