

THE 4 WAVES

THE EVOLUTION OF FEMINISM

What Is the F-Word, Really?

Feminism refers to all topics about women, including issues, qualities, and anything else relating to females. Since the 2nd Wave of Feminism, the term has become synonymous with radical feminism and stirs up images of women's liberation as the "advocacy of equality of the sexes and the establishment of the political, social, and economic rights of the female sex."

- Oxford University Press, 2024



The Waves

Since the 19th century AD, generations of women have resisted the arbitrary limitations placed on them by patriarchal societies. As each generation achieved success (the vote, employment, pay equity, etc), the oppression of women became more subtle – so subtle that most men (and many women) became unaware of their role in it.



First Wave, 1840s-1920s

- Women's contributions to society unpaid and unacknowledged
- Women's activism focused on healthcare, family issues, orphans, the aged
- Women's influence to policy and governance only through their husbands, brothers and other male allies
- Key goal(s) achieved:
 - The right to vote

Third Wave, 1980s-2000s

- With the signing of the Royal Commission on the Status of Women, women thought they were done:
 - unawareness of others' discrimination "It's only me"
 - pervasive belief that "equity is now achieved"
 - women distancing themselves from the "feminist movement"
 - women adopting masculine style of dress (remember those shoulder pads?)
 - Super-Girl movement
- Sexual discrimination in the workplace continues covertly:
 - pay inequity
 - sexual favours expected
 - glass ceiling hindering advancement
- Key goal(s) achieved:
 - governance focus on pay equity
 - quota system for hiring



Second Wave, 1940s-1970s

- Women filled industrial and professional roles of men during WWII, completing academic undergraduate and graduate degrees by invitation
- Women's activism focused on the right to retain their jobs after the war AND equal pay for equal work
- Women excluded from men-only professional clubs
- Key goal(s) achieved:
 - Royal Commission on the Status of Women (1970)
 - Equal pay for equal work



Fourth Wave, 1990s-Present

- Women in the workplace object to further discrimination
- Women speaking out about oppression and inequities
- #MeToo Movement
- Women adopting feminine styles in workplace
- Mental health normalized
- Human rights cases launched
- Key goal(s) achieved:
 - many organizations changing hiring practices
 - increasing opportunities for advancement of women
 - feminine women recognized for their achievements
 - salaries demystified

Status Today

The four waves coexist in society; how far a culture has adapted depends on the education and awareness of the community and individuals therein (see infographic titled "The Hero & the Heroine").

Many professions resist changing their ways of being, entrenched in a masculine culture (e.g. engineering, accounting, professional sports, apprenticeship trades, to name a few) but change is happening throughout. If you have read this full infographic, you are part of the solution. Thank you.

Recommendations to add to the list?
Let us know at the address below!

For more information about etymology, see https://www.oed.com/dictionary/feminism_n?tab=meaning_and_use; for more on the four waves, see <https://www.werspace.ca/items/186ccbf2-2390-445f-80b7-3de56b10802>; https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fourth-wave_feminism; <https://www.history.com/news/feminism-four-waves> (pp31-34).

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