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An Essay on Science and Feminism

By Christina Darco

There is a danger in marrying transcendental ideals with partisan politics, especially in America today, where there are often only two points of view. In the current political landscape, voters want answers to yes or no questions. Do you support vaccination, or are you anti-vax? Do you believe in modern climate change, or do you deny it? Politics often seeks to polarize ways of being and thinking because it makes voting easier. Unfortunately, framing complex questions in this way belittles the issues by creating simplified definitions that come from a lack of understanding.

The 2017 Women's March and Science March disappointed me because they created a perception of "for or against." The marches circumvented an inclusive conversation behind the issues, seeking instead to force-feed a blatant political agenda. Since when have science and feminism purely existed as motivating points for political rallies? This type of behavior limits the definition of a what it means to be a feminist or scientist to those who are in control of the conversation. The marches were indeed monumental, but also one-dimensional. The Woman's message, particularly, was swallowed by an anger at a perceived failure in our country's democratic process, and an attack on anyone who they felt was a moral threat to the *definition* of feminism. In this way, feminism wrongly becomes a polarized, partisan topic. The public's perception of science is also suffering the same fate. This dichotomy is directly contrary to the core tenets of science and feminism, which are predicated upon inclusive philosophies whereby anybody and everybody is judged equally, without biases of religion, race, or creed.

The civil rights movement of the 1960s found success in exactly the opposite way; in his famous "I Have a Dream" speech, MLK painted a rainbow instead of choosing one color. MLK took a profoundly activist message and transformed it into an exposition on the human condition. Racial discrimination and poverty were not merely political arguments, but human ones. Science and feminism are also deeply humanistic concepts. Both stem from two ancient, instinctive desires of mankind: to understand our environment and how the physical world works, and to be seen as equals – to be one of a team.

Although science and feminism are both influenced by and influence policy, they cannot be reduced to it. Science is not an end but a means. It provides a way of approaching the universe with methods for recording, analyzing, and interpreting observations. It empowers us with the ability to habitually use evidence and logic for making critical decisions every day. Like science, feminism also has no political goals or aspirations. It is a belief in equality and opportunity.

Unlike politics, grey areas do exist here. For some, gender equality is paramount to their quality of life. For others, it has little-to-no impact. For some, science provides all the necessary answers in life. For others, science fails to answer our most important questions. The "politifying" of ideas cloud these delicate realizations. Science and feminism risk becoming simplistic and one-sided debates, and thus, an easy target for less informed individuals.

So, how can we be better feminists? How can we be better scientists? In this case, it might be best to listen to the past and be the change you envision. Having unique points of view adds to the richness of any society. Scientists and feminists also have rich and differing points of view; we don't all think the same. These views enrich the debate, and should be welcomed, if not at least challenged equally. They should not be ignored or bashed. You don't need to identify as a scientist to talk or act like one. Anyone becomes a scientist when they ask questions like: *what evidence can I gather to prove that person wrong?* Similarly, anyone can become a feminist when they practice and advocate for equality in the workplace and elsewhere. You do not need to be a woman, a liberal, a democrat, a millennial, or a humanitarian. What these gatherings fail to forget is that becoming a feminist is not jumping on a bandwagon headed for the capital. It's a decision you make in the office, on a street corner, in line at the grocery store, and it's one that you make alone.

I believe there is room for feminism and science in the political debate, but the conversation must go beyond the definitions of scientist or feminist. Perhaps 2017 was the Year of "Voice": tweets, #fakenews, scandals and conspiracies. Make 2018 the Year of "Action" – to instill change where it matters. Our actions speak louder than our voices. Identifying as a scientist or feminist is besides the point and creates divide where it is unnecessary. Inspire others to think differently via your own actions, and change how they approach problems and situations day-to-day. Have conversations with those who are unsure where their values measure up. At the end of the day, we must remember science and feminism are philosophies, not parties. It is about time we stop treating them like one.

Lose the definitions.