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RISE OF FEMINISM

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ABSTRACT

The rise of feminism, a global movement advocating social, economic, and political equality of the sexes, evolved over centuries through distinct, often overlapping "waves" targeting patriarchal structures. From 19th-century suffrage to modern digital activism, it has expanded to address intersectional issues, aiming to replace subordinate status with gender equality. Feminism is a global socio-political movement and ideology dedicated to achieving social, economic, and political equality for women, aiming to dismantle patriarchal systems that have historically relegated women to subordinate roles.

INTRODUCTION

The **history of feminism** comprises the narratives (chronological or thematic) of the movements and ideologies which have aimed at equal rights for women. While feminists around the world have differed in causes, goals, and intentions depending on time, culture, and country, most Western feminist historians assert that all movements that work to obtain women's rights should be considered feminist movements, even when they did not (or do not) apply the term to themselves. Some other historians limit the term "feminist" to the modern feminist movement and its progeny, and use the label "protofeminist" to describe earlier movements.

Modern Western feminist history is conventionally split into time periods, or "waves", each with slightly different aims based on prior progress:

- First-wave feminism of the 19th and early 20th centuries focused on overturning legal inequalities, particularly addressing issues of women's suffrage
- Second-wave feminism (1960s–1980s) broadened debate to include cultural inequalities, gender norms, and the role of women in society
- Third-wave feminism (1990s–2000s) refers to diverse strains of feminist activity, seen by third-wavers themselves both as a continuation of the second wave and as a response to its perceived failures
- Fourth-wave feminism (early 2010s–present) expands on the third wave's focus on intersectionality, emphasizing body positivity, trans-inclusivity, and an open discourse about rape culture in the social media era

Although the "waves" construct has been commonly used to describe the history of feminism, the concept has also been criticized by non-White feminists for ignoring and erasing the history between the "waves", by choosing to focus solely on a few famous figures, on the perspective of a white bourgeois woman and on popular events, and for being racist and colonialist. There are people who believe that we do not need feminism today, but nothing could be further from the truth. Women have struggled for equality and against oppression for centuries, and although some battles have been partly won - such as the right to vote and

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equal access to education – women are still disproportionally affected by all forms of violence and by discrimination in every aspect of life.

FEMINISM AND WOMEN'S RIGHTS MOVEMENT

It is true that in some areas and on certain issues, there have been improvements: for example, **in Saudi Arabia women were allowed, for the first time, to vote and run for office in 2015**.However, on other issues there has been little or no progress: for example, there have been **insignificant reductions in cases of violence against women**. Women continue to receive lower pay for the same work as men in all parts of the world; there are still countries that do not have laws against marital rape and still allow child brides, and practices such as 'honour' killings and female genital mutilation still exist.

Jokes about feminism and stereotypes about feminists persist, and many of these are also homophobic and assume that being lesbian is something 'bad'. In fact, being a feminist is not something particular to any sex or gender: there are women and men who consider themselves feminists, some are gay or lesbian, some heterosexual, bisexual or transgender - and some may identify differently.

The concept of feminism reflects a history of different struggles, and the term has been interpreted in fuller and more complex ways as understanding has developed. **In general, feminism can be seen as a movement to put an end to sexism, sexist exploitation, and oppression and to achieve full gender equality in law and in practice**. There have been many extraordinary women who have played an important role in local or world history, but not all of these have necessarily been advocates of women's issues. **The women's movement is made up of women and men who work and fight to achieve gender equality and to improve the lives of women as a social group**. In most societies, women were traditionally confined to the home as daughters, wives and mothers, and we are often only aware of women in history because of their relation to famous men. Of course many women throughout history did in fact play an important role in cultural and political life, but they tend to be invisible. An organised women's movement only really started in the 19th century, even though women activists and the struggle for equality have always been part of all human societies.

One of the early pioneers, who thought and wrote about women as a group, is the Italian writer Christine de Pizan, who published a book about women's position in society as early as 1495. Christine de Pizan wrote about books she had read by famous men, who wrote books about the sins and weaknesses of girls and women, and questioned whether women were really human beings at all, or whether they were more similar to animals. Christine de Pizan's work offers a good example of the early stages of the struggle for women's equality. However, she was very unusual in being able to read and write, which was not at all common for women of that time.

In later history, women took part in the French revolution from the very beginning: the demonstrations that led to the revolution started with a large group of working women marching to Versailles to demand not only food to feed their families, but also political change. However, the French Revolution did not lead to proper recognition of women's rights. For that reason, in September 1791, Olympe de Gouges wrote the Declaration of the Rights of Woman and of the Female Citizen, in response to the Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen, and with the intention of exposing the failure of the French Revolution to recognise gender equality. As a result of her writings de Gouges was accused, tried and convicted of treason, resulting in her immediate execution.

The women's movement began to develop in North America, mainly because women there were allowed to go to school earlier than in Europe - and women who can read and write, and who are encouraged to think for

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themselves, usually start to question how society works. The first activists travelled around North America and fought for the end of both slavery and women's oppression. They organised the 'First Women's Rights Convention' in 1848, and continued to campaign to improve the social position of all women. The movement also began in Europe with the same broad aims: activists collected signatures demanding that working women should receive their own wages and not their husbands', that women should be able to own a house and have custody of their children.

Sexism

This term is very often present in feminist literature as well as in the media and everyday life, and it is an important concept in understanding feminism. **Sexism means perceiving and judging people only on the basis of their belonging to a particular sex or gender**. It also covers discrimination of a person on the same basis. It is important to note that sexism applies to both men and women, however, women are more affected by sexism than men in all areas of life. **Everyday sexism takes different forms**, sometimes not easily recognisable – for example, telling jokes about girls, commenting on the female body (objectifying women), reacting to the way women are dressed, assigning women easier tasks in Internet games or objectifying women in advertising.

The literature mentions three types of sexism:

- **Traditional sexism:** supporting traditional gender roles, treating women as worse than men, employing traditional stereotypes which portray women as less competent than men.
- **Modern sexism:** denying gender discrimination ('it is not a problem anymore'), having a negative attitude towards women's rights, denying the validity of claims made by women
- **Neosexism:** This notion refers to ideologies that justify discrimination towards women on the basis of competences – 'men are effectively better competent for some things' – for example in managerial or leadership positions, and not on a direct discrimination of women. Defenders of these ideas tend to ignore or deny the difficulties faced by women in society as having an influence on 'competences'.

If it is true that the situation of women's human rights has improved in recent years, this does not mean that sexism has ended.

Women's rights are human rights

Why do we need women's rights, when these are simply human rights? Why do we need human rights treaties about women's rights, when we have already general human rights instruments? Almost everywhere in the world, women are denied their human rights just because of their sex or gender. **Women's rights should not be seen as special rights**: they are human rights enshrined in international human rights treaties and other documents, and include such rights as **freedom from discrimination, right to life, freedom from torture, right to privacy, access to health, right to decent living conditions, right to safety, and many others**. However, there are also human rights instruments that take into account the specific situation of women in society with regards to accessing or exercising their human rights, or which aim to protect them from violence.

FEMINISM: THE FIRST WAVE

For generations, the feminist movement has forged ahead advocating for women's rights. Many scholars and activists assume that there are three distinct "waves" of feminism, with the "#MeToo Movement" marking a contemporary fourth wave. However, the history of the feminist movement is much more complex.The metaphor of "waves" representing the various surges of feminism began in 1968 when Martha

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Weinman Lear published an article in the New York Times called "The Second Feminist Wave." Lear's article connected the suffrage movement of the 19th century with the women's movements during the 1960s. This new terminology quickly spread and became the popular way to define feminism.

Although this metaphor of "feminist waves" is helpful for people to distinguish between different eras of women's activism, it is impossible to accurately pinpoint specific dates that started or ended each wave of feminism. In reality, each historical era was inspired by a long tradition of activism that transcended generational lines.

The Origins of the Movement

The first wave of the feminist movement is usually tied to the first formal Women's Rights Convention that was held in 1848. However, first wave feminists were influenced by the collective activism of women in various other reform movements. In particular, feminists drew strategic and tactical insight from women participating in the French Revolution, the Temperance Movement, and the Abolitionist Movement.

The French Revolution

"The French Revolution marked the beginnings of the organized participation of women in politics." --Historian R.B. Rose in "Feminism Women and the French Revolution." As the French Revolution began in 1789, women were frequently on the front lines advocating for their rights. Even though they were considered "passive citizens," these women took an active role in the political climate of their country. On October 5, 1789, thousands of armed French women marched from markets in Paris to the Palace of Versailles. They demanded that the King address their economic concerns and the drastic food shortages happening across France. Unfortunately, their fight was far from over.A few months prior, reformers were able to persuade the French National Constituent Assembly to adopt the "Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen." This document provided citizenship rights to various members of the population. Unfortunately, it still excluded women and other minority groups from citizenship. When this document became the preamble to the French Constitution in 1791, many women shifted their focus to gaining citizenship and equal rights.One of these women, playwright Olympes de Gouges, wrote "Declaration of the Rights of Woman and the Female Citizen" in 1791. Gouges' declaration begins as follows: "Women are born free and are man's equal in law. Social distinctions can be founded solely on common utility." Her statement also includes the various rights that both men and women should possess. This document and the collective activism of the women in the French Revolution became a source of inspiration for first wave feminists.

The Temperance Movement

First wave feminists were also influenced by the widespread activism of women during the temperance movement. In the early nineteenth century, many United States citizens began to promote "moral reform." In an effort to fight against immorality, the temperance movement developed in the 1820s to limit or prohibit the consumption of alcohol. For many middle-class white women who were deemed the "moral authorities of their households," drinking was considered a threat to the stability of their homes. These women, along with male supporters of temperance, began to create cartoons, pamphlets, songs and speeches about the harms of alcohol usage.By 1826, the American Society for the Promotion of Temperance (American Temperance Society) was formed in Boston, Massachusetts. The society quickly spread, with temperance activists starting local chapters all across the country. In addition, by 1831 there were over twenty-four women's organizations dedicated to the temperance movement. One of the notable groups that developed later in the movement was the Woman's Christian Temperance Union. Thousands of women from this organization marched into liquor stores and

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bars demanding that owners sign a pledge to stop selling alcoholic beverages. As these women advocated for temperance and the affairs of their homes, they also demanded to have an equal role in public activity.

"The temperance movement, in fact, gave women the opportunity to be engaged in public political life for the first time." --Tara Isabella Burton in "The Feminist History of Prohibition"

The Abolitionist Movement

As many of those women began to advocate for their political voice, women from different ethnicities and backgrounds were also fighting to have basic human rights. In the early nineteenth century, much of the African American population in the United States was enslaved. With the first group of enslaved Africans arriving in the early 1600s, African American men and women had been fighting for freedom and citizenship for centuries. Their collective activism was the foundation of the abolitionist movement that pushed for the end of slavery.African American women were central to early nineteenth century abolitionism During the 1820s and 1830s, these women established social and literary organizations, as well as religious groups to challenge slavery and support their communities.

On February 12, 1821, two-hundred working–class African American women established the Daughters of Africa Society in Philadelphia. This society provided support to their members, and a weekly allowance of $1.50 when they were sick. Similarly, the Colored Female Free Produce Society was formed in 1831 to boycott the exploitation of enslaved labor by only selling items that were produced by free African Americans.

Several literary societies also formed during this time that were devoted to the "diffusion of knowledge and the suppression of vice and immorality." The Female Literary Association, the Afric-American Female Intelligence Society, and the Colored Ladies Literary Society were all formed in the early 1830s.

FEMINISM: THE SECOND WAVE

Feminism: The Second Wave, a movement in feminism that was represented by the women's rights movement of the 1960s and '70s and was seen as a seemingly abrupt break with the tranquil suburban life pictured in American popular culture. Yet the roots of the new rebellion were buried in the frustrations of college-educated mothers whose discontent impelled their daughters in a new direction. If first-wave feminists were inspired by the abolition movement, their great-granddaughters were swept into feminism by the civil rights movement, the attendant discussion of principles such as equality and justice, and the revolutionary ferment caused by protests against the Vietnam War.

Women's concerns were on Pres. John F. Kennedy's agenda even before this public discussion began. In 1961 he created the President's Commission on the Status of Women and appointed Eleanor Roosevelt to lead it. Its report, issued in 1963, firmly supported the nuclear family and preparing women for motherhood. But it also documented a national pattern of employment discrimination, unequal pay, legal inequality, and meagre support services for working women that needed to be corrected through legislative guarantees of equal pay for equal work, equal job opportunities, and expanded child-care services. The Equal Pay Act of 1963 provided the first guarantee, and the Civil Rights Act of 1964 was amended to bar employers from discriminating on the basis of sex.

Some deemed these measures insufficient in a country where classified advertisements still segregated job openings by sex, where state laws restricted women's access to contraception, and where incidences of rape and domestic violence remained undisclosed. In the late 1960s, then, the notion of a women's rights movement took root at the same time as the civil rights movement, and women of all ages and circumstances were swept up in debates about gender, discrimination, and the

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nature of equality.Mainstream groups such as the National Organization for Women (NOW) launched a campaign for legal equity, while ad hoc groups staged sit-ins and marches for any number of reasons—from assailing college curricula that lacked female authors to promoting the use of the word *Ms.* as a neutral form of address—that is, one that did not refer to marital status. Health collectives and rape crisis centres were established. Children's books were rewritten to obviate sexual stereotypes. Women's studies departments were founded at colleges and universities. Protective labour laws were overturned. Employers found to have discriminated against female workers were required to compensate with back pay. Excluded from male-dominated occupations for decades, women began finding jobs as pilots, construction workers, soldiers, bankers and bus drivers.

Unlike the first wave, second-wave feminism provoked extensive theoretical discussion about the origins of women's oppression, the nature of gender, and the role of the family. Kate Millett's *Sexual Politics* made the best-seller list in 1970 and in it she broadened the term *politics* to include all "power-structured relationships" and posited that the personal was actually political. Shulamith Firestone, a founder of the New York Radical Feminists, published *The Dialectic of Sex* in the same year, insisting that love disadvantaged women by creating intimate shackles between them and the men they loved—men who were also their oppressors. One year later, Germaine Greer, an Australian living in London, published *The Female Eunuch* in which she argued that the sexual repression of women cuts them off from the creative energy they need to be independent and self-fulfilled.Any attempt to create a coherent, all-encompassing feminist ideology was doomed. While most could agree on the questions that needed to be asked about the origins of gender distinctions, the nature of power, or the roots of sexual violence, the answers to those questions were bogged down by ideological hairsplitting, name-calling, and mutual recrimination. Ever the term *liberation* could mean different things to different people.

Feminism became a river of competing eddies and currents. "Anarcho-feminists," who found a larger audience in Europe than in the United States, resurrected Emma Goldman and said that women could not be liberated without dismantling such institutions as the family, private property, and state power. Individualist feminists, calling on libertarian principles of minimal government, broke with most other feminists over the issue of turning to government for solutions to women's problems. "Amazon feminists" celebrated the mythical female heroine and advocated liberation through physical strength. And separatist feminists, including many lesbian feminists, preached that women could not possibly liberate themselves without at least a period of separation from men.

Ultimately, three major streams of thought surfaced. The first was liberal, or mainstream, feminism, which focused its energy on concrete and pragmatic change at an institutional and governmental level. Its goal was to integrate women more thoroughly into the power structure and to give women equal access to positions men had traditionally dominated. While aiming for strict equality (to be evidenced by such measures as an equal number of women and men in positions of power, or an equal amount of money spent on male and female student athletes), these liberal feminist groups nonetheless supported the modern equivalent of protective legislation such as special workplace benefits for mothers.

In contrast to the pragmatic approach taken by liberal feminism, radical feminism aimed to reshape society and restructure its institutions, which they saw as inherently patriarchal. Providing the core theory for modern feminism, radicals argued that women's subservient role in society was too closely woven into the social fabric to be unraveled without a revolutionary revamping of society itself. They strove to supplant hierarchical and traditional power

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relationships they saw as reflecting a male bias and they sought to develop nonhierarchica and antiauthoritarian approaches to politics and organization.

Finally, cultural or "difference" feminism, the last of the three currents, rejected the notion that men and women are intrinsically the same and advocated celebrating the qualities they associated with women, such as their greater concern for affective relationships and their nurturing preoccupation with others. Inherent in its message was a critique of mainstream feminism's attempt to enter traditionally male spheres. This was seen as denigrating women's natural inclinations by attempting to make women more like men.

FEMINISM: THE THIRD WAVE

Feminism: The Third Wave, movement in feminism that emerged in the mid-1990s. It was led by so-called Generation Xers who, born in the 1960s and '70s in the developed world, came of age in a media-saturated and culturally and economically diverse milieu. Although they benefitted significantly from the legal rights and protections that had been obtained by first- and second-wave feminists, they also critiqued the positions and what they felt was unfinished work of second-wave feminism.The third wave was made possible by the greater economic and professional power and status achieved by women of the second wave, the massive expansion in opportunities for the dissemination of ideas created by the information revolution of the late 20th century, and the coming of age of Generation X scholars and activists.

Some early adherents of the new approach were literally daughters of the second wave Third Wave Direct Action Corporation (organized in 1992) became in 1997 the Third Wave Foundation, dedicated to supporting "groups and individuals working towards gender, racial, economic, and social justice" both were founded by (among others) Rebecca Walker, the daughter of the novelist and second-waver Alice Walker. Jennifer Baumgardner and Amy Richards, authors of *Manifesta: Young Women, Feminism, and the Future* (2000), were both born in 1970 and raised by second wavers who had belonged to organized feminist groups, questioned the sexual division of labour in their households, and raised their daughters to be self-aware, empowered, articulate, high-achieving women.These women and others like them grew up with the expectation of achievement and examples of female success as well as an awareness of the barriers presented by sexism, racism, and classism. They chose to battle such obstacles by inverting sexist, racist, and classist symbols, fighting patriarchy with irony, answering violence with stories of survival, and combating continued exclusion with grassroots activism and radical democracy. Rather than becoming part of the "machine," third wavers began both sabotaging and rebuilding the machine itself.

Influenced by the postmodernist movement in the academy, third-wave feminists sought to question, reclaim, and redefine the ideas, words, and media that have transmitted ideas about womanhood, gender, beauty, sexuality, femininity, and masculinity, among other things. There was a decided shift in perceptions of gender, with the notion that there are some characteristics that are strictly male and others that are strictly female giving way to the concept of a gender continuum. From this perspective each person is seen as possessing, expressing, and suppressing the full range of traits that had previously been associated with one gender or the other. For third-wave feminists, therefore, "sexual liberation," a major goal of second-wave feminism, was expanded to mean a process of first becoming conscious of the ways one's gender identity and sexuality have been shaped by society and then intentionally constructing (and becoming free to express) one's authentic gender identity.Third wavers inherited a foothold of institutional power created by second wavers, including women's studies programs at universities, long-standing feminist organizations, and well-established publishing outlets such as *Ms.*

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magazine and several academic journals These outlets became a less important part o the culture of the third wave than they had beer for the second wave.

In expressing their concerns, third-wave feminists actively subverted, co-opted, anc played on seemingly sexist images anc symbols. This was evident in the double entendre and irony of the language commonly adopted by people in their self-presentations Slang used derogatorily in most earlier contexts became proud and defiant labels. The spirit anc intent of the third wave shone through the raw honesty, humour, and horror of Eve Ensler's play (and later book) *The Vagina Monologues*, ar exploration of women's feelings about sexuality that included vagina-centred topics as diverse as orgasm, birth, and rape; the righteous angei of punk rock's riot grrrls movement; and the playfulness, seriousness, and subversion of the Guerrilla Girls, a group of women artists who donned gorilla masks in an effort to expose female stereotypes and fight discrimination against female artists.The third wave was much more inclusive of women and girls of colour than the first or second waves had been. In reaction and opposition to stereotypical images of women as passive, weak, virginal, anc faithful, or alternatively as domineering demanding, slutty, and emasculating, the third wave redefined women and girls as assertive powerful, and in control of their own sexuality. In popular culture this redefinition gave rise to icons of powerful women that included the singers Madonna, Queen Latifah, and Mary J Blige, among others, and the women depicted in television series such as *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (1997–2003), *Sex and the City* (1998-2004), and *Girlfriends* (2000–08). Medic programming for children increasingly depicted smart, independent girls and women in lead roles, including Disney heroines such as Mulan (1998) and Helen Parr and her daughter, Violet (*The Incredibles,* 2006), and television characters such as Dora (*Dora the Explorer* 1999–2006), Carly and Sam (*iCarly*, 2007–12) and *Sesame Street*'s first female lead, Abby Cadabby, who debuted in 2006. The sassy self-expression of "Girl Power" merchandise also proved popular.

The increasing ease of publishing on the Internet meant that e-zines (electronic magazines) and blogs became ubiquitous. Many serious independent writers, not to mention organizations, found that the Internet offered a forum for the exchange of information and the publication of essays and videos that made their point to a potentially huge audience. The Internet radically democratized the content of the feminist movement with respect to participants, aesthetics, and issues.

FEMINISM: THE FOURTH WAVE

Feminism: The Fourth Wave, movement within feminism that, although debated by some, began about 2012. Its focus was on sexual harassment, body shaming, and rape culture, among other issues. A key component was the use of social media to highlight and address these concerns. The new wave arose amid a number of high-profile incidents.

In December 2012 a young woman was brutally gang-raped in India and subsequently died, sparking local protests and international outrage. That was followed two years later by the Gamergate campaign, a manifestation of the so-called "men's rights movement" that had its origins on the Web site 4chan. GamerGate ostensibly sought to promote ethics in video-game journalism, but it was in reality a harassment campaign against "social justice warriors." The latter were often women who objected to female stereotypes in video games and were subsequently inundated with death threats and rape threats.

Against this background came Donald Trump's defeat of Hillary Clinton in the U.S. presidential election in 2016. Trump had made a number of inflammatory remarks about women, and the day after the election a grandmother went on Facebook to propose a march on Washington, D.C. The suggestion quickly gained traction and became a call for social change, especially in

regard to gender equality. Known as the Women's March, it grew to include demonstrations across the United States and around the world. The protests took place on January 21, 2017, the day after Trump's inauguration, and as many as 4.6 million people attended the various events in the United States, making the Women's March perhaps the largest single-day demonstration in that country's history.Arguably even more significant was the Me Too movement, which was launched in 2006 in the United States to assist survivors of sexual violence, especially females of colour. The campaign gained widespread attention beginning in 2017, after it was revealed that film mogul Harvey Weinstein had for years sexually harassed and assaulted women in the industry with impunity. Victims of sexual harassment or assault around the world—and of all ethnicities—began sharing their experiences on social media, using the hashtag #MeToo. The movement grew over the coming months to bring condemnation to dozens of powerful men in politics, business, entertainment, and the news media.

CONCLUSION

The rise of feminism represents a powerful and ongoing movement toward achieving gender equality and social justice across the world. It has played a crucial role in challenging traditional norms, breaking stereotypes, and raising awareness about the discrimination and inequalities faced by women in various aspects of life. From securing basic rights such as education and voting to addressing complex issues like workplace equality, reproductive rights, and representation, feminism has continuously evolved to meet the needs of changing societies.

Moreover, modern feminism emphasizes inclusivity and intersectionality, recognizing that factors such as race, class, culture, and identity shape individual experiences differently. Despite significant progress, many challenges still remain, including gender-based violence, wage gaps, and unequal opportunities. Therefore, the rise of feminism is not just a historical phenomenon but an ongoing effort that seeks to create a fair, respectful, and inclusive society where everyone, regardless of gender, can thrive with equal rights and opportunities.

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