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Ron Paul Supporters Might Turn Out to Be the Biggest Proponents of Equality for Women

 By [Liana Gamber Thompson](#) December 14, 2012

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Image Credit: [Twitter: Women for Ron Paul](#)

In January of this year, [Stefan Molyneux](#), popular libertarian author and host of [Freedom Radio](#) said, “[Feminism is socialism with panties.](#)” If I had heard that statement any time before last fall, when I embarked on an ethnographic [research project](#) on the student liberty movement (the results of which are available [here](#)), I probably would have shrugged it off as part and parcel of the libertarian outlook on gender and feminism. Having been cocooned in the liberal environs of academia for the past decade, I just assumed that libertarianism and feminism were directly at odds.

But I was wrong, and so is Molyneux. (You can read a great rebuttal to his statement [here](#).) Over the last year, I interviewed over 30 participants in the student liberty movement from ages 15-25 and found a surprisingly robust feminist sentiment among many of them.

For starters, it’s important to understand that many young libertarians have moved well beyond the dogmatic individualism of Ayn Rand. They’re now taking inspiration from a wide range of theory and scholarship, some of which embraces feminist thinking. “T.J.” said, “I see a lot of times in the media, people think, ‘Oh, Ayn Rand, libertarian.’ Yeah, that’s like the front porch of libertarianism. Come into the house. Come upstairs. There are so many more other influences and thoughts in the libertarian movement.”

What’s more, as “Ann” explained, libertarianism is increasingly attracting women who are socially liberal, particularly on women’s issues, but who favor fiscal conservatism and small government.

"I think people will find that with conservatism, they’re going to — I think lose a lot of women with issues on right to life and gay marriage and stuff like that, especially with my generation because we tend to be much more tolerant. And I think women will begin also seeing that government solutions to women’s rights aren’t as effective as they were hoping they would be," she said.

The [Ladies of Liberty Alliance](#), founded by [Allison Gibbs](#) in 2009, was created as a resource for just such women. The organization seeks to address the shortage of women leaders in the liberty movement, where demographics are becoming more balanced with regard to gender but which still skews more heavily male.

I also learned that, while women might have been even more of a minority in the early days of the movement, luminaries like [Tonie Nathan](#) and [Sharon Presley](#) have been advocating for women’s rights in the liberty movement since the early 1970s. (In fact, there are some noted libertarian feminists throughout history — see, for example, [Voltaire de Cleve](#) and [Rose Wilder Lane](#).) Nathan founded the [Alliance of Libertarian Feminists](#) (ALF) in 1973, and Presley is a longstanding member and current executive director of the organization. ALF is still going strong today, publishing papers, hosting conferences, and maintaining an active [Facebook group](#) with over 3,000 likes.

Here’s Presley in a 2012 interview with Reason.TV on libertarian feminism. She explains that libertarian feminists think all men and women should have the freedom to be the individuals they want to be. But unlike other feminists, they don’t believe the state is helpful in achieving that goal.

In this sense, the core libertarian tenet of individual liberty is completely compatible with feminism. But in my interview with "Seth," who considered himself a libertarian feminist, he warned against individualism getting in the way of people seeing the inequalities that still exist. He said, "Individualism is a good methodological tool in some regards" but explained that it could also be used "too strongly."

"It (individualism) does sound like a very anti-racist and anti-sexist type of ideology, and it is. Like, their (libertarians') hearts are generally in the right place, but they forget that we aren't there right now. So, it's really important to come to terms with how race, how gender works in American society and the world at large before we skip all of that and just say, 'Oh, we're all individuals. It doesn't matter.'"

Still, there are a lot of libertarian anti-feminists out there (like Molyneux), and a lot of work has yet to be done to convince the naysayers. But I found it heartening to find that there is a new generation of libertarians who are trying to keep feminism present in the discourse.

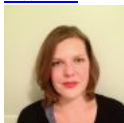
As Moriah Costa and Luca Gattoni-Celli put it in their impassioned January 2012 [blog post](#) for [Students for Liberty](#) on why libertarians should embrace feminism, "Whether as a libertarian you are on the right or the left, thick or thin, you are already a feminist. At its core, feminism is not about women getting special privileges. It is about men and women being respected equally."

According to this line of thinking, not only are libertarianism and feminism compatible, but libertarianism is itself *inherently* a feminist enterprise.

The research referred to in this article was conducted in conjunction with the MacArthur Network on [Youth and Participatory Politics](#) and funded by the [John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation](#). Pseudonyms were used for all interview participants.

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