



## Ten ways I am trying to be a better feminist

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A 'better' feminist? A lofty goal. One that may even seem impossible to achieve through a simple list of ten things; and yet, what lies ahead is an attempt. Inspired by writers such as Roxanne Gay and Chimamanda Ngozi Adiche, I present to you, the 'better' feminist manifesto, created in the spirit of trying.

### 1. Recognising My Privilege

When practicing intersectional feminism, there is a necessity for recognition. As a white woman, I understand I have more privilege than other women. As a woman with a home and food on the table I recognise my privilege. And in recognising this privilege, I understand my voice may be heard more than others, and that I do not get to speak for others or assume the experience of others less privileged than me. It is after recognising the privilege of being white, cis-gendered and able bodied that I hope to create a safe space for those who have less privilege than me.

Having this privilege also means educating myself on my privilege, for example, as a white woman I am less likely to be arrested for the same crime as a person of colour. In fact, according to UK arrest figures in 2021, black people were more than three times as likely to be arrested. Similarly, as a woman who lives in the UK, I have the privilege of driving and choosing my own religion. These things, along with others, are important to recognise because when trying to learn to be a better feminist I must in turn learn what I am fighting for for others, not just for inequalities I personally face.

### 2. Challenging Others

This one specifically is important to me because in the past I have been someone who would allow those around me to act to act in ways I do not support, and I would give up a piece of myself for their comfort. I believe it is important to call people out and provide them an opportunity for education. For example, when I hear a misogynistic joke from a colleague, I can acknowledge that it would be easier to let it slide, but I know it is the right thing to call them out.

Similarly, I am trying to be better at knowing *when* to challenge the misogyny of others. In the past I have been rash, turned the conversation argumentative rather than educational, or I have been impatient and called people out in front of others. Something I am trying to practice is patience, wait until it is the right time and when that time comes understand that miseducation is common, and a decent conversation rather than an argument could lead to their respect of feminism rather than further dismissal. This point especially goes for family members, who I feel the most apprehensive about calling out.

Furthermore, as much as I can recognise that everyone has been indoctrinated by society to support misogyny, I must also remember there are only so many times you can use ignorance as an excuse before

somebody is outright misogynistic. When that happens, I'm going to be honest with myself and understand that some people do not wish to learn and that you cannot force it upon them. When this happens, and it most likely will, I should reserve my energy but remain stern, clear that I do not agree but I will not continue to argue. There are people out there who are willing to listen and those who are not: I will choose to spend time with those who choose to listen.

I am also pushing myself to challenge the feminism of others, hoping to better it. There are times where, typically men, claim to be feminists despite not actually being interested in full gender equality. I shouldn't always take someone at their word when they say they are a feminist, a feminist wouldn't mind being questioned and so I should not feel bad for challenging someone what they say they are a feminist.

This also applies to challenging other feminists when I believe they are wrong or ill-informed, it does not go against feminism to help educate another feminist and I should remember I am helping the cause in the long run, even if I feel uncomfortable doing so.

### **3. Letting Myself Be Wrong**

This is something that comes with learning, and it is learning that not everything I know is correct and not everything I am going to learn will always be correct. There is a certain part of me that hates to be wrong, my pride often gets in the way of my progress and a part of actively trying to be a better feminist is letting go of my pride when being told by somebody else that what I believe I know is incorrect.

Similarly, I need to learn how to move on from being wrong and not put myself down for being incorrect; from childhood we are taught things from the patriarchy that we believe to be true, and I shouldn't hold it against myself that I once believed an incorrect assumption. I should just correct it and continue on.

How could I possibly educate others and have tough, or uncomfortable, conversations if I cannot let go of being wrong?

### **4. Loving Myself**

Part of being a feminist is loving the things I used to hate about myself: that the misogynistic system ingrained in me to hate. For example, I love the colour pink and my favourite artist is Taylor Swift. I care about how I look, and I love fashion, I don't like sports, and I love gossiping. Understanding these things about myself, as small and shallow as they seem, is a real battle when considering how long I wished I didn't like those things because those things did not appeal to men or were "too girly". From birth women are taught to shape themselves into women men will like, women are shamed for liking things if lots of other women like them, and we are embarrassed about key elements of ourselves such as our bodies. By loving myself, my body, and my interests, I am in a way being a better feminist because I am no longer holding myself to misogynistic standards.

### **5. Questioning What I Know About Gender**

Sometimes I feel ridiculous for hating something seemingly so small, such as blue is for boys and pink is for girls, after all how could colours hurt people? However, the world is indoctrinated into a system that works for the patriarchy and part of this system is gender roles. By separating girls and boys into things such as pink and blue and dolls and cars we are immediately creating a separation between men and women which allows the patriarchy to assume one is better than the other. These are trivial examples, but by supporting

these assumptions I am in a way supporting the eventual result, which is gender-based violence and the oppression of women.

It is important to challenging these stereotypes in my everyday life, and I do this in the smallest of ways, for example when shopping with my brother I take him round the whole shop, not just the 'boy' side.

Similarly, when talking with my nieces and nephews I ask them all the same questions, I don't just ask my nieces about boys and my nephews about superhero's. I don't assume interests based of their gender and I do not belittle an interest solely because it stereotypically "belongs" to one gender.

## **6. Questioning What I Know About Women**

Part of my aim to become a better feminist is trying to destroy the negative and passive stereotypes I hold about women. For example, that women are "bitchy" or "competitive", I am trying to rid myself of the awful generalisations I had in the past made about women, because by grouping us all together in any way I am ignoring the nuance connected to each person and I am perpetuating the standards set by men.

Additionally, by ridding myself of these stereotypes, I am opening myself up to learning more about women, by allowing myself to engage with women without this pre-established "knowledge": I am making room for more truth.

Along with this, I am opening myself up to a larger circle where there are more women and there is more female support. I am no longer going to be held back by assumptions of women's character and instead be supported by great women. This becomes increasingly important as I am realising the power I hold as one woman trying to do better, because imagine a whole group of both men and women, each motivating one another to do better and be better.

## **7. Monitoring My Media**

This may seem like a smaller issue, but for me it's important what information I am taking in and what people I may be unknowingly supporting. For example, when finding a new artist I enjoy I should start looking them up, finding out if I truly support them, and if not, I shouldn't just ignorantly listen to their music because I could in a way be rewarding them for actions I do not support.

Similarly with a movie, regardless of how much I enjoy it, I should think critically about the messages the movie is sending and if I support the humour or the actions of the characters, if the answer is no, then, I shouldn't watch the movie and I definitely shouldn't recommend it to others.

This also counts for the types of content I'm taking in on social media, it is very easy to cover one side of the story or to make assumptions when on social media, so if I hear a fact or story, I shouldn't believe or share those things without looking them up first, social media can be false, and I would do good to remember that.

This ties into making sure I'm aware of who I am following and the messages their posts could be sending, if I see something incorrect or hurtful, I should start reporting the post and maybe contacting the person if I know them personally.

Likewise, I should be careful of the messages I am sending out on social media, it is very easy to be unaware of those things, and I have begun to monitor my own posts more and I try to remember to not be offended if somebody calls me out on something: we all make mistakes and my pride will not get in the way of my growth as a feminist.

## 8. Being A Feminist For Men Too

As much as there is a privilege to being a man, patriarchy can often hurt them as well as favour them, and there are things I can do to be a better feminist for men. To begin, I shouldn't just assume other men aren't feminists. I shouldn't keep them out of the conversation simply for being a man and I shouldn't just assume they aren't open to learning. Moreover, I am trying to educate myself more on the ways patriarchy harms men, for example, the treatment of male mental health and the standard of masculinity men are held to. By supporting men in their issues, I am in turn furthering the feminist movement because as a feminist I believe it is important to acknowledge how patriarchy harms everyone.

On top of that, I should let go of my assumptions about men and sexual assault, by letting myself keep hold of these assumptions I am silencing male victims. I need to educate myself on domestic violence, also, something which is mostly talked about in a female victim setting but by learning about this issue and promoting this issue I could help men realise they're in a situation of domestic abuse or I could help a man feel he has a safe environment within which he can be open about his experiences.

Patriarchy also prevents men from making meaningful relationships with others, by supporting men as well as women and by ridding myself of male stereotypes I am allowing myself to create new relationships with men without the barrier of sexism and harmful assumptions. By having these friendships, I allow myself to be more informed on male issues and hopefully work towards being a better feminist.

## 9. Helping Women's Charities

Although this is one that not everyone can do, I recognise that as someone with a job and with a larger income than others I can make donations to charities that need it, and in my efforts to be a better feminist I plan to start donating to women's charities. These charities can be different every time but, for example, a good place to start could be Well-being of Women, a charity which funds research into improving the health of women, girls and babies in the UK and more.

I also wish to donate more to women in need charities, which is a further step of recognising my privilege, because by doing this I will be a part of the support for women who have less than I do. For example, Women's Aid.

This also ties into my wish to be more proactive in my feminism, a way to do this is by donating and volunteering. Volunteering is much harder to organise than donating as I would have to find the free time, but by giving free aid to certain female organisations I feel as if I would truly be making a difference.

Another way I wish to help women's charities is by attending women's marches when they happen, by attending rallies and marches I am a part of the community who is drawing attention to these issues and these charities.

## 10. Writing About It

My final step in trying to be a better feminist is writing this list, by doing this I am holding myself accountable, something every feminist should do, because we cannot do better and improve without first setting that goal and then achieving it.

When writing this list, it became apparent to me that being a 'good' feminist was not something I could achieve, because it felt quite problematic to assume something so personal could ever have a definite 'good'. Therefore, I made my aim simply to do better than before and by writing this list and sharing my work, I am in a way already moving myself and others towards the goal of being a better feminist. And what

happens, you may think, when I believe I have achieved this goal, well then maybe I will reflect and write a new list.