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# Emma Watson’s United Nations: “HeForShe: Gender Equality is Your Issue, Too” Speech

By Emma Watson  
2014

*Emma Watson is a British actress, model, and activist, most widely known for her portrayal of Hermione Granger in the Harry Potter film series. In 2014 Watson became a UN Women Goodwill Ambassador and helped launch the campaign HeForShe. Watson presented the speech below at the Headquarters of the United Nations in New York. As you read, take notes on why Emma Watson believes the roles of men are important in ending gender inequality.*

- [1] Today we are launching a campaign called “HeForShe.”

I am reaching out to you because I need your help. We want to end gender inequality—and to do that we need everyone to be involved.

This is the first campaign of its kind at the UN: we want to try and galvanize<sup>1</sup> as many men and boys as possible to be advocates for gender equality. And we don’t just want to talk about it, but make sure it is tangible.<sup>2</sup>



*“UN Women launched HeForShe IMPACT 10x10x10 Initiative” by UN Women is licensed under CC BY-NC-ND 2.0.*

I was appointed six months ago and the more I have spoken about feminism the more I have realized that fighting for women’s rights has too often become synonymous with man-hating. If there is one thing I know for certain, it is that this has to stop.

- [5] For the record, feminism by definition is: “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.”

I started questioning gender-based assumptions when at eight I was confused at being called “bossy,” because I wanted to direct the plays we would put on for our parents—but the boys were not.

When at 14 I started being sexualized<sup>3</sup> by certain elements of the press.

When at 15 my girlfriends started dropping out of their sports teams because they didn’t want to appear “muscly.”

When at 18 my male friends were unable to express their feelings.

1. **Galvanize (verb):** to cause people to become excited or concerned about an issue or idea, so that they want to do something about it
2. **Tangible (adjective):** able to be touched or felt
3. to make sexual, often in a way that treats the individual as an object rather than a person

[10] I decided I was a feminist and this seemed uncomplicated to me. But my recent research has shown me that feminism has become an unpopular word.

Apparently I am among the ranks of women whose expressions are seen as too strong, too aggressive, isolating, anti-men and, unattractive.

Why is the word such an uncomfortable one?

I am from Britain and think it is right that as a woman I am paid the same as my male counterparts.<sup>4</sup> I think it is right that I should be able to make decisions about my own body. I think it is right that women be involved on my behalf in the policies and decision-making of my country. I think it is right that socially I am afforded the same respect as men. But sadly I can say that there is no one country in the world where all women can expect to receive these rights.

No country in the world can yet say they have achieved gender equality.

[15] These rights I consider to be human rights but I am one of the lucky ones. My life is a sheer privilege because my parents didn't love me less because I was born a daughter. My school did not limit me because I was a girl. My mentors didn't assume I would go less far because I might give birth to a child one day. These influencers were the gender equality ambassadors<sup>5</sup> that made me who I am today. They may not know it, but they are the inadvertent<sup>6</sup> feminists who are changing the world today. And we need more of those.

And if you still hate the word—it is not the word that is important but the idea and the ambition behind it. Because not all women have been afforded the same rights that I have. In fact, statistically, very few have been.

In 1995, Hilary Clinton made a famous speech in Beijing about women's rights. Sadly many of the things she wanted to change are still a reality today.

But what stood out for me the most was that only 30 percent of her audience were male. How can we affect change in the world when only half of it is invited or feel welcome to participate in the conversation?

Men—I would like to take this opportunity to extend your formal invitation. Gender equality is your issue too.

[20] Because to date, I've seen my father's role as a parent being valued less by society despite my needing his presence as a child as much as my mother's.

I've seen young men suffering from mental illness unable to ask for help for fear it would make them look less "macho"<sup>7</sup>—in fact in the UK suicide is the biggest killer of men between 20-49 years of age; eclipsing<sup>8</sup> road accidents, cancer and coronary heart disease. I've seen men made fragile and insecure by a distorted<sup>9</sup> sense of what constitutes male success. Men don't have the benefits of equality either.

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4. A "counterpart" is a person or shares a similar role as another.

5. a representative or messenger

6. **Inadvertent** (*adjective*): not intended or planned

7. manly or masculine in a very noticeable or exaggerated way

8. surpassing

We don't often talk about men being imprisoned by gender stereotypes<sup>10</sup> but I can see that that they are and that when they are free, things will change for women as a natural consequence.

If men don't have to be aggressive in order to be accepted women won't feel compelled<sup>11</sup> to be submissive.<sup>12</sup> If men don't have to control, women won't have to be controlled.

Both men and women should feel free to be sensitive. Both men and women should feel free to be strong... It is time that we all perceive gender on a spectrum<sup>13</sup> not as two opposing sets of ideals.

[25] If we stop defining each other by what we are not and start defining ourselves by what we are—we can all be freer and this is what HeForShe is about. It's about freedom.

I want men to take up this mantle.<sup>14</sup> So their daughters, sisters and mothers can be free from prejudice but also so that their sons have permission to be vulnerable and human too—reclaim those parts of themselves they abandoned and in doing so be a more true and complete version of themselves.

You might be thinking who is this Harry Potter girl? And what is she doing up on stage at the UN. It's a good question and trust me, I have been asking myself the same thing. I don't know if I am qualified to be here. All I know is that I care about this problem. And I want to make it better.

And having seen what I've seen—and given the chance—I feel it is my duty to say something. English Statesman<sup>15</sup> Edmund Burke said: "All that is needed for the forces of evil to triumph is for enough good men and women to do nothing."

In my nervousness for this speech and in my moments of doubt I've told myself firmly—if not me, who, if not now, when. If you have similar doubts when opportunities are presented to you I hope those words might be helpful.

[30] Because the reality is that if we do nothing it will take 75 years, or for me to be nearly a hundred before women can expect to be paid the same as men for the same work. 15.5 million girls will be married in the next 16 years as children. And at current rates it won't be until 2086 before all rural African girls will be able to receive a secondary education.

If you believe in equality, you might be one of those inadvertent feminists I spoke of earlier.

And for this I applaud you.

We are struggling for a uniting word but the good news is we have a uniting movement. It is called HeForShe. I am inviting you to step forward, to be seen to speak up, to be the "he" for "she". And to ask yourself if not me, who? If not now, when?

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9. **Distort (verb):** to twist something out of its original shape, form, or meaning

10. **Stereotype (noun):** a widely held but fixed and oversimplified image or idea of a type of person or thing

11. **Compel (verb):** to force

12. **Submissive (adjective):** willing to obey someone else

13. Used to classify something, or suggest that it can be classified, in terms of its position on a scale between two extreme or opposite points.

14. an important role or responsibility that passes from one person to another

15. a skilled, experienced, and respected political leader or figure

Thank you.

*Emma Watson's United Nations: "HeForShe: Gender Equality is Your Issue, Too" Speech by Emma Watson is in the public domain.*

## Text-Dependent Questions

**Directions:** For the following questions, choose the best answer or respond in complete sentences.

1. PART A: Which statement identifies the central idea of the text?
  - A. The term “feminism” to describe the movement of gender equality is too strong a word, which is why Emma Watson has adopted the term “HeForShe.”
  - B. Emma Watson believes that gender inequality should not only be a concern for women, but men as well.
  - C. Gender inequality is an issue that effects women alone, as women have been denied equal rights and men have not.
  - D. The help of men in achieving gender equality is necessary because their voices and opinions are more respected than women’s.
  
2. PART B: Which detail from the text best supports the answer to Part A?
  - A. “I was appointed six months ago and the more I have spoken about feminism the more I have realized that fighting for women’s rights has too often become synonymous with man-hating.” (Paragraph 4)
  - B. “I started questioning gender-based assumptions when at eight I was confused at being called ‘bossy,’ because I wanted to direct the plays we would put on for our parents—but the boys were not.” (Paragraph 6)
  - C. “How can we affect change in the world when only half of it is invited or feel welcome to participate in the conversation?” (Paragraph 18)
  - D. “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.” (Paragraph 21)
  
3. PART A: How do the experiences of men with gender inequality compare to women?
  - A. Men are more privileged than women but are still negatively impacted by gender stereotypes.
  - B. Men do not experience society’s gender expectations until later in life, while women experience them from girlhood.
  - C. Men are more accepting of gender inequality than women because they have monetary advantages and this is something that is unlikely to change.
  - D. Men are less likely than women to help end gender inequality because they would lose some of their rights to women.
  
4. PART B: Which quote from the text best supports the answer to Part A?
  - A. “This is the first campaign of its kind at the UN: we want to try and galvanize as many men and boys as possible to be advocates for gender equality.” (Paragraph 3)
  - B. “When at 15 my girlfriends started dropping out of their sports teams because they didn’t want to appear ‘muscly.’” (Paragraph 8)
  - C. “We don’t often talk about men being imprisoned by gender stereotypes but I can see that that they are and that when they are free, things will change for women as a natural consequence.” (Paragraph 22)
  - D. “Because the reality is that if we do nothing it will take 75 years, or for me to be nearly a hundred before women can expect to be paid the same as men for the same work.” (Paragraph 30)

5. What is the impact of Emma Watson sharing her own experiences with inequality, as a woman?

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