

In Toronto, we ask feminists for insight on movement's next steps

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LANCE MCMILLAN FILE PHOTO Tens of thousands of people filled Nathan Phillips Square on Jan. 21, the day after U.S. President Donald Trump's inauguration, to support women's rights.

It seems that we're riding yet another wave of the women's movement.

The Women's March on Washington in January — which inspired an estimated five million demonstrators across seven continents in 82 countries, including 60,000 in Toronto — signalled something is in the air.

But this is not a movement without its issues and there are still women to be heard and work to be done. Where do we go from here?

For International Women's Day, we looked to local women for insight on the future of feminism, inclusivity and smashing patriarchy.

Farrah Khan

Sexual violence support worker, educator, queer Muslim artist How can feminism get people of different colours and genders into the fold?

This march is not the beginning. Many people, including our elders and godmothers of the movement, have been fighting for a long time.

It's not about getting people from marginalized communities into the fold but expanding what the fold is. It's creating space for different visions of what equity looks like. We need to be continually thinking about who is left out and who needs to be included.

The movement needs intergenerational conversations, feminist godmothers, FEMtors that have institutional and movement memory so we're not reinventing the wheel but building on the amazing pathways and conversations that have come from our sisters before us.

We need to share power.

Uzma Jalaluddin, 37

Writer, teacher, Star columnist: Samosas and Maple Syrup Did you march? What should happen now?

I didn't march but fully support the women who did. I'm an activist in daily life, behind the scenes. I think there's a sense that something very fundamental about American society is under attack right now and people feel it on a visceral, personal level. For me, as someone who is very visible, I understand so many people who are being placed, viewed and treated as outsiders. They are in a position that is unfamiliar to them but I've lived within and without the outsider status all my life. I live in the intersection of faith, culture and feminism. All the social justice movements, especially feminism, need compassion, empathy, understanding and tolerance. It would also be nice to see a wider variety of stories out there. I believe in the power of words. I think that feminists need to read each other's stories.

Ing Wong-Ward, 43

Associate director for the Centre for Independent Living What else does the movement need?

I do hope that the women who marched can take the power and goodwill they felt during that day and find ways to turn this into everyday resistance. Social movements aren't solely built on large, visible demonstrations. They're also built on the decisions individuals make to say they refuse to believe the status quo cannot change. The movement needs to be far more open to diversity and to find ways to share power with under-represented groups, including women with disabilities, who are too often rendered invisible within the feminist movement. Part of this involves white, CIS, straight, nondisabled women listening to women whose lives do not mirror their own, to hear what the feminist movement can do to be more inclusive. It involves hearing the experiences of minority women and actually listening to their critiques around feminism and

racism, ableism, transphobia and homophobia without becoming defensive. White women need to ask themselves, are they opening doors or creating barriers?

Kate Chung, 74

Toronto Raging Grannies What did you make of the march? Marches like this help build solidarity but I hope it's not all focused on the United States. We're brainwashed here to think that Canada is so wonderful and we live in the best country in the world but, I'm sorry, there are still things to fix. This is not a perfect place and I see things sliding backwards. I'm old enough to remember the 1970s, when we had hope that change was coming.

Also, there's no such thing as just a women's issue. Climate, the future of this planet, justice, refugees, pipelines, war and peace, homelessness — we're not just fighting for our own grandchildren but all grandchildren. To be a Granny, you don't have to be a certain age, a grandmother, or a mother. You just have to be a woman and have attitude. We need to recruit.

Septembre Anderson, 34

Feminist and activist, journalist How should feminism work to get folks of different colours and genders on board?

One critique is that white women need to bring us on board, but it's more like, "How do we work together?"

It's important to understand and accept that we're working on the same issues but not together, that we're working as teammates but not necessarily on the same team. Our diversity is our strength. We're all working towards ending patriarchy; it's not necessary for us to be in the same group doing that.

Men are a whole other thing and it's valuable for men to do their work where they are. They don't need to come into our group, they need to speak to other men. In the locker rooms where they're talking about grabbing women by the p---- — that's where their work is — or in the boardrooms where they alienate and exclude women from the conversation. To the men: Your work is with other men.

Gwen Benaway, 29

Annishinabe/Métis trans poet What does the movement need right now?

To really focus on intersectional feminism. It's time for us to move past divisiveness and embrace the strength, mission and perspectives of all women who are experiencing misogyny if we are going to really challenge and change things. There has been a fundamental rollback of our rights and equal access so we need to come together as diverse women and stand unified. (We have a) moment to leverage the unity of the moment and the strength of our unity. The way to do that is to call out men collectively, to call out misogyny. Our intersectional identities gives us myriad ways to think and to act and respond to these forces. It makes us stronger as a whole, it's

an enhancement. Once we let the voices that are already present rise up, we will be more powerful.

Caitlyn Kasper, 30

Anishinaabek/Blackfoot lawyer with Aboriginal Legal Services of Toronto What does the movement need now?

Whether it's black women, indigenous women, sex trade workers or queer women, in all of those different communities there is strength so we need to realize the future is in recognizing each other as sisters and coming together with our differences but also with our fundamental likenesses. We need to ask how we can support each other. Our experiences are so parallel in so many ways. It's about being an ally. Just because it isn't your issue personally doesn't mean you can't offer yourself and your support in ways others say you can be helpful.

The only other thing I would add is that emphasis on self determination: We need to be honouring and show respect to different groups for self determination and defining feminism in a way that makes sense to them.

Kavita Dogra, 29

Founder of We Talk Women, co-organizer of the Toronto Women's March So you helped organize the Women's March in Toronto, what's next?

The committee started a Facebook group because we (were fielding) a lot of questions about what to do now. The group is to encourage ongoing discussion and sharing. People are eager to be active and it's important to take that energy and guide it meaningfully. We want to connect people with the opportunities because it will help sustain their enthusiasm to be vocal and active in their local communities. We'll also be inviting people to come to the International Women's Day rally that happens annually at the University of Toronto.

Janaya Khan

Co-founder of Black Lives Matter - Toronto Why do women's overlapping identities matter?

Too often, it is the most marginalized women that are left behind. Feminism has really become the fight against the imperialist, white supremacist, capitalist patriarchy, and since we're pushing back against something that's so incredibly advanced and adept, the feminist movement needs to be just as adaptive and just as responsive to multiple needs and multiple identities. It only makes sense when the concept of feminism is translating for some of the most marginalized people; feminism identifies itself not by its name, but by its actions. These interviews have been edited and condensed.