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23rd June

Kirstein Rummery: The key step we must take to bring women equality

By [Kirstein Rummery](#)

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do.

I did my Outraged Feminist Tiger Mum thing, insisted we report it, gave her the whole spiel about how she doesn't have to put up with that. My daughter is, of course, a much cooler feminist than me. She'd already reported it and spoken to the boys in person in No Uncertain Terms. As she does taekwondo and can kick a hole in a wall, I am fairly sure neither of them will do it again.

But what emerged that was shocking to me was that the dick pic sender – who was also only 13 – did this because he genuinely thought this was how, in the online text-savvy age, you flirted with girls you liked. The violent boy thought it was OK to slam my daughter into a wall because he was “angry”.

How on Earth did we get here? I am as old as the Equal Pay Act, part of the second wave of feminism which saw amazing women dismantle sexism wherever they found it. Feminist activists, academics, lawyers and politicians all campaigned, marched and took legal cases.

We saw reforms of laws that had held it was impossible for a man to rape his wife, that domestic violence was a private affair, that it was fine to pay women less for the same job.

And looking back at the rampant sexism running through most of my childhood TV (the Benny Hill show anyone?) it seems we've come so far.










And yet, we haven't. A staggering 81% of women and 43% of men have experienced some form of sexual assault. Fifty-one per cent of women have experienced unwanted sexual touching. Thirty-four per cent of us have been followed, 30% of us have been flashed. Forty-one per cent have experienced sexual harassment online.

You only have to call yourself a feminist on Twitter to see for yourself the torrents of misogyny that are unleashed on social media on a daily basis.

Several of my friends blamed the digital age for my daughter's experience. Exposure to porn, little echo bubbles of adolescent men egging each other on, learning about male entitlement as part of a violent and misogynistic online culture. But sexual assault and harassment is nothing new.

Hands up if you, like me, a child of the pre-digital age, had your first experience of harassment from boys walking to school?

If a boy or a man flashed you in public? If, as a teenager, you clubbed together in

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four who have been harassed? #metoo demonstrated, if nothing else, that this happened to us all.

The platforms may have evolved but the behaviour has not.

We must no longer normalise this misogyny – when basic human rights for women and girls are being taken away all over the world, we cannot afford to.

Women in the USA are losing the right to access reproductive [health](#) care, women in Saudi Arabia are being tortured and killed for the crime of being raped. Demand for prostitution, particularly in countries where it has been legalised, is at an all-time high, leading to women being trafficked, raped and murdered in alarming numbers.

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In their groundbreaking study of domestic violence, the researchers Dobash and Dobash found that men who were violent to their partners all shared the belief that women should be subservient to men and that men had a right to women's bodies.

This belief is what feminists would recognise as patriarchy: that it's the natural order of things for men to oppress women and, when they step out of line, violence justifiably follows.

Those patriarchal attitudes are still at work throughout society. We cannot change things for the better without recognising that root cause.

With the exception of Dominic Raab, all of the candidates for the recent Tory leadership contest have declared themselves feminists. They – or more likely their advisors – have clearly realised that women are getting angrier, sick of the lack of progress on equality.

The truth is, everyone with a modicum of power who isn't a feminist is enabling sexism and misogyny.

They're enabling the culture that tells that 13-year-old boy that sending pornographic images of himself to girls who don't want to see them is "what you do".

The then 13-year-old boy who raped and murdered his 14-year-old classmate Ana Kriegel in Ireland in May 2018 had more than 12,000 pornographic images on his phone, which were dismissed as being usual for a teenage boy and so not submitted in evidence.

IT shouldn't be usual. It's that same sexism and misogyny that leads to violence against women and girls. Those of us who tolerate and normalise this are part of the problem. By not speaking up, by teaching girls how to avoid or pacify violent men instead of teaching boys and men NOT to be violent, NOT to have a sense of entitlement, NOT to condone violence in other men, all of us who aren't fighting this are complicit in letting it continue.

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When I realised, 30 years after my own experiences of sexual assault as a student, that young women were still experiencing it, I decided to run as a candidate for the Women's Equality Party in the 2017 snap General [Election](#).

My opponent, Stephen Kerr, won the seat for the [Tories](#). Shortly afterwards, interested in some of the ideas I had thrown at him during the campaign, he called me into his constituency office. He had been visited by two girls from my own daughter's school, asking what he was going to do to stop teenage boys harassing them in the street.

Well, hats off to him for seeking advice, but he didn't like the answer. #Sorrynotsorry, but the answer is feminism.

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A lack of feminism in our social mores perpetuates gender inequality. Achieving equality would lead to everything that feminists are fighting for: equal pay, equal power, equal worth, equal safety.

Teach boys and girls that they are equal. Teach boys how to manage their sense of entitlement in a male-dominated world, because dismantling that benefits everyone. Teach girls and boys to be feminists. Political parties should be stealing the Women's Equality Party policies left, right and centre to even scrape the surface of the problem.

That's the fight on our hands now. Because if we don't, my daughter will be despairing when HER daughters are harassed in decades to come, and women around the world will continue to live without equality and without freedom. We all need to be feminists now.

Kirstein Rummery is a Professor of Social Policy at the [University](#) of Stirling and the Scottish Policy Spokesperson for the Women's Equality Party.

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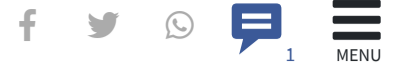
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