

'Feminism is for men,' says Harry Potter star

The actress Emma Watson has launched the UN campaign for gender equality with a powerful speech. But has 'feminist' now become a toxic term for many women — let alone men?



Top table: Emma Watson before her speech with the UN Secretary General, Ban Ki-moon © PA



en:' said Emma Watson, who played Hermione Granger in the Harry Potter film series, 'Gender equality is your issue too.'

The actress was delivering an impassioned speech on feminism at the United Nations Headquarters in New York. This was for the launch last weekend of the UN's 'HeforShe' campaign which aims to recruit 100,000 men and boys to join the fight to end the inequalities that women and girls face around the world.

In addressing men, her argument was that gender stereotypes are as oppressive of men as they are of women. She observed that 'I've seen young men suffering from mental illness, unable to ask for help, for fear it would make them less of a man. I've seen men made fragile and insecure by a distorted sense of what constitutes male success. Men don't have the benefits of equality, either. We don't want to talk about men being imprisoned by gender stereotypes but I

can see that they are.'

She gave her definition of feminism as 'the belief that men and women should have equal rights and opportunities. It is the theory of the political, economic and social equality of the sexes.'

Although, when described in those terms, this is an idea which many people, both men and women, could agree with and benefit from, she admitted that the word feminism has become unpopular. Many women now prefer not to identify themselves as feminists — or even declare themselves as anti-feminist. Many find its overtones too strong, aggressive, isolating and anti-men.

Yet the efforts of feminists have been responsible for most of the freedom and equality that women enjoy today in the western world — the vote, equal pay, access to contraception and abortion among them. Why has the word become such an uncomfortable one? Why do women reject 'feminism', but are happy

to enjoy all the things it has given them?

Battle of the sexes

Some argue that it is feminism's own fault. Like Islam, it finds itself popularly represented by its most extreme elements, no matter how few and unrepresentative they really are. Until mainstream feminists publicly reject the anti-male rhetoric of their radical sisters, they will find it impossible to rebrand feminism.

Nonsense, say others. Although gender equality has made great strides in the developed world in the last 50 years, it still has a long way to go. Its opponents are everywhere, women as well as men, and particularly in the popular press. Feminism is just one of the standard objects of hatred in right-wing newspapers, along with left-wing politics, the EU and immigrants. They take every opportunity to make it seem ridiculous or deranged.



Q Why should I care about gender equality?

A It may well become important to you as you get older that your opportunities and behaviour are not limited by old-fashioned and irrelevant ideas of what is possible or

appropriate for your sex. The world may seem pretty liberal in its attitudes, but large parts of it are not. The fight for gender equality is to ensure a better life for all.

Q Can feminism be rebranded?

A Certainly, yes. Feminism has made enormous strides across the world. The liberation of women is the greatest histori-

cal event of our time, as great as the Industrial Revolution was in the 18th and 19th century.



'Feminism is a subject for women only, not men.'

WHAT DO YOU THINK?



RAINFORD
HIGH

READING HOMEWORK

1. Does gender equality need both men and women to fight for it? Explain your thinking.

2. Why does feminism have such a poor reputation, despite its successes? Explain.
