

HOW MY UN-FEMINIST MOM RAISED AN UBER-FEMINIST

My mother is not a feminist, except she is one. She is a staunch feminist in the media she chooses to champion, in her beliefs of the power women possess, and in her approach to child-rearing, specifically me. However, she is not a feminist. She chooses to distance herself from that word, from that movement, and the culture surrounding it, including the stereotypes. But innately...she's a feminist, in her soul.

My mother is a product of the post-radical feminist, relatively politically calm, all about money and success, 1980s. She graduated high school in the mid-80's and it is the decade she most identifies as a seminal time in her life. During this time, middle-class, Midwestern families didn't have much to be worried about. Maybe they weren't living in a McMansion and didn't own their own helicopter, but they were doing all right. And while women still weren't being treated equally or equitably, things were better and improvements seemed to constantly be on the rise.

At this time women had, even more, high-powered media role models to look to. Gloria Vanderbilt and her iconic jeans, Madonna and her I'm-going-to-take-over-the-world attitude, Melanie Griffith kicking ass and taking names in *Working Girl*, Brooke Shields and her eyebrows, and much more. The 80's were churning out badass women for the public to adore and for women and girls everywhere to take pride in.

Due to the seemingly rapid advances in gender equality from the 1970's to the 1980's, women, including my mother, were under the false impression that feminism wasn't needed anymore. In her mind, things were great. Women were everywhere – in high-powered jobs, in government, etc. Women were making names for themselves and setting their own rules.

Whether my mother realized it or not, she brought this strength and pride that the 1980's gave women into how she raised me, beginning in 1991. Although we've established that she didn't consider herself a feminist, because in her mind we didn't need it anymore and feminists were just women who hated men (eye roll), what she can't shake is her innate sensibility to champion women and their efforts.

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(Forewarning: I will be discussing media quite a bit because it was a formidable part of my childhood and of how my family interacts with one another. So buckle up.)

All throughout my childhood, my mother exposed me to different forms of media, most often with a strong female lead. Some of my earliest memories are of my mom and me watching movies together

and then her and I discussing the film or a particular character, and the importance of said character/character's actions.

As a grade schooler, my mom and I were huge fans of the movie *Now and Then*, a story about a group of 13-year-old girls and one life-changing summer. The movie is wonderful. It's a mostly female cast. It deals with the struggles of being a young teen and carrying your childhood dreams and hopes with you as an adult. It deals with friendship, most importantly female friendship, which we all know to be an extremely fierce and soul-satisfying form of [friendship](#). My mom and I were obsessed with this movie. Well, I was obsessed because my mom was, and she was obsessed because of what the movie taught and represented for her daughter. She was so into it that she "forced" us to watch it at every slumber party I ever had. Don't worry, those girls are probably thanking her now.

This theme began long before this movie and it continued as I grew up. My mama, champion of female actresses and stories for generations. She not only was a fan of media that simply included or featured women, but also media and stories that put women in a position of power and autonomy over their lives, choices, and whole selves. These films range from *Little Women* (1994) to *Superstar* (1999) to *Legally Blonde* (2001), and much more.

The thing that is truly revolutionary about my mom, or at least felt so for the early 90's, is that she raised me to believe that I could be whatever I wanted to be. I could do whatever I wanted to do. That my brain, my intellect, skills, and accomplishments are more important than what I looked like. That my personality and humor would get me far and win people over. She never shied away from telling me I was beautiful, don't get me wrong, but it wasn't the only thing about me she praised. She praised and lifted up and supported ALL OF ME. Both of my parents did, and that was and still is a pretty radical thing: to teach a girl that the world is their oyster, no matter what anyone says. Those are things generally reserved for white-heterosexual-Anglo-Saxon-males-of-affluence, not lil' old, weird, chubby, Midwestern ... ME.

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It's odd though. As I grow up and as my younger siblings grow up (I have two brothers, one is 8 years younger and the other is 17 years younger), I see that my parents parenting strategy didn't change much between children. Which one might say is a good thing, right? No. Because while my parents were raising me in a way that supported my talent and career path over being a mom and wife someday is radical and feminist, my parents raising my brothers to believe they can do anything is simply...par for the course. It's normal to tell boys the world is theirs if only they reach out and grab it. And we should tell boys that. We should tell boys AND girls and everyone in between. But in raising a son in a feminist way, one must talk about the imbalance of power and representation amongst genders in our world today. One must frankly discuss the idea of rape culture with children,

so as to stop it in its tracks. One must allow boys to feel and emote openly without the veil of toxic masculinity dampening their heart.

I share all of this to demonstrate that my mom is not a feminist. I wish she was- we'd destroy the patriarchy together. She knowingly raised a (head)strong, determined, hopeful, compassionate, creative, do-no-harm-but-take-no-shits, the-world-is-my-mothereffing-oyster, fierce-ass woman. She unknowingly raised me, a feminist. Because if she truly were a feminist she would've done the above with my brothers. If she were truly a feminist she'd recognize that the patriarchy not only exists but is toxic and strong. If she truly were a feminist she would openly recognize that there is still a wage gap, a power imbalance, a culture of fear among women, and a lack of true and honest media representation. If she were truly a feminist she wouldn't sneer her nose at the word and would delight in the fact that she raised one proud, radical, uber-feminist bitch. Which she did.

I will continue to take everything my mother instilled in me that made me the feminist I am, and I will go beyond. I will also take everything my mother didn't teach me, everything she didn't instill in my brothers, and I will instill it in others. If I ever have children, you best believe they – boy or girl – will be raised to be a feminist and strong supporter of equality and equity for all. Until then, I will carry all of my mother's lessons and wear my feminist badge with immense pride. Thanks, Mama, for everything.