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TUESDAY, JUN 10, 2014 05:12 AM AEST

Yes, men, you can be feminists

The New York Times is the latest to ask the obvious

MARY ELIZABETH WILLIAMS (HTTP://WWW.SALON.COM/WRITER/MARY_ELIZABETH_WILLIAMS/)

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(http://media.salon.com/2014/06/pharrell_williams2.jpg)

Pharrell Williams (Credit: AP/Francois Mori)

Here's the short answer: Yes. Here's the slightly longer answer: DUH, yes. And here, longer still, is where I try to explain to you why I cannot believe the question "Can a man be a feminist?" even still has to be asked.

The latest version of the "But is it humanly possible to have a penis AND be actively involved in the safety and well-being of women in the world?" conundrum ignited last month, when Pharrell admitted in an interview, "I've been asked, am I a feminist? I don't think it's possible for me to be that ... I'm a man. It makes sense up until a certain point. But what I do is — I do support feminists. I do think there's injustices. There are inequalities that need to be addressed." And it's nice enough that Pharrell wants to "support" feminists. He even added that "I'd love to see a woman run the country. Historically this world has been run by a man, and what would a world be like if 75 percent of our world leaders and prime ministers were female? What would that world be like? We do not know because we haven't given it a shot. We're too busy telling them what they can or can't do with their bodies." But Pharrell's declaration that he didn't think it was "possible" for him to be a feminist opened up the question yet again.

In a thoughtful piece for the Atlantic last week, Noah Berlatsky explained why he calls himself a feminist, framing the conversation around the high price men and women alike pay for misogyny, and giving the "What's in it for guys" argument. "Misogyny is a cage for everyone," (<http://www.theatlantic.com/national/archive/2014/06/men-can-be-feminists-too/372234/>)he wrote. "When I call myself a male feminist, I'm not doing it because I think I'm going to save women. I'm doing it because I think it's important for men to acknowledge that as long as women aren't free, men won't be either." And in the Advocate, Katelyn Hilsenbeck and Rebecca Gaulke stated, "If you're male and not a feminist, you're not helping. I (<http://www.advocate-online.net/opinion/column-opinion/everyone-should-be-a-feminist-6815/>)n fact, you're perpetuating the problem."

Now, the New York Times has come on board, pondering, "Who is the male feminist? Perhaps we

Should we first ask "Does Heaven exist?" (nytimes.com/blogs/op-talk/2014/06/08/its-possible-to-be-fem... a-male-feminist/) I don't know about that one. Should we? Really? Because I looked at my watch and it said 2014. In his piece, writer Jake Flagin cited the sad fiasco of Hugo Schwyzer (http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2013/aug/06/male-feminism-hugo-schwitzer), last year's flashpoint for the "Can men be feminists?" debate and 2013's poster child of how not to be a male feminist. (http://www.salon.com/2013/08/07/men_shouldnt_fear_womens_anger/) He further noted that even ladies – like Medium writer Sarah Ali and XOJane's Meghan Murphy – have in the past year written pieces questioning "the myth of the male feminist" and men and "their so-called feminism." And citing Berlatsky's Atlantic piece, he observed, "Even those styled as such acknowledge the label as occasionally problematic."

From reading the Times, you'd get the sense that the only label more "problematic" than "feminist" is "male feminist." Yet just this January Joseph Gordon-Levitt called himself, "feminist, absolutely," (http://blogs.indiewire.com/womenandhollywood/hollywood-feminist-of-the-day-joseph-gordon-levitt) and the earth did not spin off its axis. Last year, John Legend expressed a similar sentiment, stating that "All men should be feminists. (http://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/music/rockandpopmusic/9956410/John-Legend-All-men-should-be-feminists.html)If men care about women's rights the world will be a better place." So in response to the Times' question of whether or not male feminists exist, I'd say, unless you don't believe in Joseph Gordon-Levitt and John Legend, it would appear so.

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