

On life and opinions

For a long time, if I was asked to describe myself, I'd often be heard saying I'm open-minded. For me being "open-minded" meant I'm an 'each to their own kind of girl'... Each to their own sexuality, each to their own religion, each to their own opinion. I honestly used to think that I could handle opinions different to mine. Instead I'm learning that this is only true for some issues like food, music, movies or hangout places. If someone does not have the same opinion as mine on women's rights, gay rights or sexism, I often find myself wanting to scream "you're an ignorant idiot and I really shouldn't associate myself with you!" On a good day I can slightly tolerate the belief that a heterosexual relationship cannot work if the man does not feel like the "provider" of the household, but again, I leave this up as an "each to their own" situation.

However, what recently had my heart beating like a jackhammer was a conversation with a friend who implied that there is no urgency in changing the status quo of men earning more than women simply because they're men. I usually go through life thinking that my peers and I are on the same page when it comes to gender roles and equality, it always catches me completely off-guard each time I'm reminded that we aren't.

Sadly, I can't just "un-know" everyone I've ever known because they don't believe in the same things I do or because they don't share the same views as mine, so what I now have to learn to do, is how to deal with (and by that I mean how to keep my calm) when put in situations where I have to confront opinions different to mine. So now I've resolved that the next time one of my peers makes an ignorant remark, no matter how callous or insensitive, I will remind myself that the likelihood that slapping them and/or calling them stupid dim-wits will make things better in any way is slim to none. I will also keep reminding myself that everyone is entitled to their opinion and sometimes the best I can do is "strongly disagree" and engage the person in dialogue in the hope that they might re-think their stance. It's not always easy, but I keep learning to keep calm

and count to 10, or at least try really hard. However, I must add that "you're entitled to your opinion" isn't always the best way to approach the situations because sometimes adopting a laissez faire attitude may just worsen the problem because every sexist, racist, homophobe or any other bigot out there can just say they are "entitled to their opinion."

In as much as people are entitled to their own opinions – in the interest of a social contract based on mutual respect and equality, we all should be compelled by a moral imperative to treat all persons the way I want to be treated. I don't have to like the way someone lives their life, but it's their life, they have the right to live it as they please and I should respect that in the same way I would expect them to respect the way I choose to live my life.

Respect for livelihood and people's choices should not be subjective to their age, sex, religion or sexual orientation. All humanity should be respected for humanity's sake, be it in your own person or another's.

bell hooks once said: "I want there to be a place in the world where people can engage in one another's differences in a way that is redemptive, full of hope and possibility. Not this "In order to love you, I must make you something else". That's what domination is all about, that in order to be close to you, I must possess you, remake and recast you."

By Mimi Mwiya



You are not entitled
to your *opinion*. You
are entitled to
your informed
opinion. No one is entitled
to be ignorant.

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