

The idea of celebrity in its self has changed in the last two decades, just as similarly has the movement of feminism, and with those changes, comes a morphing of what activism means. Generations learned of the activists of history's past only after they made grand stands for their movements, lost their lives, or had laws and other changes made. Since the 2000s where technology has rescheduled the nightly news to a 24-hour live feed both on our televisions, on our computers, and in our hands, the activists from all over the world big and small are known the minute they join a hashtag. So that brings about the debate, if those involved in the movement can so easily speak for themselves do celebrities need to elect themselves into the movement? Are they joining for publicity or just to gain followers? Or is this a way to truly support something they believe in? Celebrities are those that many recognize and look up to, remembering from their childhood and more. They are generally trained through careful public relations teams, at least more commonly than the average man, on how to conduct themselves, and on the very least have the financial and social connections to get far more done than the laymen. So, in a world where everyone holds the power to become instantly and fleetingly famous in their pocket, celebrities of a more traditional sense are powerful aids for social movements like feminism because they empower the movement and have a positive result.

As with any movement, there will always be those who cast a light that may not be the most flattering. Many worry that celebrities that self-claim the feminist title have the potential to severely damage the feminist movement by behaving in a way that only proves the detractors right, rather than continues the progress. The name that often comes up in that argument is often Lena Dunham. Lena Dunham has famously been quoted as stating that she wished she could say she had had an abortion, and more recently had come under fire for being an accused rapist

apologist. One of Dunham's costars filed police reports stating she had been raped by one of the writers of the show "Girls". "Dunham admitted that she had lied when she claimed she had "insider information" that would support Miller's innocence" (France 2018). She then continued in her letter to the Hollywood reporter;

"When someone I knew, someone I had loved as a brother, was accused, I did something inexcusable: I publicly spoke up in his defense," Dunham wrote in her THR letter. "There are few acts I could ever regret more in this life. I didn't have the 'insider information' I claimed but rather blind faith in a story that kept slipping and changing and revealed itself to mean nothing at all. I wanted to feel my workplace and my world were safe, untouched by the outside world (a privilege in and of itself, the privilege of ignoring what hasn't hurt you) and I claimed that safety at cost to someone else, someone very special." (France, 2018)

This apologist behavior that seems to change alliances with whoever is most popular is often where people worry that celebrities pick social movements for the followers. Which leads many to want celebrities to stay out of movements. While this is an understandable conclusion, it has been proven wrong by popular reaction the Lena in general and especially within the feminist community. There are multiple opinion pieces by feminist leaders large and small that call out Lena Dunham for her behavior such as the piece *Lena Dunham Uses Feminism to Market, Not to Lead, and Apologies Don't Fix That* by Kate Erbland. In this piece Erbland puts it simply, "-it's time to recognize that her political stances are not misguided, or even inconsistent: They aren't ruled by values, but by what's good for Dunham and her friends" (Erbland & Erbland 2017). This article and this opinion is not alone either, there are more that go farther into the opinion-based realm including calling Lena a flat-out nightmare. While Lena is not the only person who

is in this position she makes an excellent example of what happens when a poor role model elects themselves as a feminist. The community of activists at large, not only reject them, but reject them publicly, and loudly. This not only reminds the community and those opposing what the over arching goal of the movement is, but furthermore and in situations like these more importantly what it is not. Therefore, rather than refuting the cause of celebrities in feminism it furthers it even more.

As we look at the changing world of technology, and celebrity we must look at the changing idea of what it means to be feminist. As said before, feminist have no problem now speaking against those who stand for outdated or antiquated views that either go against or add toxicity to their movement. Another way that many have led the argument to a more agreeable and easier to understand playing field is to explain that feminism was never a movement of exclusion but rather one of inclusion. Emma Watson is a celebrity that is widely known as someone who is known as both a feminist and an equalitarian. She explains her involvement in the movement and the movements progression quite simply, “Feminism is about giving women choice. Feminism is not a stick with which to beat other women with. It’s about freedom. It’s about liberation. It’s about equality” (EW 2017). This opening of the definition feminism makes it a lot more welcoming to those who may have been intimidated by the bra burning imagery of the past, or the younger generations that are not familiar with feminism at all. This is where Emma Watson becomes an imperative celebrity in the feminist movement. Known and beloved by many 90s children from her role as Hermine Granger (a quite feminist character in itself) in the Harry Potter series many now young adults and those reaching into their late twenties are familiar with the actress and feel comfortable following not only her career but her politics as she goes from actress to UN Women’s representative (UN 2018). This familiarity with their

childhood makes Emma an easy avenue into feminism, as well as her ability to show that feminism is about equality.

Another name that is not the first that may come to many academics but should not go without mentioning is that of Kim Kardashian-West. While many will scoff or even just be stunned with confusion at that claim, but this calls back to the easy familiarity that many feel with Emma Watson and takes it to the level of the insta-famous generation. While initially Kardashian-West may have been argued as an internet superstar she is not a celebrity in her own right and has used that celebrity not only to endorse the feminist movement but to go as far as meeting with the current president of the United States and pursuing pardons for those wrongly convicted and sentenced such as Alice Marie Johnson (BBC 2018). She also spoke about Cyntoia Denise Brown a young woman sold into sex trafficking who killed the man she was sold to, in order protect herself. It is believed that the actions of celebrities speaking out about the case, such as Kim, were why the case was reevaluated, and clemency was granted for Brown. (Gafas & Burnside 2019). This is an example that having the connections and power of celebrity does make a difference. While many may not be happy that what celebrity and the face of our country's government is changing so much, the fact of the matter is, change is inevitable. Following that change, and embracing it is the easiest and healthiest way to continue and quicken a movements way to spread and be embraced by facets that would have felt isolated in the past. Kim Kardashian-West is one of the most followed people on the internet, and therefor has one of the biggest influences on those who normally do not follow the more political and news cyclic realms of media, her reach can integrate those two worlds allow a bridge to lead future generations to create their own form of feminism. This argument has come to a head as the Kardashian focused on emojis of all things, selling female empowerment emojis, on National

Women's Day that many called sexualized (Cooper 2018). The argument then became more of her quality of a role model, and sexuality's place in feminism. The fact of the matter is, that the emojis had a broad reach in a way that a politician simply wouldn't have. There are all different types of feminists because there are all different types of men, women and those who choose not to identify as either within the movement and Kardashian-West is a surprisingly proficient example of that.

Lastly, celebrities can reach groups and minorities that are under represented in many fields, and are not represented in politics and activism, speaking to those in the movement who may not feel for certain they belong in the movement for sure. Laverne Cox is an excellent representation of this. As a transgender woman of color and proud feminist, she shows where intersectional feminism is incredibly important. Cox was nominated for the 2015 Feminist Celebrity Nominee for Ms. Foundation for Women, a foundation focusing on building women's collective power and advancing the equity for all in the US. She was also the first transgender person nominated from for an Emmy, to have figure to have in Madame Tussauds and a cover of TIME magazine. While these would be accomplishments on their own, she uses that platform to reach out as a proud feminist and speak on issues of trans rights being woman's rights (Administrator 2015). Cox uses her platform to show that women of color have a place in feminist talks as well as transwomen. There are often where trans women who feel and are even told they are excluded from the feminist rights conversation, and this is to many not acceptable and does not follow the trending new idealism of feminism following the equalitarian mindset. When asked if transwomen are better at speaking about feminism cox replied;

“I don't like making blanket statements like that, but my womanhood is something that I've had to claim. I think transwomen, and trans people in general, show everyone that

you can define what it means to be a man or woman on your own terms. A lot of what feminism is about is moving outside of roles and moving outside of expectations of who and what you're supposed to be to live a more authentic life." (Romano 2017)

This whole mentality really goes with the same idea that we all have a right to be equal, and to be ourselves. So, focusing on that, and reaching out to those in minorities as someone in the trans and African American community, especially a combination of those two gives Cox access to a fanbase that many do not have, even considering unconventional stars such as social media stars. Combining this with her stardom, financial influence and connections she's able to spread the feminism message in a way to the trans community especially in a way that promotes their inclusion in the feminist movement.

The modern society allows people to be made famous by technology from Instagram to YouTube, to even tweets that never show your face. Especially in the United States where everyone holds the power to become suddenly even if briefly famous in their pocket, it has been questioned whether, celebrities of the traditional sense need to be involved in movement of social and political connection. This shows not only that they are powerful role models and aids for social movements like feminism but because of their connections they empower the movement and have an even greater positive result. Celebrities like Emma Watson tie back to many of the new to political and social movement generations' childhood. This has the skill of leading those who may not be likely to follow a social advocate who is not known for anything else, to listen to her stance on feminism and social movements because they were already open to her as a childhood favorite. Kim Kardashian-West is one of social media's mega moguls who turned her instafame into real world celebrity and used those connections not only to create a billion-dollar empire but gain power and political connections that she uses to help prison reform

and fight for the pardons and clemency of those many feel are wrongly imprisoned. With her connection to a demographic that many would discount as nonpolitical she can bring a massive amount of people into the conversation. Finally, Laverne Cox combines two minorities as a transgender woman of color and unapologetically voices that transgender rights in all circumstances are women's rights, and that feminism is a fight for equality not a gendered fight. She reaches out to communities that are guarded after many years that have left them tired of being spoken for by those who are not one of their own and gives the ability to see representation in the movement. This diverse list is not the end, merely the beginning, which is the reasoning behind celebrities in feminism at all. It's to open a door, to start a Twitter thread, to begin a hashtag on trending.

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