
The Real Meaning Of Being A Feminist

Some topics are better understood when you approach them on the basis of what they are not than what they are. Feminism as a concept falls in this category. This is so because most users of the term abuse or misuse it either because they do not understand what it means or, (for those who claim to fully understand it,) do not know where this school of thought applies.

Feminism is therefore not about hating men or fighting and eliminating them; it is not about fighting to get men out of power, neither is it a fight for woman superiority. This French word that became an English term since the 1890s goes beyond being sexually liberal as a woman, nor is it opposed to marriage and motherhood. With all these said, one would wonder what then is Feminism? Well, this what we will trash out as you read on.

What Does Feminism Mean?

With much credit to Charles Fourier a Utopian and French philosopher who invented the word in 1837, some schools of thought have given different definitions of the term and these definitions can only be narrowed to two. On one hand, it is political, social and economic equality on the sexes, on the other hand, it is an organized activity centred on women's rights and interests.

But then, if we must accept parts of these definitions, the term feminism can then be simply put as a social movement or an ideology that is based on closing the wide gap between men and women. It is the advocacy for women's rights on the ground of sexist equality. The ideology wants women to feel safe against all forms of harassment.

The concept of feminism has its root from the early 18th century when women are forced to endure severe sexist laws which include, but not limited to getting girls as young as ten years married, denying women jobs based on their gender, and husbands raping their wives to satisfy their sexual urges. It is the fight against these historical societal misfortunes at different stages that gave rise to different waves of feminism.

The Four Waves of Feminism

Since the inception of the term, feminism has always been known to have three waves. However, thanks to the era of internet connectivity, the fourth wave was birthed on the strength of the #MeToo movement on various social media platforms. Each of the waves of Feminism has its own goal.

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The First Wave of Feminism

This was prevalent between the late 19th and early 20th centuries. It was focused on fighting to gain political power, especially the right to vote. This movement is also popularly referred to as "the suffrage movement". The movement actually started in the western world when a group of men and women collectively sought for women's right to vote. The success of this movement in different countries in the western world led to its success in other nations of the world.

The Second Wave of Feminism

This wave came into existence after the first goal was achieved almost in all countries of the world. The wave lasted for about two decades starting from the 1960s, after the second world war. The main goal of this phase is to ensure equal rights for women in all works of life— social, reproductive, legal and employment-related. The movement focused on putting to a lasting end the male-centric society as was the case at the demise of the war.

The Third Wave

This phase started around 1991 and it continued until the fourth wave was birthed. The wave centred on different issues that concerned women alike ranging from the right to contest for a political office, to right for women to control their lives and bodies. Towards the end of the late 90s and the early 2000s, the wave broadened its goals to encapsulate the abolition of gender-role stereotypes and the expansion of feminism to include women with diverse cultural and racial identities.

The Fourth Wave

With the rise of the fourth wave in motion, feminism now appears to be reaching a level of cultural relevance it wasn't allowed to enjoy in the past years. The resurgence of this term was with the help of the social media and although it now involved young people who probably have little or no idea about what it means, the wave has its focus on justice for women, fight against sexual harassment and the fight to stop violence against women.

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