



# Feminisms - Different Meanings

**Overview:** By examining multiple meanings of feminism, people develop a fuller appreciation of its different interpretations and the backlash and power dynamics that get triggered in response. This examination can deepen people's exploration of the reasons behind the negative attitudes toward feminism and of the variations that exist so they can develop their own definition.

**Purpose:** Using a quick word association, this activity explores people's initial understanding and feelings about feminism, introduces some of the many meanings of feminism currently in use, provides an opportunity to develop a common definition, and examine how sexist beliefs operate to undermine women's rights and feminism,

**Time:** 1 hour – 75 minutes

**Materials:**

- Flip chart
- Newsprint
- Markers
- Hand out: Different Definitions of Feminism

**Other Readings:** *Changing Their World: Feminist Movements and Movement Building* and the *JASS Feminist Dictionary*





**Process:**

***In plenary:***

- Introduce purpose and explain process of activity – word association and discussion
- Ask group --What is the first word you associate with feminism? Record words on flip chart. And what words does society most often associate with feminist? Record.
- How do these words make you feel? Record on flip chart.

***In buzz groups:***

- Why do we feel this way? Why do you think there are so many negative words associated with feminism and feminists?

***In plenary:***

- Each group gives 1 or 2 ideas.
- Probe further: Some women don't want to be seen as feminists, why? Who or what promotes this negative view of feminism and feminists?
- As facilitator, synthesize and point out that this is how some forms of power are exercised – discrediting us, seeking to limit our actions through fear and intimidation, making us feel hated sometimes, angry other times.

***In buzz groups:***

- Going deeper without the stereotypes, what are 2-3 things that you think feminism is really about? What would you want to include in a definition? Have group record ideas on newsprint.
- *Note: Give groups 5 minutes to grapple with definition, then give them general definitions hand out from academic sources, activists, feminists.*
- Ask them: what parts of these definitions resonate with them? What else might they want to incorporate into their definition? What might they want to leave out?

***In plenary:***

- Each groups provides some key points; record on flip chart.
- As facilitator, ask what are some commonalities? Synthesize, noting the emerging definition. Stand back and ask for comments from the group about the evolving definition. And finally, conclude with: what's important for us to remember about feminism in our work?



## Hand Out: Different Definitions

**Feminism** is the belief that men and women should have equal rights and opportunities; organized activity in support of women's rights and interests

- *Merriam-Webster Dictionary*

**Feminism** is a collection of movements and ideologies aimed at defining, establishing, and defending equal political, economic, and social rights for women.

- *Wikipedia*

**Feminism** is "a socialist, anti-family political movement that encourages women to leave their husbands, kill their children, practice witchcraft, destroy capitalism and become lesbians."

- *Pat Robertson, conservative Christian televangelist*

**Feminism** is a political proposal focused on eradicating all inequalities between men and women and defending the rights of all those who have been marginalized – women, men, and children.

- *JASS Alquimia workshop October 2013, Nicaragua*