

My first thoughts when I came to St. Andrew's were not about figuring out how I would define and come to understand myself in a new place with new people, but instead about how these new people would define me. I was more concerned with how people would interpret my awkward eye contact with them in the hallway (or perhaps my self-conscious way of talking in class). I was more worried about how to fit in, and did not realize I was about to embark on an incredible journey of self-understanding and a much deeper and compassionate understanding of others.

As I learned pretty quickly, this school is filled with a passion for activism. (We are taught and allowed and encouraged to be focused on causes greater than ourselves.) This was so liberating! I joined the Girl Collaborative Club and while I knew I had always considered myself a feminist, being surrounded by a group of women so passionate for themselves empowered me. For the first time in my life I was having deep conversations about important issues.

Sophomore year, Sophia Cordova gave an amazing chapel talk, that I can't do justice describing,...but it made a huge impact on me and taught me to see myself as a woman in a completely new light. .. She discussed how hard it was to explain to others that she didn't see herself having children as an adult woman. People just assume girls will grow up and have babies. Sophia was thinking beyond this. Up until that moment I had never considered not having children. It was something I had always known I wanted. However, hearing this chapel talk made me question that decision. By wanting to have children, could I still call myself a feminist? Was I doing a disservice to the female population by locking myself into this stereotypical position?

This may seem like a strange thought because of course I was not doing a disservice to the female population by wanting to have children. In fact, I believe we are biologically blessed to have this choice and ability. The fact is, we need to have freedom and choice in every aspect of our lives. I realize when I say this that I am a white woman living in a privileged part of America, and I don't want to take my good fortune for granted. By trying too hard to become the person I thought I had to be, I had inadvertently created two boxes defining what it means to be a woman. In my mind, my future was either the fierce feminist CEO who didn't need a man's help, or I was the docile stay at home mom. I couldn't cross the lines between these two concepts.

As I reflected on this idea, I came to understand the absurdity of it. It didn't matter what type of woman I was. That is a large point of feminism: women and men breaking down these stereotypes to be whatever type of person they want to be, as equals.

There have been so many experiences at St. Andrew's that have changed and defined my understanding of my identity since sophomore year. Going to the women's march this year was one of them. The thing that struck me the most was the diverse lives of the speakers. Each woman had a different story, a different experience and a different message they were trying to get across. Yet despite these differences we all came together to support one another in an expression of self love and acceptance.

Part of what makes our experience at St. Andrew's so special is opportunities like this. I hope you all continue to push yourself to keep thinking about what makes you you, but more importantly that you continue to find the courage to find your own voice and acceptance of yourself while also understanding the needs, fears and uniqueness of others.

By coming to St. Andrew's we have been exposed to a level of empathy and compassion rarely seen in today's world. Let's take what we have learned this weekend, and continue these difficult discussions and important work.