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# Feminism Needs Men, Too

Lauren Rankin in Millennials, Feminism 5 days ago

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Feminism Needs Men Too

Feminism is a movement to eradicate gendered oppression, to highlight women’s voices and experiences, and to challenge restrictive and constructed gender norms. It challenges male dominance and privilege, and, at its best, challenges white, heteronormative, and cisgender privileges, as well.

“This is what a feminist looks like,” the t-shirt proudly proclaims. But what about men? What does it mean to be a man and a feminist? What role do or should men play in the feminist

movement? According to a [2009 CBS News poll](#), only 14% of men consider themselves feminists. Why so few male feminists? And how do we increase the number of male feminist allies?

Perhaps it’s because feminism isn’t a label, but an action. Co-host of Citizen Radio and writer Allison Kilkenny, notes that for a man to truly become a feminist, “He has to view the world through a more empathetic lens.” That reflects what her husband and co-host of Citizen Radio, Jamie Kilstein, notes as perhaps the biggest road block for men to become feminists: “Feminism requires an active change in your life.” To be a male feminist means changing the way you speak about and treat women, and that often means challenging your male friends when they perpetuate sexism, which can be incredibly difficult.

What’s more, the simple fact is that patriarchy privileges men, particularly white men. What does it mean to challenge an immensely deep societal framework from which you profit? It can be incredibly hard, and as Kilkenny says, “not every guy is up to that challenge.”

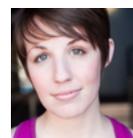
But many are, and more should be, because ending the patriarchal oppression for women is good for men, too. Patriarchy doesn’t just privilege men over women, but privileges certain kinds of men and certain kinds of masculinity. White, heterosexual, cisgender men receive the most favor, but with that privilege, they are expected to perform a certain type of masculinity, one that is normalized as natural but is, instead, a performance based on societal norms. Feminism works to free both men and women from the gender binary that imposes a strict set of acceptable gender performances.

Worth noting, in the same [2009 CBS News poll](#), 47% of men stated that the women’s movement had improved their lives, up from 30% who said so in 1999. And this makes sense; feminism is not about demonizing men but about ending patriarchal oppression. Men are not the target; patriarchy is. Male feminists understand that no one is free until we are all free, and until we end the patriarchal oppression of women, men will suffer, too.

The feminist movement cannot afford to eschew male participation in a radical movement for social change. There are numerous male feminist allies who do incredible work — [Jeff Fecke](#), [Jamil Smith](#), [Andrew Jenkins](#), [Jamie Kilstein](#), [Angus Johnston](#), [John Knefel](#), to name a few — and continually prove that men not only have something to offer feminism, but can help enable feminist consciousness and understanding within a group that many female feminists simply can’t seem to reach: other men.

Jamie Kilstein is a political comedian, co-host of [Citizen Radio](#), and proud feminist, and he emphasizes the role that feminist men can play as a role models for younger men.

“If you look up to a guy and he starts telling you about rape culture or feminism as you’re developing, that can make a difference,” he says. Feminist men can help to shift the patriarchal assumptions of masculinity for younger men, and they can help liberate other men from the strict



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gender binary that dictates what it means to be a man. And male feminist comedians like Jamie Kilstein and John Knefel help make feminism relatable and cool for younger men who may not understand it. Male feminist allies can get through to younger men in a way to which women may not be able.

Men can be great feminist allies, but because of their privileged positions as men and because they cannot understand firsthand what patriarchal oppression feels like, it's important for men to take a supportive role.

"I shut up for a second and listen to people who actually have to live with [that oppression]," Kilstein emphasizes, and he is exactly right. Men who want to be feminist allies need to listen to women and give rise to women's voices and experiences. Male feminists can play a vital role in educating other young men and showing solidarity with feminist women, but they need to understand that they are supportive allies, not headlining superstars. Feminism affords women a space to share their often ignored and silenced stories, experiences, and perspectives, and male feminists should promote and support those.

The feminist movement needs male allies, but we need male allies who listen, who trust us, who support us. We need male feminist allies who will challenge their friends and male social circles, who will defend us without sidelining us, and who will continue to call out sexism when they see it. "I'm proud to be part of a movement where women are at the forefront and [I get] to be the backup," Kilstein says. And that is what being a male feminist ally is all about.

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