


# PRIORITIES

the feminist ♀ voice in a socialist movement

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feminine ending the ending of a line of verse  
 stressed syllable; (gram.) a termina-  
 ble that marks a feminine word  
 rhyme of two syllables, the  
 g. 'gaily, daily'  
 ti:) n. the quality of being  
 n. the policy, practise or  
 economic and social  
 cate of feminism (fr. L  
 the tranformation of a male into

feminize pres. part. feminizing past and past part.

feminized v.t. to cause (a male) to become female

femme (fem) n. one who assumes the female role in a  
 lesbian relationship Cf BUTCH

femoral adj. of, relating to or near the femur

- *In search of the meaning of feminism ...*
- *also On The Line,*  
*your opinions - we'd like to hear them*

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*"The issues and demands raised by the Women's Liberation Movement are integral to the development of a democratic socialist society. The NDP actively encourages and provides support for women organizing around the demands of the Women's Liberation Movement and commits an NDP government to creating the legislation necessary to realize these demands."*

- NDP Policy on Women's Rights

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*Your thoughts about anything*





### feminism -

- the policy, practice or advocacy of political, economic and social equality for women.
- the theory of equality of the sexes. ①

Most of us openly admit to the label 'femi nist', most of us devote much time to the furtherance of 'feminism'.

How do we define feminism? Is it, as the dictionary quote above indicates, the clinical advocacy of equality?

Or is it something more undefinable? Is women's spirituality an essential part of feminism, or are men able to be feminists as well?

Most of the women who responded to my inquiry fit into the rough category of social feminists, that is they:

"...analyze women's oppression through four intertwining categories: gender, class, race and sexual orientation...socialist feminists challenge the power relations of that (the social and economic) system and argue that equality of opportunity can never be attained in Canadian society as long as there are fundamental differences in wealth, privilege, and power based on class, gender, sexual orientation, and race." ②

I have, for variety, included several definitions of feminism written by women that are radical feminists, who:

"...identify fundamental emotional, social, and political differences between men and women.

....radical feminism validates the differences between women and men and in fact argues that we need a anti-militaristic, non-hierarchical co-operative society organised on the female values of life-giving and nurturance." ③

I, of course, had the advantage of reading through all the submissions before I had to write my own. Though I admit they were of great interest to me, I don't honestly believe they gave me much of a head start. What did become abundantly clear to me is that women have a tendency to assume that we are all speaking the same language, when, in fact, there are a great many different dialects. While all those dialects may be based upon the same language, they are greatly diverse, some hardly recognisable to others. Our notions of what feminism is, are as individual to each of us as are our fingerprints. Here they are, then, your fingerprints, I hope we learn to enjoy each other more for having shared with each other!

Those entries contained in quotation marks are excerpted from A Feminist Dictionary, (Cheris Kramarae and Paula Treichler, Pandora Press, London, 1985) unless otherwise credited.

Those that are italicised are taken from "Cross-Cultural Rebellion, A Sampling of Feminist Proverbs from Around the World", Sisterhood is Global, (ed. Robin Morgan, Penguin Books, 1984, pages 759-760).

① The New Lexicon, Webster's Dictionary of the English Language, USA, 1989.

② Feminist Organizing For Change, Adamson, Briskin, McPhail, Oxford University Press, Toronto, 1988, page 11.

③ ibid., pages 10-11.

# CHAIR'S REPORT

In May of this year, I chaired my first WRC Steering meeting. The agenda included a goal-setting session. The following priorities were developed during a discussion to determine the purpose of the WRC:

1. Watchdog role
2. Promote equality
3. Redefine nature of power, leadership and organizational structure from a feminist perspective.
4. Promote sisterhood
5. To address systemic discrimination
6. To develop leadership and participation of young women

Steering then developed an action plan under each general topic as follows:

## *Watchdog role*

The chair was directed to write an article for the Democrat informing women of party policy on affirmative action and encouraging them to become involved in their local constituency executives. The President of the B.C. NDP was asked to include a statement on the affirmative action policy in his next column in the Democrat. The WRC will continue representation on Party Committees.

## *Promote Equality*

A mission statement, to be developed by Table Officers, will incorporate this.

## *Redefine Nature of Power (etc.)*

Following the next Provincial Election, the WRC will plan a one day strategy session to:

- a) examine feminist values in preparation for defining power
- b) develop a strategy around nominating and electing women
- c) Review the structure of the WRC

## *Promote sisterhood*

The WRC felt that the beginning step toward the promotion of sisterhood was the development of a social committee. That committee is in place and will be planning some fun, leisurely, social activities for us.

## *Systemic discrimination*

Again to be included in mission statement.

## *Develop leadership and participation of young women*

- 1) The WRC will endeavour to form liaisons with the YND and participate actively in their events. To this end, the WRC chair will be attending the October YND Conference in New Westminster.
- 2) The WRC will communicate with the Education Policy Sub-Committee for consultation on a project that would aim to provide an update on the status of Women's Studies Programs in the schools.

3) For the October meeting of the WRC each member is encouraged to invite a young woman, and that Table Officers prepare an agenda item of interest to young women.

These activities will certainly keep us busy over the next year, as will other projects and priorities that the WRC develops from time to time. As you can see, we can certainly benefit from any input YOU may have to our activities. Please call me if you can lend a hand or if you have an idea to share. (542-0512)

in sisterhood,  
Maggie Larocque, Chair, WRC

## 1990 WRC Table Officers

Chair - Maggie Larocque  
542-0512  
Vice Chair - Irene Wright  
537-5347  
Past Chair - Ann Frost  
922-4067  
Secretary - Lynda Raynard  
736-0756  
Treasurer - Louise Kilby  
846-5765  
Priorities CoOrd - Kathy Hill  
584-7346  
Democrat - Jacquie Boyer  
469-2332  
POW Rep - Ray Edney  
733-3638  
Members at Large -  
Linda Ervin - 254-4116  
Joanne Fox - 254-8410  
Sarah MacDonald - 734-9511  
Women's Rights Organizer -  
Vicki Robinson - 430-8600



# what is feminism?

Feminism is the love of women, and the belief that women are oppressed.

Vicki Robinson,  
Women's Organizer, BC NDP

Feminism is the expression of full rights for women everywhere in every area of their lives, as a part of the political struggle for universal, fundamental advancement for all people, by all concerned persons.

Claire Culhane

To me, it's a way of life. It's what I eat, drink and breathe. Until that magical day when women and men stand side by side in equality, we MUST continue to develop policies and action plans that enable and empower women to leap forward. It's the only way we'll catch up!

Maggie Larocque, Chair  
Women's Rights Committee, BC NDP

Feminism is a recognition that women as a group are systemically disadvantaged and discriminated against in our society. Moreover, feminism involves a desire to change that and a willingness to work for women's equality. If there are lines to be drawn they are not between men and women; rather, they are between those who are working for change and those who will not.

Jan Pullinger, MLA

"... has as yet no defined creed... (Is) the articulate consciousness of mind in women...in its different forms of expression."

"The Freewoman" 1911,  
Votes for Women

What is feminism?

In the past - Canadian women who got a vote (political change)

In the present - working for equal pay (economic change)

In the future - Social change, which can come about if women really want equality and if men really want women to be equal.

Bette Pepper

Has as a goal: the liberation of women for women. "We don't have to have anything to do with men at all. They've taken excellent care of themselves."

Jill Johnston 1973

Feminism has always meant, to me, a political stance or belief system which promotes empowerment of women. I believe that the process of empowering women occurs at all levels of our lives, on a continuum from who cleans the lavatory to who runs the country. Each of these roles is representative of who holds power within relationships - at the micro/personal level and at the macro/community level. Any move towards empowerment from refusing to always clean the lavatory, to running for political office can be highly courageous and profound in its effects on the status quo - and changing the status quo is what it's all about.

Ray Edney

"A many-headed monster which cannot be destroyed by singular decapitation. We spread and grow in ways that are incomprehensible to a hierarchical mentality."

Peggy Kornegger 1979

In the beginning, of course, it was Women's Liberation. I was already forty when the movement began, but it crystallised for me all the social, personal and political discontents that had been rumbling around in the complexities of life.

As we became more and more active politically, and more aware of the enormity of what we faced, the term Women's Liberation became too constricting, too limited, and then there were the jokes...

Of all the terms we have used to chart our growth, feminism seems to me the most apt and all-encompassing. Combining femina/woman, feminine/social construct (but one we can take the best of, like silk underwear, and discard the foolish rest), and ism/a distinctive doctrine, ideal, system. It also means, for me, a secret compact with all women. Often they are unaware that we have entered into this compact, but when I look into their eyes I know that their lives have been altered by the movement, by what I and others have been doing on their behalf. Feminism is a focus of woman-oriented thinking...that can only benefit all people.

Jane Evans





Feminism is for men, too.

Equality between the sexes promotes harmony and discourages the adversarial relationships that can occur between men and women.

We all profess to believe in equality for all human beings; equality of opportunity; equality of pay; racial equality. In theory, we are very fair-minded.

The reality is that equality between the sexes has never existed and does not exist today. The word 'Feminism' still evokes memories in some people of strident-voiced women burning bras.

Feminism should be defined as 'humanism'; a recognition that the

Feminism: the knowledge that women are equal to men intrinsically and in what they offer the community, that they should receive equal treatment, and that the value of such equality, if practised, would accrue to all people. As well, a commitment by a woman to behave as an equal whenever possible, and to resist the defeat which the intensity and frequency of her negative experiences threatens.

Anne Edwards, MLA

The doctrine that maintains the equality of the sexes; advocacy of women's rights.

Sandra McElroy

meaning as the belief that women are mentally as highly endowed as men, and should be given social, economic and political equality. What a refreshing difference from the 'American College Dictionary' of 1957 which defines feminism as 'the doctrine advocating extension (emphasis ed.) of the activities of women in social and political life.' This explains why when I began my teaching career in Vancouver in 1950 a male with exactly then same education qualifications as I had was paid \$1800 when I was paid \$1500 annually teaching in the elementary system. Fortunately equal pay for equal work came into effect in September of the following year.

'Funk and Wagnalls Standard College Dictionary' defines feminism as a doctrine advocating the granting of the same social, political and economic rights to women as the ones granted to men; but it also adds: a movement designated to support this doctrine and gain such rights. By being a member of the NDP I believe I do belong to a movement that genuinely supports feminism.

Shirley Cooke, Candidate, Abbotsford

Is the fairy godmother. "Do you remember the story of Cinderella? She is sitting at home rather pissed off, wanting to go to the ball, and not having a thing to wear, when the fairy godmother whizzes in and puts it all right. One of the most important things about the fairy godmother is that she transforms all the old stuff around Cinderella into new and useful equipment: the rags, the pumpkin, the rats and so forth. This little girl's fairy godmother turned out to be called Feminism. As well as cheering the little girl up no end Feminism also transformed all the old things around her."

Sara Maitland 1980



sexes are different, but equal; that the sexes need each other for the species to survive.

Feminism should not be merely a reaction to oppression. It should be a celebration of the pride of half the human race.

Feminism means that we should be socialising our daughters in the same way as our sons; buy non-sexist games; read them non-sexist bedtime stories. Stop thinking of little girls as pink, soft and helpless, and of boys as tough little men.

Feminism begins at birth and with enlightened child rearing and education, the next generation of women will not have to fight for the equality that should be theirs by right.

Linda Groenig

"I myself have never been able to find out precisely what feminism is: I only know that people call me a feminist whenever I express sentiments that differentiate me from a doormat..."

Rebecca West 1913

As I sought help in clearly defining 'feminism' by consulting the five dictionaries in my household I became aware that I have been a feminist all my life! I have always had the belief that women are mentally as highly endowed as men. Unfortunately I grew up in a society that did not believe a woman needed to be as educated as a man. This was clearly spelled out in my grade twelve year at Lord Byng High School when only the boys were allowed to participate in the 'Older Boys Parliament'.

It is interesting that the dictionary used in my schooldays, 'The Highroads Dictionary' does not even list the word (which probably did not exist at the time) but the dictionary used in my son's schooldays, 'The Winston Canadian Dictionary for Schools' gives the







### A Special Experience

When she was twenty years her eyes were first opened to the concept of Feminism,  
She looked around.  
She became angry and aggressive and even hateful  
For the things they were doing to her,  
For the lies, for the oppression, for the misuse of her power.

The she had babies and raised them, kept house and family together, and worked.  
She kept fighting and got political and attended meetings, many meetings, everywhere  
She talked and negotiated, she became a superwoman.  
She was determined to demonstrate her worth to a male dominated world  
Motivated by economics.

Twenty years later she was still a feminist, her mind was open, she became sensitive,  
She looked around.  
Her children were grown, her life was changed forever.  
She saw a world still struggling with the backlash of the fighting and the pushing,  
The hurt and unsureness created by demands for change, for equality.  
She saw her children, male and female alike, feminists, still struggling with oppression  
She saw violence against women erupt from seemingly nowhere.  
She was horrified but not hateful, instead she sought solutions.

Now her feminism comes from a different place, it comes from her heart.  
She no longer feels a need to fight, she need prove nothing, her battle wounds have healed.  
She is comfortable and strong knowing who she is, she is not afraid  
She looks around.  
She sees a world that is crying for her healing touch  
She no longer needs to depend on external forces for her strength  
Her strength comes from within, and she knows it  
She is prepared to share her strength  
She is prepared to lead.

It has been a special experience, being a feminist.  
It has opened her eyes to worlds of opportunity, it has freed her to be who she is  
It has allowed her the presence of mind to dare to be what she wants to be  
And to feel love and pride and excitement through that being.  
She is woman, she is grandmother, mother, aunt, sister, she is strong, proud and aware.  
She is creative and sensitive, she is alive, she is free, she is feminist  
And the world will be a better place for it.

Marlene Crawford



Feminism implies sexual inequality. Only when feminism is a non-issue will equality have been achieved. This can only happen with the liberation of both men and women. With no thanks to the media, both sexes are portrayed over and over again in their stereotypical roles. The messages are constantly permeating young, impressionable and vulnerable minds. Why must a bikini for women and macho symbols such as horses or trucks for men be prerequisites for beer ads?

Due to the insistence, perseverance and struggles of women, acceptability is slowly increasing for women to have careers in male-dominated fields. However, is it as acceptable for men to assume the full-time role of a parent or a career in a female-dominated field? If a man were to choose to do so, would he have the same income, the same status and the same respect? A man doing 'women's work' usually means loss, but a woman doing a 'man's job' means gain.

When we have full equality and liberation of both men and women, each will be able to live a life the way they wish, not based on what is wished upon them.

Unfortunately, we must keep feminism as an issue. Feminism does and will demand our concern, our attention and our action until disabling attitudes and expectations are totally eradicated from society.

Barbara Copping, Candidate-Elect,  
Port Moody-Burnaby Mountain

*Now you have offended women; now you have touched rock; now you will be crushed.*

- Africa, Zulu women warrior song

"Feminism means you have to read a lot, to understand a lot, to feel a lot, and to be honest."

Nawal el Saadawi 1980

Feminism is a confidence that women's perspectives on the world, women's value systems and women's approaches to problem solving are distinct and valid.

Feminism rejects the waste of human talent when women's contributions are excluded, ignored and/or undervalued.

Feminism recognizes that full participation of both women and men - and mutual respect for the contribution of each - is essential to balanced decision making at every level and in every sector of our society.

Joan Sawicki, Candidate,  
Burnaby-Willingdon

*My dream is to ride the tempest, tame the waves, kill the sharks. I want to drive the enemy away to save our people. I will not accept the usual fate of women who bow their heads and become concubines.*

- Trieu Thi Trinh, 240 C.E., Vietnam

*If particular care and attention is not paid to the ladies we are determined to foment a rebellion, and will not hold ourselves bound by any laws in which we have no voice or representation.*

- Abigail Adams, USA

A feminist is a man or a woman who already knows for a fact that men and women are equal, and who wants society to wake up to that fact, so the world can stop operating at half strength, so that half the brains, half the inspiration, half the joy and beauty, half the human resources in the world will no longer be wasted.

Marlo Thomas

Feminism is having an awareness of one's femininity and feeling good about it.

It is being confident that you are entitled to equality and having the tenacity to stand up for that belief.

Yvonne Cocke

Feminism is a philosophy and a movement whose goal is a society and an economy in which women, women's work, women's values, women's relationships, women's emotions and women's very essences are of equal importance to men ... a society and economy in which no gender dominates the other. Growing to understand how women are oppressed and marginalized leads feminists to become environmentalists, peace activists, and so on. Experience in these other movements leads women to become feminists. It is a completely different way of looking at the world.

Alexa McDonough, Leader  
Nova Scotia NDP





Feminists are people who SEE inequalities in our society. They do not deny. They do not evade. They face reality. The more sophisticated have full-blown analysis of the connections between patriarchy, violence against women, inequities before the law, women's poverty, militarism, the rape of the environment and anything else you can think of. Beginners, or women who operate largely from their personal experience, know they live in a male-dominated society, and it's not good for women. They are *conscious*. Feminists are women who ADDRESS inequalities in their personal relationships, their workplaces and their organisations, including their political organisations. Sometimes this involves research, and sometimes it involves action.

Feminists support other women whenever possible, especially other feminists, but they don't all belong to feminist organisations. Many women will deny being feminists, because they are, at the moment, conscious of only one issue, such as equal pay. I call them pre-born feminists.

There are all kinds of sub-categories: socialist feminists, maternal feminists, lesbian separatist feminists, eco-feminists. For some, feminism is a religion, orienting their moral decisions, their social life, their intellectual life, their political life and their spiritual life.

Basically, there seem to be two kinds of feminists: doctrinaire feminists who define feminism in detail, excluding others, and those who accept other women where they are on their personal journeys.

To conclude, I see feminism as a continuum of awareness and commitment to change on behalf of women.

Unsigned

Guess I would say - non-sexist, non-racist striving for social and economic equality.

Susan Stout

"Means to me the movement towards creating a society where women can live a full-self-determined life. This may seem a bland statement but in terms of the changes we need to achieve this, it is revolutionary."

Mary MacNamara 1982

*Men should leave women alone and go study mathematics.*

- Italy

Feminism: 'the theory of political, economic and social equality of the sexes.'

How simple, reasonable and logical .... and yet, how many have suffered and how much we have yet to gain in order for full and complete equality. The years of tyranny, abuse and frustration shared by so many generations of our sisters are slowly, sometimes grudgingly, become just that: history. Societies are gradually awakening to the fact that this must be a shared

what is feminism?.....

world with shared opportunities.

Feminism is not anti-male; rather it is a celebration of the worth of women. A feminist is one who speaks out on behalf of women's issues and women's rights. A feminist is one who finds strength in her own worth and the worth of her sisters. A feminist will not tolerate physical or mental abuse or anguish, nor will she allow anyone to control the wellbeing of her own body. A feminist is one who seeks to better the lives of all humankind by ensuring the rights of all citizens.

In the history of humankind, the recognition of the worth, strengths and rights of women has only just begun. Brothers and Sisters working together will see a better world where the rights of all are recognized as equal.

Lois Boone, MLA

Prince George North

"It is an entire world view or *gestalt*, not just a laundry list of 'women's issues'. Feminist theory provides a basis for understanding every area of our lives, and a feminist perspective can affect the world politically, culturally, economically, and spiritually."

Charlotte Bunch 1983

*Remember the dignity of your womanhood. Do not appeal, do not beg, do not grovel, Take courage, join hands, stand beside us, fight with us.*

- Christabel Pankhurst, Britain





Feminism "begins but cannot end with the discovery by an individual of her self consciousness as a woman. It is not, finally, even the recognition of her reasons for anger, or the decision to change her life, to go back to school, to leave a marriage.... Feminism means finally that we renounce our obedience to the fathers and recognize that the world they have described is not the whole world.... Feminism implies that we recognize fully the inadequacy for us, the distortion, of male-created ideologies, and that we proceed to think, and act, out of that recognition."

Adrienne Rich 1976

"The incalculable gift of feminism to women and to the world is the clarity with which it reveals misogyny as systemic, not as an isolated problem of individual women ...

Feminism, by depersonalizing women's bondage and generalizing our experience, refuses to blame the victim. Feminism tells us that it is not a matter of blame but rather of looking bravely at the truth of our lives....

Feminism provides us with the knowledge that women in every sizable society in the world and most of the others are kept enslaved by massive violence, on such a scale and to such a depth that it is, for most of us, not wholly imaginable, barely thinkable. Teaching us that as women we were deliberately *made* slaves, helping us understand how we are deliberately *kept* slaves, and promising that we can end our slavery, feminism hands us three essential tools: truth, self-esteem, and hope.

The genius of radical feminist theory is its understanding of the 'seasoning' of women to be slaves, of the training of men to be masters, of the consequent total corruption of perception, thought and feeling, and therefore human liberty on every level of life."

Sonia Johnson,  
From Housewife to Heretic,  
Wildfire Books, Albuquerque,  
New Mexico

### The quest for women's equality

Recently I visited my mother in the Maritimes. The purpose of my visit was to employ a new caregiver so that my mother could continue to live independently. As I sought out and interviewed applicants and contacted my extended family in other small Maritime towns, I had opportunities to meet and talk with a number of women about their roles and work in their families and communities.

Over and over again I encountered information about the low wages for paid work. \$6.00 an hour was a high wage, in spite of skills and responsibilities required by the job.

Nor is the situation unique to the Maritimes. Take the recent B.C. labour dispute involving psychiatric and community nurses in which pay equity was a key issue. By necessity and choice, women work in jobs vital to the social and economic well being of society. Yet our work is undervalued. Women are consistently exploited by a society that would collapse without our work. But society is not yet prepared to pay a fair wage for the diverse work performed by women. My visit to the Maritimes served to rekindle my anger at the injustice of women's wages.

Women seek and expect opportunity, recognition and remuneration in keeping with the value of their talents, skills and work effort. Rightfully so! Yet wherever we look, in the Maritimes, in B.C. or in developing countries, economic injustice inhibits the well-being of women and their families.

The attitudes and practices that permit the economic exploitation of women must change. I believe that education and legislation are the keys to such change and that feminism - the active quest for the equality of women - will ensure these changes emerge as political and educational goals.

Anita Hagen, MLA

*Men are the reason for women disliking each other.*

- France

We live in a world in which women are half the population, but work nearly two-thirds of all the working hours, receive only one-tenth of the world income, and own less than one percent of the world's property. Feminism is a political movement struggling to build a society in which women do half the work, receive half the income, and in which the world belongs to everyone.

Dawn Black, MP

NDP Status of Women Critic

....being a feminist means never having to say you're sorry to anyone but a sister.

Louise Kilby





Feminism is a process which begins when a young woman says "I am a feminist" and which never ends. It is a process which is different for every woman and which reaches into every aspect of her life. The essence of the process is the woman's increasing ability to love her woman-self and all women. It involves a constant struggle to free herself from all aspects of patriarchy both internally and in the world.

Because feminism is a process, it means different things to a woman at different times of her life and it means different things to different women at any point in time.

Today, for me, feminism means loving myself and other women more and more; continuing to heal my internal wounds and so becoming more fully my woman-self; grieving profoundly as I watch and experience patriarchal forces try to control and destroy what women have created and care about; being angry at a political system that is so abusive of women and the world; discovering my spiritual connectedness with other women and the goddess/es and learning about my relationship with women of colour and what they have given and are giving to me.

Penny Handford



### *Towards a Definition of Feminism*

Feminism (being a feminist) means putting women first. It requires starting with women's experience - our own and other women's (rather than focusing on human liberation or on how some men are oppressed, etc., etc.) - as the basis for developing analysis and strategy to guide our work.

"Feminism is ... a mode of analysis - a method of approaching life and politics, a way of asking questions and searching for answers rather than a set of political conclusions about the oppression of women." (Nancy Hartsock in *Feminist Theory and Revolutionary Strategy*.)

To be a feminist then is to be critical - to ask questions about how society functions, about how women live in society. Feminism is a process of questioning rather than a 'dogma' or a set of prescribed positions or answers.

By starting with women's experience and analyzing how women live in society, it is clear that women are oppressed, socially and economically and that women's subordination is institutionalized in our society, whether the institution is small (the family) or large (the government, the economy). Feminism enables women to see how and why our everyday lives are affected and shaped by society's ideologies and institutions.

To be a feminist requires identification with other women and acknowledgement that all of us, as women, are affected by women's oppression. To work as feminists, therefore, is not to work for the benefit of some 'poor downtrodden women' over there, but for ourselves. This does not mean that we are all affected in the same way - or that all women are the same and have the same problems - in fact, it's essential to be clear about the differences. It does mean suspending the distance between ourselves and other women and recognizing that our lives are on a continuum based on women's oppression: Some of us are in a better, more privileged place than others, but we're all on the continuum. Feminism, being a feminist, presupposes that women's oppression must end. It means a commitment to working in whatever ways we can for change.

### The Pornography Paper

Working Group on Sexual Violence

Kate Andrew, Jan Barnsley, Megan Ellis, Debra Lewis, Francis Wasserlein  
Vancouver, B.C. 1986





---

## ON BEING FEMALE, FAT, AND FORTY

---

Thank god.

Now I know for sure she's a black female,  
Organizing and filing and sorting things out up there,  
Having taken over chaos from the white male god  
Who left such a mess that a woman had to step in to do the job.  
So we're making out for progress now,  
And finding small inconsequential things,  
Like fairness, and awareness, and Gorbachev's peace which finally, thank you god, passeth all understanding.

She's done a true blue, right-bright job on me.

Under the previous god, I'd had to grin and bear it for the close-rape from my father's friend,  
Whose opening and move in line was that he'd held me in his arms when I was six months old.  
He'd kept his eye on me for all that time,  
And when I was insensate with vodka and lime and a love's-end grief at twenty,  
He took me in his arms again, and ripped the clips from my hair and the blouse from my breasts.

The sirens striped the township air next day,  
And he sent a message to the ward, via my father yet,  
That he was sorry, he didn't know I'd really meant it  
When I said I didn't want to put one foot after the other every empty day.

Curiously, he no longer has a head.  
He comes to mind only from the neck and shoulders down.

Not, naturally - for a woman -, that he was the first,  
Or the only one.

My uncle started it when I was twelve.  
He'd kept his eye on me as well.  
I developed my eye into the whitest stare of all,  
And could see his howling mega-male plea to defeat in one second flat in the end.  
And therein lies my aching stage. I could play and play, and no one knew what grew inside.  
Families are a dangerous thing. I aborted mine.

So now that god is sorting her priorities, and flicks away the white-male muck-up of the years,  
I am ancient, and have an aching acting eye,  
And I eat potato chips, as I do now, in pain and prevention,  
I can say it's good she's god and I can pray to thank her for letting me be female, fat, and forty.

Mary Burroughs



In 1913, Rebecca West, an English writer, said "I myself have never been able to find out precisely what feminism is: I only know that people call me a feminist whenever I express sentiments that differentiate me from a doormat..."

Nearly 80 years later Kate Clinton, a lesbian comedienne said that to be a feminist means to recognize that women are oppressed and to realise that that oppression must end. For me as a socialist feminist, feminism also includes an awareness of the political basis of women's oppression, and the recognition that systems as well as individuals must change if the ultimate goal of feminism - true equality for women - is ever to be achieved.

Ann Frost  
Past President, WRC



Feminism is awareness.

It means challenging ourselves to re-examine our relationship to, and our participation in the patriarchal quagmire we live in.

It means learning to love ourselves, learning to trust ourselves, and to trust those wise old woman voices we hear. It means trusting that, as we are capable of living our lives as we see fit, others have the wisdom, ability and the right to live as they see fit.

It is an everchanging kaleidoscope of beauty, energy, love and inspiration. Each day brings me new awareness. Of myself, my body, and of my physical and spiritual relationship with others. Of my unique sameness with other women, all women. Of our many differences, some we may never overcome.

Each day I am becoming more me. Each day I am becoming more all women.

Kathy Hill

Feminism is remembering. Remembering and acting. Acting and celebrating.

Feminism is remembering that women in this province earn less than two-thirds of what men make. It's remembering that women are four times more likely to live in poverty than men. It's remembering that most employed women are concentrated in the lowest paying sectors of our economy. It's remembering these things and fighting for pay equity, fair labour laws, and a higher minimum wage.

Feminism is remembering that many women in our society will experience physical, sexual or emotional abuse at some point in their lives. For some women, the experience will cripple them. Some will even die. Judges, law enforcement officers, and others will imply we asked for it. Feminism is remembering the women massacred in

Montreal and fighting to expose and destroy the violence against women that is so prevalent in our society.

Feminism is remembering that not too long ago women couldn't vote, choose their own careers or make financial decisions without the approval of their fathers or husbands. It's remembering how tenuous our right to control our own bodies is. It's remembering and continuing to fight for choice and justice for all women.

Feminism is remembering and acting and celebrating the bonds between women of all ages, colours, and beliefs. It's the belief that the union of women and like-minded men can build a better world.

Elizabeth Cull, MLA



I was born a female. So!  
I am therefore a human being, right?  
That means I can do anything a male  
can do, (except father a child) which  
means I can be a mother, only if I want  
to.

Which brings us to the problem of  
abortion, and no one male or female  
can tell another human being what  
they can do with their body.

That also means I should be able to  
take any position or job I feel I am  
capable to do.

Back to when I was 11 or 12 years old,  
I played soccer with the boys until one  
day the Principal called me to his of-  
fice. He said I could not play soccer, I  
was a female and might get hurt. Ha!  
Well 80 years later we have progressed,  
a little. I have a granddaughter playing  
soccer, rowing, playing grass hockey,  
etc., but it has taken all those years.

At 19 (62 years ago) I tried to organize  
the sales clerks at H.B. Co. and man-  
agement politely told me forget it, or  
no job. I ended up managing the  
Children's shoe department, but no  
where near the males in salary.

So I married, war came on, my hus-  
band went off to war, and I ran a  
bowling alley all by myself. The  
Canadian born Japanese pin boys were  
removed from the bowling alleys, so I  
was forced to replace them. But I  
wasn't permitted to use females as  
replacements, just wasn't possible.

Always that barrier. So! I am female.  
So therefore not a human being? But  
who decided we had to be second  
class citizens?

These barriers have always been  
thrown up, but damn it all, we will  
break them down. If I should live so  
long! But, I am a female, a feminist,  
and I am all for feminism.

My father encouraged me to do what-  
ever I felt capable of doing.

My mother was a suffragette, the dic-  
tionary definition of which is 'a woman  
who militantly advocates the right of  
women to vote'.

At least seventy-five years ago women  
were fighting to be heard.

And they still are.

Irene M. Chapman



'Don't beg Charlotte.'

Martha Campell, 1981 (USA)

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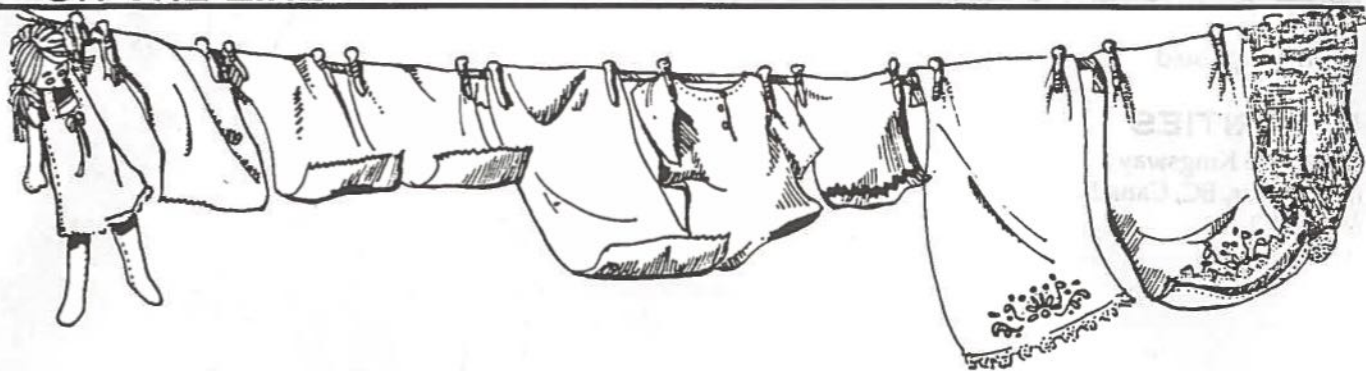
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## ON THE LINE



**ON THE LINE** will publish your responses to issues which normally produce a certain degree of controversy. In other words, shit-disturbing. Since I haven't received much input from our readers (ever), I continually try to come up with ideas to encourage your response. This is another one (doomed to failure, no doubt). This issues topic (since I have to start you off) is -

**Do you feel that the NDP has responded in an appropriate/adequate way to establish gender parity in the number of elected candidates for the next provincial election?**  
**If so, or if not, write to us and air your praise/ beefs.**

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