

I met Lene, a 24-year-old student from Denmark studying technology, at a coffee shop in Norreport on a rainy and gray morning. She is a tiny woman, with short blonde curly hair just reaching her shoulders. She stood out amongst the dark interior of the shop with her bright yellow trench coat and blue rain boots. As we sat down, she wasted no time diving right into her thoughts about the event we had both attended.

Just two weeks ago we were surrounded by a diverse group of women on another overcast day in a small bar named *Jolene*. I took a seat in the back of the eight rows of black folding chairs, Lene in the first row, her curls tied back as she faced the screen in the front of the room. Phones and laptops filled my gaze as I looked around the room, it seemed quite fitting for a Techfestival event. Before the speakers began I scanned the room once more, this time my gaze greeted by one man sitting by the long wall of windows. A short Indian man wearing a black shirt tucked neatly into black pants, he kept his backpack on as he-like Lene, myself, and the rest of the women in the room-patiently waited for the featured speakers of *FemVision: Empowering the Community of Female Entrepreneurship*, to begin.

“Are there any entrepreneurs in the room?” asked the first speaker to take the stage. I watched as three women’s hands went up, and listened as the man blurted, “I am an entrepreneur with a brand new start up!” The room was not disturbed, and the presentation went on. As discussions regarding passion began, the man’s voice once more interrupted the room as he began to explain his personal entrepreneur journey. “She can speak with you individually after the presentation is finished,” cut in the event mediator standing behind me. With a thin smile and slight nod of approval the man contently stated, “I look forward to it.”

Woman shifted in their chairs and readied themselves with new blank documents pulled up on their computers as the next speaker began. “I didn’t start my entrepreneur journey until I was thirty-five, what for most is—” The rows of women in front of me jolted their heads up from their screens as the man stopped the speaker, inquiring, “Why have you not prepared a presentation? Also, could you speak just a bit louder, I am having trouble hearing you.” The room once more remained still and undisturbed as the woman in the front of the room cleared her throat, gave a soft smile, and went on with her talk.

A round of applause signaled the end of the speeches and the start of a Q&A session. Back at the coffee shop, Lene showed her frustrations recounting this point in the event as she wrapped

both of her hands tight around her mug of tea confessing, “I still get chills thinking about this moment.”

This was because with each new question asked, the man’s voice from the side of the room interjected by discounting both the questions and the answers with his sharp, matter of fact words. It was not until just ten minutes remained in the session when I watched as the small blonde Danish woman sitting in the first row broke what I found to be a tense moment. Lene kept her face forward as she began to speak, explaining her frustrations with not only the man and his behavior, but also everyone in the room who has kept silent as he talked over them. I, along with the rest of the room, watched as she slowly turned her face to look at the crowd behind her. Her voice began to catch and tears started to form in her eyes, “This is a celebration of female entrepreneurs, but once again this could just as easily be turned into a discussion on sexism and the unconscious bias associated with it.”

The room was hushed as some looked away, others looked down, but most did not seem to be bothered or even supportive of this outburst. The silence was finally broken by the man who rose from his chair, backpack in tow, leaving the now eerily still bar. Lene turned back around in her chair as the questions about marketing plans and gaining capital continued on.

We each took a sip of our teas as our reflections on the event ended. Lene began to explain to me her views on gender equality, those of which were quite similar to mine; women and men are equal in all aspects. I told her how coming to Denmark I was told about the amazing equality that is demonstrated, so I found myself just imagining a country full of individuals with strong feminist values. But, as I sat here and talked with Lene, I was shocked to learn how taboo a topic feminism actually is. She herself even scrunched her small face up with disgust as she explained the Norwegian model of thinking—that there should be total equality in the work place, even if that means not being as qualified as the opposite sex. Her hands flew up in the air telling me, “I have learned that feminism isn’t a bad word, but so many people just don’t know enough. It comes down to education, and knowing what the hell identifying as a feminist actually means!” She told me she wished everyone at the event was here right now so they could understand just how wrong their silence was.

As the sun began to peak out of the dark clouds our conversation came to an end. We exited through the door and Lene let out a small laugh as she asked me if I thought she was crazy for

her outburst. Looking at her bright face I formed a smile saying, “If you didn’t, I would have”, as we parted our separate ways.

I didn’t have the heart to tell Lene that this was only partly true. Back home I could not fathom the thought of an entire event filled with sheer rudeness being tolerated for that long. My feelings would have been found among a majority of the room, who would have spoken up just like Lene had, though much sooner. But here, at this event filled with women of all ethnicities and backgrounds, I was shocked to not see this same sense of community formed. I was made unsure whether my beliefs were too extreme, something I had never realized about myself and what I stand for as not just a global citizen, but a global woman. It seemed to me that even though equality may be more present here in Denmark in terms of legislation, the growth on the subject as an everyday acceptance is just as much a struggle here as it is in America.

Here I was at a coffee shop with a woman strong in her beliefs. We discussed ideas and experiences that could just as easily taken place back home. It is hard to decide whether this all too common conversation I was having across the globe was comforting or disheartening.