

SUMMARY

BY ALYSSA BURNETTE

We Should All Be Feminists

By Chimamanda
Ngozi Adichie



Summary of We Should All Be Feminists by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie

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Why feminism is for everyone

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Introduction

Fill in the blank: feminism is...

Many people would fill in that blank with different answers. Members of far-right groups have often finished that sentence by arguing that “feminism is a cancer,” or “feminism is hating men.” But as Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie knows, feminism is simply the radical belief that women are people. And as you’ll see through the course of this summary, real feminism is nothing like the misconceptions you may have heard. It’s not about hating men and it isn’t founded on the belief that women are better than men. Feminism also does not try to assert that women should be treated better than men or that women should never be held accountable for their actions. Instead, feminism posits that women and men should be treated equally and have equal rights in all aspects of life. That’s all! Sounds pretty great, right? In fact, it probably sounds like something that anybody would agree with! So, in this summary, we’ll explore that theory in more detail.



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Discrimination is Everywhere

If you're unfamiliar with feminism, you may find yourself approaching this book with questions like, "Why do we even need feminism now?" or "Don't women have it pretty great?" And on the surface, that might appear to be true. After a long history of sexist discrimination, women now have the right to vote, to own property, and to work outside the home. In many cases, women also have the freedom to own their own bodies by having access to abortion, birth control pills, and the freedom to wear what they want. So, given the existence of these multitudinous rights, why do we still need feminism? What else do we need to fight for?

The author observes that there are actually a number of areas in which women still face discrimination. The workplace is one of the primary arenas in which inequality is blatantly displayed. For example, many people are aware that the gender pay gap exists. But a recent study conducted by the popular website PayScale has shed some new light on the subject. PayScale's Gender Pay Gap Report for 2020 reports that "recently, pay equity has been thrust under a glaring media spotlight. The #MeToo movement of 2018, which began as an outing of sexual harassment and sexual assault, cascaded into analysis of gender inequality in the workplace in 2019, encompassing not only pay inequity but also barriers to advancement and representation of women in leadership. In addition, several high-profile class action lawsuits have made pay equity a hot topic in executive boardrooms across the country. Our research shows that the uncontrolled gender pay gap, which takes the ratio of the median earnings of women to men without controlling for various compensable factors, has only decreased by \$0.07 since 2015. In 2020, women make only \$0.81 for every dollar a man makes."

In light of this report, it becomes readily apparent that women are earning less than men for literally no reason other than gender. PayScale's research has also found that gendered pay inequality disproportionately affects "women of color, women in executive level roles, women in certain occupations and industries, and women in some US states." There's no doubt about it: these statistics plainly show that the gender pay gap is sexism, pure

and simple. It's also something that you would think we would have abolished in this modern age! But the existence of the gender pay gap and the fact that discrimination is so prevalent in the workplace proves that sexism is still rampant in our society. The author also observes that pay inequality is not the only form of discrimination that women experience in the workplace. Sexual harassment is still extremely common and sexist stereotypes often prevent women from advancing in their careers. For example, where men are seen as being confident and assertive, women are often labeled "bitchy" and "aggressive" if they exert professional authority in the same manner as their male counterparts.

And lastly, PayScale's research indicates that women are frequently penalized in the workplace when they make the decision to become mothers. Their report remarks that "part of the reason for the gender pay gap is that women are more likely to take a break during their careers to have children or to seek lower paid positions that offer more flexibility to make it easier to manage a family. Some people mistakenly assume that this "explains" the gender wage gap and eases fears over sexism. However, this explanation does not fully account for the gap. Neither do differences in education, experience, and occupation, as we can see from the controlled gender pay gap. It also doesn't negate sexism in the workplace.

Factors that are likely to impact the gender pay gap but are difficult to measure include unconscious bias and discrimination against women, including assumptions that women will leave the workforce to have children or that women with children should earn less than men. In a 2017 survey, the Pew Research Center found that 42 percent of women said they have experienced gender discrimination at work compared to 20 percent of men who said the same. One of the most commonly reported forms of discrimination is earning inequality. Indeed, 25 percent of women said that they have earned less than a man doing the same job while just 5 percent of men said they have earned less than a woman doing the same job. Women with children also make less than men with children or women without children. This is often called the motherhood penalty or the childbearing penalty. The research also shows that women occupy more lower paying

positions than men. Although women have increased representation in higher paying jobs today than they did when the Equal Pay Act was signed over 50 years ago, women as a whole are still underrepresented in high paying jobs and leadership roles, especially in the C-Suite.”

So, for starters, we need feminism because women are still not equal in our society!



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Sexist Stereotypes Create Social Snares

In the previous chapter, we referenced some of the legal rights the modern woman can enjoy. But even if those rights are legalized, unfortunately, it's impossible to legislate public opinion. That means that women can still face pressure, discrimination, and stigma from people who disagree with feminism or hold outdated opinions about a woman's place in the world. For example, in the previous chapter, we mentioned that women have the right to wear what they want. But if you're a woman, you probably know that short dresses will get you called "slutty" or prompt men to say you are "asking for it." Both of these statements are viciously sexist and completely untrue! But that doesn't stop people from weaponizing their opinions to keep women from wearing or doing what they want.

Unfortunately, these are just some of the tactics that are used to hold women hostage. In the previous chapter, we mentioned that women are often penalized in the workplace if they have children. But working mothers are also subjected to a number of social penalties. For example, everyone understands and agrees that a child needs to spend time with their parents. But no one complains when fathers work long hours, miss school plays, or fail to be there for their child. By contrast, when a working mother is running late or brings a store-bought snack to soccer practice instead of a home-made option, she is criticized as a bad mother or accused of prioritizing her job over her child. These criticisms all stack up to solidify the impression that a woman's place is in the home and that women should devote their lives to being mothers and homemakers. As a result of this unfounded and sexist prejudice, many working mothers and career women lack the support they need.

And if you choose not to have children, you haven't escaped the struggle or the stigma-- not by a long shot! That's because sexism is notorious for creating impossible double standards. If you have children and you work, you're a bad mother. If you don't have children, you're often belittled and treated like a second-class citizen because women are expected to be wives and mothers. No matter what you do, you can't win! And even if these biases

aren't legally enforced, social stigma is a powerful threat that can make life unbearable for many women. Sexist biases also fail to consider a number of important factors like the fact that not every woman can have children. And likewise, even if they have the physical capability to give birth, many women simply don't want to! Both of these are completely valid reasons for not becoming a parent and both should be respected. Instead of treating women like breeding stock, maybe we should consider the fact that every woman is a human being with rights, desires, and preferences of her own. And no woman was put on this earth for the sole purpose of giving birth!

Unfortunately, however, this is by no means the end of the discrimination that women face. (If you're a woman yourself, there's a good chance that you are intimately acquainted with this harsh reality!) For example, your own experience has probably taught you that women fear sexual assault on a daily basis. We avoid walking home alone at night. We look over our shoulders constantly. We watch our drinks like hawks and jump through innumerable social hoops to avoid accepting drinks from strangers. We give out fake phone numbers when we're cornered by creepy men, motivated by the sheer terror of being stalked and murdered. We give our mothers and friends our locations before we go out on a date with a stranger. Why? So they can call the police if our date turns out to be a rapist or a serial killer. These are just a few of the fears, stereotypes, and struggles that women face on a daily basis! And this is in the "modern" world where women have allegedly achieved all the rights they needed to attain equality.



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Equity vs Equality

Through the course of the previous chapters, we've examined a few of the reasons why feminism is necessary and why women still face discrimination. But now it's time to take a look at some answers. If everyone was a feminist, what would that mean for our society? How would our lives change? The author posits that the answer lies in differentiating between equity and equality. The Equality and Inclusion office at Winston Salem University provides a helpful explanation of these differences when they assert that: "the terms equality and equity are often used interchangeably; however, they differ in important ways. Equality is typically defined as treating everyone the same and giving everyone access to the same opportunities. Meanwhile, equity refers to proportional representation (by race, class, gender, etc.) in those same opportunities. To achieve equity, policies and procedures may result in an unequal distribution of resources. For example, need-based financial aid reserves money specifically for low-income students. Although unequal, this is considered equitable because it is necessary to provide access to higher education for low-income students."

When applied to feminism, this principle would mean that we strike a balance between equity and equality with regard to our treatment of men and women. For example, we could acknowledge that men and women are different, both physically and mentally, and that we should address their differing needs. This might mean that we make appropriate allowances for working women who have children and might need such accommodations as paid maternity leave, child care, etc. Likewise, our society might put an increased emphasis on safety and equality for women that would help to shift our perception of women's rights. By eliminating victim blaming and slut shaming, we could begin to end rape culture and help women to feel safe, go out, and enjoy themselves without the fear of being objectified or sexualized by men.

And lastly, we could acknowledge that although biological differences might account for some gender-based division of labor, that isn't necessary in every area. Men might have some physical advantages when it comes to their

ability to lift heavy things and perform intensive manual labor. But that doesn't mean that women should be excluded from intense physical tasks like serving in the army or a career in contact sports. Likewise, we can acknowledge that when we attempt to divide labor in terms of gender-specific abilities, we ignore many more important characteristics like intellect, ingenuity, and resourcefulness! These skills are completely gender-neutral and people who are smart, creative, and ambitious make excellent employees in any career! That's why we should do away with outdated gender stereotypes, concentrate on cultivating equity, and integrate feminist values into our society.



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Final Summary

Feminism has often been maligned and misunderstood. As women have fought for equality, they have been accused of hating men or attempting to create a society that privileges women over men. But nothing could be further from the truth! Rather, as Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, feminism is simply the belief that women should be entitled to the same rights and privileges as men. And if we were all feminists, we could end discrimination in society and in the workplace. We could cultivate a culture of equity that bridges the gap in gender equality and enables women to feel empowered, safe, and supported. That's why we should all be feminists: because feminism simply makes the world a better place!



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