

Why is the oppression of women so important to me? It is important because I am a woman, I have a voice, and I am sick of not being heard. Everyday, I find out new policies and laws that have been passed that suppress my rights as an individual, which have been put in place by men. There are even some women, who agree with the oppression of men, which angers me, because they don't know any better. I believe that in order to progress as a society, we need to stop creating a hierarchy and listen to what people have to say. Women outnumber men in the world, yet women are being told what to do by men. Women have a lot of things to say and I think it's time for women to be heard. I do not hate men at all, but I do feel that there needs to be a change in how they view women, as well as how they view themselves. I don't think this should only be important to me; I think this should be important to everyone. How we treat people now affects how people will be treated in the future. It scares me to think that men have the power to say whatever they want on issues that mainly affect women.

What does it mean to be a woman? It means many things for many people, but the first word that comes to mind is "strength." I am astounded at the immense strength that women possess. I am constantly amazed at how much women endure, and it makes me extremely proud to be a woman. However, it saddens me that, despite the strength that women possess, there is an oppression of women by men, especially in politics. Why? Why are women, who are just as capable and intelligent as men, belittled as soon as they open their mouths? This question haunts me everyday, and it has led me to form the title of my project. I chose my title, "The World Is Ours," because the world is not mine. It's not yours. It's not hers. It's not his. The world belongs to us all. What is the relationship between men and women as it relates to power and dominance? Men have been given opportunities that have enabled them to gain power and status, while women have been burdened with other responsibilities that haven't allowed them to advance as far as men.

What is power? What does it mean to be a woman? When did the separation of power begin? In order to understand the current state of society, I feel that it was necessary to research far back in time to find out how the power of men and oppression of women formed. What made men more deserving of power and the right to make their own decisions? I have found that the root of today's gender inequality began with something as simple as children. The reason men have gained more power is simply because they aren't the ones who bear children. According to Marxists.org, one theory is that men didn't advance faster because of their superior strength, but because they weren't obligated with the task of birthing and providing for children. I agree with this theory because I have compared it to my own life and the women that I know. In my experience, women are just as smart, strong, and capable of taking care of things the way that men do; however, women are the ones who must give birth to children. Carrying a child for months and delivering a baby requires that you rest a lot and your body is very vulnerable at that time. I found that, in history while women were taking care of children, men were able to explore other areas of interest, which led to ideas about women's strength being formed over time. Most people form their opinions about women, based on what women haven't done, but not many people look at *why* they haven't done certain things. If you take a look at women in history who didn't have to care for children, they ended up being quite strong and successful women. For example, Amelia Earheart is known as one of the strongest and most independent women in American history. I believe the main reason for that is because she had no children and was, therefore, not tied to any duties that may have prevented her from going after her own interests. The book "A People's History of the United States" by Howard Zinn discusses men's attitudes towards women and how women were oppressed at the start of our country. I discovered that in

the early days of America, women were brought over for the sole purpose of being wives, child bearers, and companions for men. The law at the early start of America, stated that once a woman was married, her husband had the right to control her in every way, leaving women powerless. I was astonished to find out that the root of today's inequalities is linked to the attitudes of the men who started our country. The state of mind for men, was that they were the ones meant to create laws and rules and that women weren't capable of doing any sort of decision making. It was expected that women knew that they had no place making decisions and that inequality was merely a fact of life. After finding out the history of inequality, I am not surprised at how the attitudes towards women and equality came to be in the present day.

After I researched our country's history and the attitudes of inequality in the past, I took a look at our country today, and what inequalities women are facing now. There has been a tremendous amount of progress in the attitudes towards women and the rights that women now have. However, there is a huge issue of passivism in our country today. Instead of blatant disrespect and dismissal of women, there is an unspoken and silent oppression that women now deal with. Over time, women have gained the respect of men and have gained the opportunity to voice their opinions. But it has now become an issue of being able to speak but not being heard. In a survey conducted by Forbes.com, it was discovered that less than 20% of Congress is composed of women; however, 51% of the voters in our country are females. Why are women so underrepresented in our government? Because men have most of the power and they aren't willing to give it up. But, men aren't the only ones to blame. A big part of women being heard, is *women* allowing *other* women to be heard. For some reason, women are very critical of other women and often do not support the advancement of other females. As women, we are often critical of other females and do not allow them to advance, which only inhibits us all in the long run.

There are so many issues in our country that affect women. Most women aren't given the chance to make decisions that impact their lives. It is so hard for women to be able to say what we want to say. In my experience, I have found that many men are a lot more comfortable when women aren't talking and aren't involved in the decision-making process. I honestly feel that men are intimidated by women, which has led them to silence us. I read a poem by HaliJo Webster, which talks about the oppression of women in our society, and I think it accurately represents my feelings about the topic.

About fix it men, I could disappear but...
by HaliJo Webster

For all you do, I feel worthless.
where did my name go?
Everything lost.
No direction.
you have taken it all -
my dignity,
my voice.

Two in a room,
I disappear
like a child.
My voice is not heard.

Incredulous in your ignorance,
no idea of your ego
and raw male pride.

How dependant are you on
others who feed your overblown ideas.
Poor things.

If you would only allow yourselves to cry.
Imagine the time you could spend on your selves
instead of having to protect us "weak inferior beings".
Us Woman,
Womyn, I prefer.

There is strength in Womyn.
Does the body shape scare you?
What power do you witness in the Goddesses of this Earth?
Why do you fear us so?
The freedom to be is only a thought away.
Come join me in this spirit dance won't you?
Let us frolic,
and be one with consciousness.

Women have a lot of valuable things to say, and our opinions really do matter. Why are men the ones that get to chose what happens to us? For example, the issue of abortion is being decided mainly by elderly white men who do not possess uteri and have no possibility of getting pregnant. Why did men get to decide whether or not women were allowed on the battlefield? Men are allowed to bare their bodies, but it is a crime for women to do so. There are so many contradictions and double standards in our society when it comes to men and women. I believe, just like Hillary Clinton, that it is a violation to deny women basic rights and protection. She spoke to this when she stated, "It is a violation of human rights when women and girls are sold into the slavery of prostitution for human greed -- and the kinds of reasons that are used to justify this practice should no longer be tolerated. It is a violation of human rights when young girls are brutalized by the painful and degrading practice of genital mutilation. It is a violation of human rights when women are denied the right to plan their own families, and that includes being forced to have abortions or being sterilized against their will."

I am creating a painting reflecting my ideas on the subject. Throughout my research about female oppression and the workings of our government, I not only discovered a lot about our culture, but a lot about myself. I discovered that I am fed up with the current gender inequality and I wanted to say something about it. My painting isn't an argument or a means for change; it is simply my own analysis of the current situation that women are in. I am creating a painting with three women, because three is the number that represents feminine energy and power. The figures are nude because I feel that women are most powerful in their natural state. The poses suggest that their bodies seem to be screaming. I used different colors to represent the issues women face and each color has a different meaning.

Why is this important? The answer is simple: equality is a must, not a maybe. Gender inequality affects everyone. If you're a man, it affects your mother, your sister, your wife, your girlfriend, your daughter, your granddaughter, your niece. If you're a woman, you are most definitely affected; so is your mother, so is your daughter, so is your friend. Everyone is affected by gender inequality and everyone suffers. As a young woman, I find it increasingly unnerving knowing that I am not always taken seriously. I find it quite disturbing to know that as soon as I stand up for myself, I am known as a "bitch," but when a man stands up for himself, he is respected and valued. I am tired of my looks and appearance determining how people judge me, instead of how much I know or what I can do. I am sick of being silenced, because I have quite a lot to say. I am sick of men deciding what *I* am allowed to do with my body. I am tired of men making more money, because I work hard too. I am sick of people doubting my strength, because the women in my life are the strongest people I know. But most of all, I am sick and tired of being sick and tired.

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