

## What is Feminism?

- Feminism is a collection of movements aimed at defining, establishing, and defending equal political, economic, and social rights and equal opportunities for women.
- Its concepts overlap with those of women's rights. Feminism is mainly focused on women's issues, but because feminism seeks gender equality, some feminists argue that men's liberation is therefore a necessary part of feminism, and that men are also harmed by sexism and gender roles.
- Feminist theory exists in a variety of disciplines, emerging from these feminist movements and including general theories about the origins of inequality, and, in some cases, about the social construction of sex and gender.
- Feminist activists have campaigned for women's rights—such as in contract, property, and voting — while also promoting women's rights to bodily integrity and autonomy and reproductive rights. They have opposed domestic violence, sexual harassment, and sexual assault. In economics, they have advocated for workplace rights, including equal pay and opportunities for careers and to start businesses.
- Some of the earlier forms of feminism have been criticized for being geared towards white, middle-class, educated perspectives. This led to the creation of ethnically-specific or multiculturalist forms of feminism.
- Feminist theory is the extension of feminism into theoretical, or philosophical discourse, it aims to understand the nature of gender inequality.
- It examines women's social roles and lived experience, and feminist politics in a variety of fields, such as anthropology and sociology, communication, psychoanalysis, economics, literary criticism, education, and philosophy.
- Themes explored in feminism include art history<sup>1</sup> and contemporary art, aesthetics, discrimination, stereotyping, objectification (especially sexual objectification), oppression, and patriarchy.
- Gender roles refer to the set of social and behavioral norms that are considered to be socially appropriate for individuals of a specific sex in the context of a specific culture, which differ widely between cultures and over time. There are differences of opinion as to whether observed gender differences in behavior and personality characteristics are, at least in part, due to cultural or social factors, and therefore, the product of socialization experiences, or to what extent gender differences are due to biological and physiological differences.
- Views on gender-based differentiation in the workplace and in interpersonal relationships have often undergone profound changes as a result of feminist and/or economic influences, but there are still considerable differences in gender roles in almost all societies. It is also true that in times of necessity, such as during a war or other emergency, women are permitted to perform functions which in "normal" times would be considered a male role, or *vice versa*.
- Gender has several definitions. It usually refers to a set of characteristics that are considered to distinguish between male and female, reflect one's biological sex, or reflect one's gender identity. Gender identity is the gender(s), or lack thereof, a person self-identifies as; it is not



necessarily based on biological sex, either real or perceived, and it is distinct from sexual orientation. It is one's internal, personal sense of being a man or a woman (or a boy or girl).<sup>[2]</sup> There are two main genders: masculine (male), or feminine (female), although some cultures acknowledge more genders. Androgyny, for example, has been proposed as a third gender.<sup>[3]</sup> Some societies have more than five genders,<sup>[4]</sup> and some non-Western societies have three genders – man, woman and third gender.<sup>[5]</sup> Gender expression refers to the external manifestation of one's gender identity, through "masculine," "feminine," or gender-variant or gender neutral behavior, clothing, hairstyles, or body characteristics.<sup>[6]</sup>

### **Some Key principles of feminist practice**

- The role of gender is recognised as a key factor in the oppression of human potential
- Patriarchal assumptions and practices that oppress and disempower women and girls are identified and challenged
- Women's broader experiences are validated and they are seen as individuals not just as wives and mothers or potential wives and mothers
- Difference is celebrated and the uniqueness of the human condition is embraced
- Egalitarian and reciprocal relationships are fostered
- The empowerment of women and children is assisted by:
  - Working with and not for them
  - Encouraging a collaborative relationship with women and children
  - Focusing on strengths and not deficits
  - Actively supporting and encouraging women and children
  - A feminist framework

### **A feminist framework provides for interventions at an individual, service and systemic level. A feminist framework can:**

- Assist women and children to identify their strengths and resilience
- Foster egalitarian and reciprocal relationships
- Offer a broad critique of social arrangements for the care of those who are vulnerable in society
- Assist women to find a balance between their rights and the rights and needs of their children
- Provide a sound rationale for political and community activism