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5 March 2020 | What does it mean to be a “bad” feminist when you work in the field of gender equality? That’s the question girls’ education not-for-profit One Girl and feminist tech company She’s a Crowd are asking this International Women’s Day.

Together they explore how internalised sexism shows up in their day-to-day work — both in the women and girls they speak with and in their own actions and subconscious bias. They examine how even feminists aren’t immune from seeing the world through a patriarchal lens; how a movement created for the purpose of equality often sees its own members judging each other for not being upstanding members of the club, and how that in itself is a reflection of the perfection demanded of all women in a patriarchal society.

The piece explores the more extreme examples of women turning against each other, such as with the latest controversy surrounding Bettina Arndt, through to the more subtle ways internalised bias can manifest, both in Australia and overseas. One Girl International Program’s Director Erica Berthelsen shares a story of meeting a woman in Sierra Leone who fundamentally believes all women are lazy — despite the fact that she wakes up before sunrise every day to fetch water, make breakfast for her children, and care for her extended family members, all before beginning her day of gruelling physical labour and often unpaid work.

Founder and CEO of She’s a Crowd, Zoe Condliffe, reflects back on being a young woman sitting on an International Women’s Day panel and having her reproductive choices discussed by a male audience member and the only male panel member; and then later being approached by a group of women who urged her get pregnant first and then focus on her career. Together, they explore how women often believe that in order to be the boss, they need to adopt male characteristics of leadership and squash their own natural instincts.

This International Women’s Day, women who advocate for the rights of women and girls every day reflect honestly on what it’s like to be a “bad” feminist in an industry where you’re expected to uphold the standard — the myths women internalise and tell each other as gospel, the complexity of subconscious bias as a result of centuries of inequality, and what we can all do to facilitate more space for women and girls to be the centre of their own narrative.

The piece can be found at www.onegirl.org.au/blog/badfeminist and may be published in its entirety with full credits to the authors and the organisations they represent.

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