

# Feminism

Written by Stephen McGlinchey, Rosie Walters and Dana Gold

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## Feminism

<https://www.e-ir.info/2022/05/20/feminism/>

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**This feature is part of the online resources to accompany the textbook *Foundations of International Relations*.**

Feminism focuses on explaining why so few women seemed to be in positions of power and examining the implications of this on how international relations were structured. Recognising this introduces a 'gendered' reading of International Relations, where we place gender as the prime object in focus. Once we have answered the question of where the women are (certainly not in political power relative to men) feminism will invite a deeper question that asks us to consider how we can reconstruct international relations so it can account for the experiences of all people. For some feminists this can be achieved by adding women to areas where they have been excluded, for example, all-women candidate lists in elections to ensure more women are elected, and some governments having gender-balanced cabinets. Developments like these, while a sign of progress, are often felt to not be enough to address what feminists refer to as a patriarchal culture – the male-driven environment that created such things as politics (and business) and led to the structural exclusion of women in the first place. In this sense, it is not men that are the problem per se, but a certain manifestation of the male gender that has enabled a distorted political and economic system to emerge across the world.

Feminism at its core unites to challenge International Relations to reflect on its historical dominance by men and the exclusion, until recently, of the experiences, perspectives and qualities of women. Sometimes this is as explicit as the language used in many of the discipline's foundational texts, which refer to 'man' to describe all of humankind (mankind). It can also be seen in the qualities that traditional theories, especially realism, put forward as universal truths about the nature of 'man' – rational, calculating and aggressive to name a few – which have historically been perceived as masculine qualities in almost every culture in the world. Feminists ask why these have been valued above supposedly feminine ones such as emotion, compassion and pacifism – which are equally 'human' in their nature. Of course, most feminists would argue that these are not inherently masculine or feminine qualities, but rather that (to borrow constructivist terminology) they have been socially constructed as such for centuries.

Text adapted from McGlinchey, Stephen (2022) *Foundations of International Relations*. London: Bloomsbury.

For much more on feminism and other theories, you can download the free textbook, *International Relations Theory*.

**Below is a collection of freely accessible multimedia and textual resources that help unpack, and explain the importance of feminism to International Relations.**

### Getting started with feminism

#### Engaging with feminism

Introducing Feminism in International Relations Theory – article

Interview with Kimberly Hutchings – article

## **Feminism**

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Women Peace and Security podcasts by the LSE – podcast series

FTGS Research – website

*Theory Talks* with J. Ann Tickner – article

*Theory Talks* with Cynthia Enloe – article

*Theory Talks* with Marysia Zalewski – article

Laura Sjoberg: 'The Politics of "Fitting" Feminist Theory in IR' – article

Feminist Fatigues; Or, What Can Feminism Be in International Relations? – article

Interview with Cynthia Enloe – article

Interview with J. Ann Tickner – article

Feminist IR 101 – article

Whisky and IR Theory: Bananas, Beaches and Bases (part one / part two) – podcast

Exploring Sovereignty through a Feminist Lens – article

The Gender Security Project – website

A Feminist Voyage through International Relations, J. Ann Tickner – podcast

Feminist Theory – website

The Women in Foreign Policy podcast – podcast series

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### **About the author:**

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