

Gender Equality Is Your Issue Too

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Today we are launching a campaign called “HeForShe.” I am reaching out to you because I need your help. We want to end gender inequality — and to do that we need everyone to be involved. For the record, feminism by definition is: “The belief that men and women should have equal rights and opportunities. It is the theory of the political, economic and social equality of the sexes.” I started questioning gender-based assumptions when at eight I was confused at being called “bossy,” because I wanted to direct the plays we would put on for our parents — but the boys were not. I decided I was a feminist and this seemed uncomplicated to me. But my recent research has shown me that feminism has become an unpopular word. Apparently I am among the ranks of women whose expressions are seen as too strong, too aggressive, isolating, anti-men and, unattractive. Why is the word such an uncomfortable one? I am from Britain and think it is right that as a woman I am paid the same as my male counterparts. I think it is right that I should be able to make decisions about my own body. I think it is right that women be involved on my behalf in the policies and decision-making of my country. I think it is right that socially I am afforded the same respect as men. But sadly I can say that there is no one country in the world where all women can expect to receive these rights. No country in the world can yet say they have achieved gender equality. These rights I consider to be human rights but I am one of the lucky ones. My life is a sheer privilege because my parents didn’t love me less because I was born a daughter. My school did not limit me because I was a girl. My mentors didn’t assume I would go less far because I might give birth to a child one day.

Men—I would like to take this opportunity to extend your formal invitation. Gender equality is your issue too. Because to date, I’ve seen my father’s role as a parent being valued less by society despite my needing his presence as a child as much as my mother’s. Both men and women should

feel free to be sensitive. Both men and women should feel free to be strong... It is time that we all perceive gender on a spectrum not as two opposing sets of ideals. I want men to take up this mantle. So their daughters, sisters and mothers can be free from prejudice but also so that their sons have permission to be vulnerable and human too—reclaim those parts of themselves they abandoned and in doing so be a more true and complete version of themselves.

You might be thinking who is this Harry Potter girl? And what is she doing up on stage at the UN. It's a good question and trust me, I have been asking myself the same thing. I don't know if I am qualified to be here. All I know is that I care about this problem. And I want to make it better. If you believe in equality, you might be one of those inadvertent feminists I spoke of earlier. And for this I applaud you. We are struggling for a uniting word but the good news is we have a uniting movement. It is called HeForShe. I am inviting you to step forward, to be seen to speak up, to be the "he" for "she". And to ask yourself if not me, who? If not now, when?

Thank you.