

Resource: History of the Feminist Movement in Canada and North America

Introduction

Feminism is a social and political movement that advocates for the equal rights and opportunities of women. It challenges the existing power structures and seeks to dismantle the systemic barriers that limit women's autonomy and agency. The feminist movement has a rich history in Canada and North America, with various waves of activism and advocacy over the years. This resource aims to provide an overview of the feminist movement's history, its main focus of advocacy within Canada, the importance of intersectionality in understanding and addressing gender inequality, and the presence of anti-feminist groups in Canada.

Defining Feminism

Feminism is a broad and diverse movement, but at its core, it seeks to achieve gender equality by challenging and transforming the social, cultural, economic, and political systems that perpetuate gender-based discrimination and oppression. Feminism recognizes that gender is a social construct and that women have historically been marginalized and disadvantaged in comparison to men. It aims to challenge and dismantle patriarchal power structures and norms that reinforce gender inequality.

Waves of Feminism

The feminist movement is often categorized into waves, each representing a distinct period of activism and advocacy. While these waves are not universally agreed upon, they provide a framework for understanding the evolution of feminist thought and action. Here are the key waves of feminism and their main focus of advocacy, particularly within Canada:

1. First Wave Feminism (late 19th to early 20th century):
 - Focus: Suffrage and political rights for women.
 - Achievements: Women's suffrage was granted in Canada in 1918 (federally) and in 1916 (provincially in Manitoba, Saskatchewan, and Alberta).

2. Second Wave Feminism (1960s to 1980s):

- Focus: Gender equality in all spheres of life, including reproductive rights, workplace equality, and an end to gender-based discrimination.
- Achievements: Introduction of the Canadian Human Rights Act in 1977, establishment of women's shelters and rape crisis centers, increased access to birth control and abortion services.

3. Third Wave Feminism (1990s to early 2000s):

- Focus: Intersectionality and inclusivity, addressing the experiences of marginalized women, such as women of color, LGBTQ+ individuals, and women with disabilities.
- Achievements: Recognition of the importance of intersectionality in feminist activism, increased representation of diverse voices within the movement.

4. Fourth Wave Feminism (early 2010s to present):

- Focus: Online activism, combating online harassment and misogyny, addressing sexual assault and violence against women.
- Achievements: #MeToo movement, increased awareness and discussion about consent, continued advocacy for gender equality in various spheres.

Intersectionality and Terminology

Intersectionality is a concept that recognizes that individuals experience multiple forms of oppression and discrimination based on their intersecting identities, such as race, gender, class, sexuality, and ability. It highlights the interconnectedness of various social categories and how they shape individuals' experiences and opportunities.

To understand the feminist movement and its goals, it is important to be familiar with key terms related to gender inequality:

1. Patriarchy: A social system in which men hold primary power and authority, and women are systematically disadvantaged and marginalized.
2. Sexism: Prejudice, stereotyping, or discrimination based on a person's sex or gender.
3. Objectification: Treating someone as an object rather than as a person, often reducing them to their physical appearance or sexual attributes.
4. Misogyny: Hatred, contempt, or prejudice against women, often manifested through systemic discrimination and violence.
5. Social Construction: The idea that gender roles, expectations, and norms are created and reinforced by society rather than being inherent or natural.

Issues in Saskatchewan Society

In Saskatchewan society, these issues of patriarchy, sexism, objectification, misogyny, and social construction come to light in various ways:

1. **Gender Pay Gap:** Women in Saskatchewan, as in many other parts of Canada, still face a significant wage gap compared to men, highlighting systemic gender inequality in the workforce.
2. **Violence Against Women:** Saskatchewan has high rates of gender-based violence, including domestic violence and sexual assault. This highlights the urgent need for continued feminist work to address and prevent such violence.
3. **Indigenous Women and Girls:** The issue of Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls (MMIWG) is a pressing concern in Canada, including Saskatchewan. Indigenous women and girls face disproportionate rates of violence and are often marginalized within the justice system.
4. **Representation and Leadership:** Women's representation in political leadership roles and decision-making positions in Saskatchewan is still limited, indicating the need for continued efforts to promote gender equality in these areas.

Anti-Feminist Groups in Canada

While the feminist movement has made significant progress in advocating for gender equality, there are also anti-feminist groups in Canada that oppose feminist ideals and goals. These groups often promote traditional gender roles, perpetuate harmful stereotypes, and resist efforts to challenge patriarchal power structures. It is important to be aware of these groups and their ideologies in order to effectively counter their influence and promote gender equality.

Conclusion

The feminist movement in Canada and North America has a long and complex history, with various waves of activism and advocacy. It seeks to challenge and dismantle the systemic barriers that limit women's rights and opportunities. Understanding intersectionality and key terminology related to gender inequality is crucial in addressing the issues faced by women in society. In Saskatchewan, issues such as the gender pay gap, violence against women, and the MMIWG crisis highlight the ongoing need for feminist work and advocacy to achieve gender

equality and social justice. Additionally, recognizing the presence of anti-feminist groups in Canada is essential in countering their influence and promoting a more inclusive and equitable society.