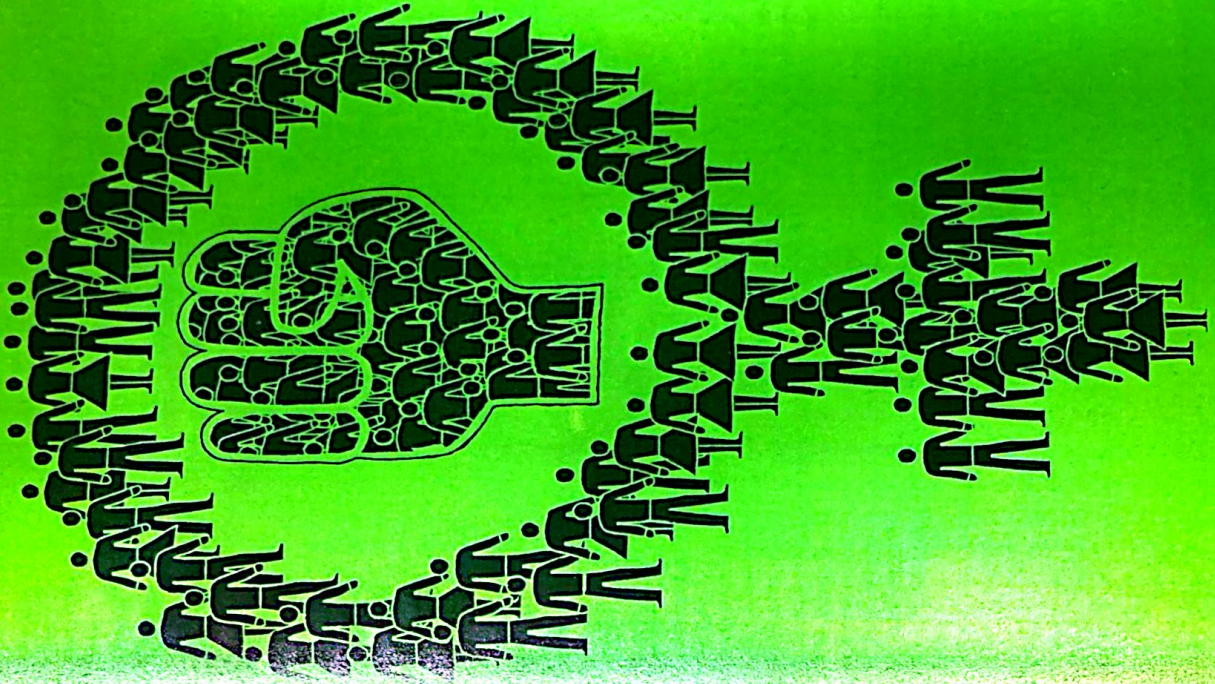


WE SHOULD ALL BE FEMINISTS

UNIVERSAL FEMINISM



IN CONTEXT

PRIMARY QUOTE
Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, 2012

KEY FIGURES
Caitlin Moran, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, Jessa Crispin

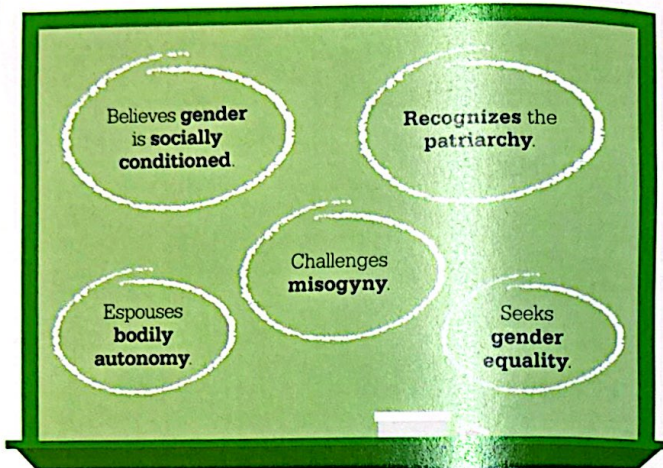
BEFORE
2000 American feminist icon bell hooks publishes *Feminism Is for Everybody: Passionate Politics*, in which she argues that feminism is good for women and men.

2004 In the US, Jessica Valenti sets up the website *Feministing.com* produced by and for young feminists.

AFTER
2016 American entertainment magazine *Billboard* describes Beyoncé's album *Lemonade* as a "revolutionary work of black feminism."

2017 *Good Night Stories for Rebel Girls*, stories that challenge gender stereotypes, is published in the US.

What makes a feminist?



At the end of the first decade of the 21st century, there was a huge surge in feminist discourse across the internet, particularly in the feminist blogosphere. Some women held the "postfeminist" view that the battle for women's liberation had been fought and won and women could now choose their own destiny. They argued that feminism was too hostile to men and irrelevant to most women's lives. Other feminists denounced such views as selfish, ignoring the needs of women who were still struggling. They urged women to remember the radicalism of second-wave feminists and unite to dismantle the patriarchy, the cause of women's oppression across the world. At the same time, entrenched critics of feminism expressed the view, as they had for decades, that feminism was nothing more than an attempt by women to assert their supremacy over men.

In the midst of these online storms, some high-profile women began to promote feminism as a

matter of common sense. Distilling their notions of feminism into a basic liberal motto of equality between the sexes, they posed the question: "Who would not be a feminist?" They proclaimed that they were feminists and that everyone else should be, too. Adherents of this type of feminism included British writer and cultural critic Caitlin Moran, actor Emma Watson, US First Lady Michelle Obama, and the Nigerian writer Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie.

A matter of common sense

Caitlin Moran's 2011 memoir *How to Be a Woman* uses humor to advance the idea of feminism being basic common sense. In contrast to many books on feminism written by academics, which could often be theoretical and abstruse, Moran's book set out to make feminist ideas accessible and relatable. She tells stories from her own life, from the naming of body parts by her family and the pressure she felt as a teenager to

See also: The roots of oppression 114–117 • The beauty myth 264–267 • Bringing feminism online 294–297 • Sexism in everywhere 308–309 • Leaning in 312–313 • Sexual abuse awareness 322–327

“
What part of 'liberation for women' is not for you?
Caitlin Moran

remove body hair and wear high heels to undergoing an abortion as an adult.

Moran argues that life for women in the 21st century is inextricably tied to feminism's historical gains. Without feminism, writes Moran, women would not even be able to read a book, let alone open a bank account or vote. Moran disputes the idea that feminism is only for a subset of women, arguing that even women who live their lives in ways not understood as traditionally feminist have a place in feminism.

Celebrities, such as British actor Emma Watson, have also advocated common-sense feminism. In 2014, Watson launched her HeForShe initiative as part of her work as a goodwill ambassador for UN Women. The campaign seeks to enlist the active support of men in the prevention of violence against women. After emphasizing the right of women and men to be equal,

A leading proponent of a new approach to feminism, Caitlin Moran uses her blog and her newspaper column to share her often quirky views on women and society.

Watson added that perceptions of feminism as man-hating had to stop and reiterated the view, expressed by Hillary Clinton in a speech in 1995, that feminism was not a women's issue but a matter of human rights, in which men also had a stake. Men, too, deserved to be freed from gender stereotypes.

Former US First Lady Michelle Obama focuses on the practical application of common sense feminism to effect meaningful change. She is an active supporter of girls' education worldwide, and declared her allegiance to the #BringBackOurGirls campaign in support of the schoolgirls abducted by terrorist group Boko Haram in northern Nigeria in 2014. She also stresses the importance of women's leadership and called out Donald Trump's disrespect for women during the 2016 US presidential election campaign. Obama's efforts to incorporate such



“
There is no limit to what we, as women, can accomplish.
Michelle Obama

issues in her role as First Lady contributed to her image as a role model for women, particularly young black girls.

Feminists unite

It is not just Western feminists who champion feminism for men and women everywhere. Nigerian writer Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie—whose first novel *Purple Hibiscus*, about a girl growing up in a violent patriarchal family in Nigeria, was published in 2003—delivered one of the most eloquent arguments for a more collaborative form of feminism in a 2012 TED Talk (online talks about "ideas worth spreading") called "We Should All Be Feminists." Adichie said that she got the idea for the talk when a male friend called her a feminist in the same tone one would use to call someone a terrorist. The talk was not a rallying cry for Nigerian feminism, or an attack on Nigerian men, but a plea for change in Nigerian society, and in the wider world.

Adichie condemned the different standards that were applied to acceptable behavior in girls and boys in Nigeria. Girls and women in Nigerian society, »

“
We need to reclaim the word 'feminism.' We need the word 'feminism' back ...
Caitlin Moran

“

We teach girls to
shrink themselves ...
**Chimamanda Ngozi
Adichie**

”

Adichie declared, were expected to do housework, to put men first in order to spare men's egos, and to self-regulate their own sexuality. Unmarried women, she said, were seen as having "failed" simply because they had no husband.

The Bring Back Our Girls

campaign of 2014 demanded the release of hundreds of schoolgirls kidnapped by Islamic terrorists in northeastern Nigeria. The campaign united women all over the world.



Men, meanwhile, continued to be seen as the "standard" humans. The fact that men do not recognize this, asserted Adichie, was part of the problem. She emphasized that men can and should be feminists, too, and that men and women must unlearn gender stereotyping in order for everyone to fulfil their potential. Part of this work, Adichie argued, involves raising children differently so that the next generation has more equitable ideas about gender, a view she expanded upon in her 2017 work *Dear Ijeawele, or A Feminist Manifesto in Fifteen Suggestions*—15 ideas on how to bring up a daughter in a gender-neutral way that is rooted in Nigerian and (her own) Igbo culture.

Although Adichie was accused of being "un-African" by some critics, "We Should All Be Feminists" seemed to strike a chord, not just in Nigeria but around the world. In 2013, the American singer and feminist Beyoncé sampled these words in the track "Flawless" on the

“

We don't all have to believe
in the same feminism.

Roxane Gay
American writer

”

album *Beyoncé*; Dior put the slogan We Should All Be Feminists on T-shirts; and when the talk was published as a book in 2014, it was given to all 16-year-olds in Sweden, in the hope that it would spark debate within schools and make boys think about gender equality.

The critiques

Distilling feminism down to the fundamental message of gender equality has the advantage of being easily understood. As such,

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie



Born in Enugu, Nigeria, in 1977, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie spent her early life in the university town of Nsukka, where her father was a professor of statistics and her mother the registrar. After studying medicine and pharmacy, she traveled to the US to study communication, and later graduated in communication and political science at Eastern Connecticut State University.

Adichie began her first novel *Purple Hibiscus* while studying in Connecticut. The book was shortlisted for the Orange Prize for fiction in 2004 and won the

Commonwealth Writers' Prize in 2005. Adichie has held a number of posts in American universities and splits her time between the US and Nigeria.

Key works

2003 *Purple Hibiscus*
2006 *Half of a Yellow Sun*
2009 *The Thing Around Your Neck*
2013 *Americanah*
2014 *We Should All Be Feminists*
2017 *Dear Ijeawele, or A Feminist Manifesto in Fifteen Suggestions*

it has the potential to reach a wide audience, encouraging people with different perspectives to all look upon themselves as feminists. However, not all feminists are comfortable with this universal approach. Moran's brand of feminism, for example, has been criticized by some women for not taking into account the issues faced by those who do not share her advantages in life as a well-paid writer and commentator.

Above all, common-sense feminism is critiqued for not being radical enough and for leaving behind its revolutionary roots. Simply wanting equality with men, and wearing a T-shirt that says so, critics argue, does not offer a serious challenge to existing male-dominated power structures.

In her 2017 book *Why I am Not a Feminist: a Feminist Manifesto*, American feminist writer Jessa Crispin explains that she does not call herself a feminist because the term has been rendered banal and "toothless"—something that everyone can support while ignoring the fundamental disparities in the world. In her book, Crispin—who began her

career as an abortion counselor for the birth control organization Planned Parenthood—criticizes what she calls "lifestyle feminism," created by patriarchal corporate culture and often reduced to slogans. She argues that there is no point in having more women in power if the system of patriarchy remains the same, and is critical of the individualistic "lean in" type of feminism promoted by Facebook's Sheryl Sandberg, who advises women to work harder and adopt male strategies for getting to the top. Instead, Crispin calls for sustained struggle against the capitalist economic system in

order to effect profound social change. She insists that achieving minor adjustments to the status quo will do nothing to help the multitudes of poor and oppressed women of the world.

Meeting challenges

In some ways, feminism has never seemed more powerful than it is now, with women from different marginalized backgrounds across the world, aided by the internet, standing up to the myriad political and economic threats to their well-being and safety. The spread of feminist ideas across social media has had an impact on women everywhere, from teenage girls in remote corners of Africa to celebrities in Hollywood.

In order to harness this power, and achieve change, many women argue that it is valuable to have successful female role models who stress that they do not hate men. Yet, while some of the "superstar feminists" are inspirational, their influence may be limited if they decline to back up their slogans with their actions and challenge the dominant structures of power in society head-on. ■

“

I'm a feminist ...
It'd be stupid not to
be on my own side.
Maya Angelou

”