

“The F Word, Explained”



By Caitlin Paulden

Last week on a rainy night in Santa Barbara, California, I finished studying at my local Starbucks and called an Uber from my iPhone because we all know anyone from SoCal can't drive home in the rain. As I waited for my Uber, I put the finishing touches on my freshly written Women's Empowerment essay due later that week. I opened up my umbrella and walked quickly to the car with the large Uber sticker parked out front. This nice woman didn't hesitate to start conversation, and was quick to complain about her previous passenger who had just yelled at her for her failure to see the recent RBG movie, and how she failed to identify as a feminist. As I sat there respectfully, she continued to state: "I'm not a feminist, I like men too much, I can't hate men". As I left the car, I politely thanked her for saving my California self from driving in the rain, but internally, I was outraged by her misinformed conception of what feminism is.

While I was shocked to find out how incorrect her definition was, I realized that many other people are probably confused as to what feminism really is. So, in light of my recent experience and the fact that it has been a century since women's suffrage was granted in 1919, I figured I'd clarify to all of those anti-feminists out there, or to anyone who may just frankly be confused, what feminism actually is.

Let's start off with what seems to bring about biggest confusion: the definition of feminism.

What is Feminism?

Feminism is defined by Merriam-Webster Dictionary as 'the theory of the political, economic, and social equality of the sexes'ⁱⁱ and by the Oxford Dictionary as 'the advocacy of women's rights on the ground of the equality of sexes'ⁱⁱⁱ.

Feminism, in its simplest form, advocates for the equality of all sexes; it is not a group of women who hate men. It is simply a belief that there should be equal opportunities for both men and women, that there should be equal rights. Now this is not to say that feminism is trying to make women equal to the men in society, but rather that women are liberated from the patriarchic and misogynistic oppression they continue to face to this day. Feminism is not striving to achieve some ideal goal of being equal to men, but rather to achieve an equality of rights and opportunities for all sexes. So, if you believe in everyone having equal opportunities – NEWS FLASH - you are following the definition of feminism.

What do most people get wrong about feminism?

Feminists are not a group of angry women who despise men, as my Uber driver seemed to believe. In fact, that notion goes completely against the definition of feminism.

Since feminism emerged as an attempt to change and improve the role women play in society, people have associated this term with a group of strong, angry women trying to push men out of their way in society. This is rooted back in the 1960s-1980s when a group of strong Conservatives quickly shut down the idea of feminism with the fear that it would ruin the traditional norms in the world.

Feminists are not trying to rid the world of men, and they are not trying to force their way to the top, pushing men down on their way up. Feminism is simply the belief that there should be equality for all sexes.

Why do these misconceptions exist?

The great misconception that feminists are a group of angry women who hate men likely comes from the rise of feminism. When feminism began to rise, women were so passionate about what they were fighting for, and are outraged to see so many people against it. The only way to make their presence known was through marches and strong activism, and through the resilient rise of this movement, those in great opposition of this movement fought back stronger, twisting the ideals feminists stand for. Women continue to be shadowed by the patriarchal, misogynistic society we live in – and it is hard to escape this society because it was the norm for so long.

What people don't understand is that these women who are now stepping up, running for office, moving their way up in the work place, and overall progressing in our society face many challenges that men do not. Women have to do more than men in the fact that they must prove they are just as capable even though they are a woman. That is the core of the issue – women are oppressed just for not being a male. Women are subject to the patriarchal society. So, they have to work harder, and face even more trials such as how they look just because they are a women. This is not giving every sex equal access of opportunities.

Who can be a Feminist?

Do you believe in equal opportunities for everyone? Great. You can be a feminist.

There are no limits as to who can be a feminist. Anyone, anywhere can be a feminist. By this point I hope it has been cleared up that feminists are not women who are angry men haters. So with that said, are you ready to support feminism?

It's ok to be a feminist

Look around the nation you live in. Women still suffer from large numbers of sexual assault (in the workplace, schools, everywhere), they are subject to their appearance, they are subject to a male-dominated society, and face great challenges to be leaders in the workplace or government, or even to earn the same wages for doing the same exact work as men. There are endless statistics that prove all of this is true.

Women are just as strong and capable as men are perceived, but they are hindered by the patriarchal and misogynistic ideals that still surround the world. It's time to open your eyes and recognize that gender should not play a factor into capability.

Feminism is here to stay, and for those of you who may have been confused as to what it is, now you have the proper definition. Feminism is a positive thing, it is here to benefit the entire whole of society, not just women. What this group of strong, empowered people who support equality

are ultimately advocating to do is better the world – making it safer, bettering the economy, and uniting everyone to create a more effective and productive government and society.

If you are going to hate feminism, at least have your facts straight. If you don't support equality for all, that's your decision, but recognize that feminism is overall a positive movement that wants to make things better for all sexes, not just women. For those of you who had a skewed interpretation of feminism, now you know what it is and I encourage you to explore even deeper as to what feminists are doing around you – it's pretty great and can benefit you. But please, think twice before you say "I'm not a feminist because I like men too much" again.

ⁱ Baker, Laura. Fourth Estate.

ⁱⁱ Merriam-Webster 1828

ⁱⁱⁱ Oxford English Dictionary