

September 30, 2014

## “Feminism”

In the spring of 2014, I was sitting in Starbucks with a friend of mine when the topic of feminism arose. Let me clarify something: Alex identifies as a conservative and has lived in Arkansas for a majority of his life. He often jokes about how stereotypically southern he is. I, on the other hand, hold much more liberal views. Naturally, being fans of debate, we tend to discuss the topics on which we disagree. In this particular conversation, he said something along the lines of, “I agree that men and women should have equal rights, but I don’t think I can consider myself a feminist because I believe in the traditional roles of men and women.” It was significant because it was the first time I had heard an *informed* opinion that differed from my own. I had probably heard the exact words, but not in the same context. At the time, I was not entirely certain how to navigate the conversation; I have since built my knowledge. Because the word “feminism” is overflowing with all of the possible connotations, the only unchanging thing is that it is always changing. Understandably, there tends to be much confusion in our society on the ‘correct’ way to define “feminism.” The word has been socially ever-changing since the moment it was born.

Feminism is often broken down into three waves: the first wave, the second wave, and the third wave. There are some slight disagreements on the specific dates because of how close-knit each wave is to the one after, but the themes are consistent across the board. The first wave took place during the time of the suffragettes; beginning in 1840 and extending through the 1960s, women fought for their basic right to vote and for representation in politics. The second wave began in the 1960s and continued into the 1990s. When people coin feminists as “bra burners” or excessively radical, they are often referring to the second wave feminists. These women recognized and advocated for their multiracial sisters, and they primarily fought for reproductive rights. They did everything they could to break the

**Commented [EO1]:** This clause is a little abrupt and not necessarily needed. Consider deleting it.

**Commented [EO2]:** CMS 8.46 suggests lowercasing “southern”

**Deleted:** S

**Deleted:** ‘

**Commented [EO3]:** Please rewrite this sentence into a paraphrase so that you can remove the quotes since you don’t know exactly what he said. Alex should also be assigned an endnote.

**Deleted:** ‘

**Commented [EO4]:** I stumbled over this as a reader. Perhaps use a construction with a similar meaning, such as “continually changing” or “continually changing in social contexts” if you feel the social part of it is key.

**Commented [EO5]:** CMS 9.34 calls for no apostrophe

**Deleted:** ‘

**Deleted:** ‘

**Deleted:** ‘

gender roles that they felt boxed women in. From the 1990s to the present, third wave feminists have extended their range of advocacy to speak out against rape culture, victim-blaming, and slut-shaming. They often confuse the second wave feminists because third wave feminists will wear lipstick and revealing clothing (a sign of oppression in the second wave) as a way of reclaiming their own identity.<sup>1</sup>

Third wave feminists are also defined by their acceptance of the trans\* community. They throw out all boundaries, and invite all people to come in and join. For example, wanting to include men in feminism is not a new discussion, but it has been more commonly seen and emphasized in the third wave.

Because the definition and views of feminists have changed over the past century and a half, one would assume that the definition of the word itself is also changing. The 1966 *Webster's New World Dictionary* defines feminism as "the theory that women should have political, economic, and social rights equal to men, or the movement to win these."<sup>2</sup> Modern dictionary definitions from *Merriam-Webster*<sup>3</sup>, *Cambridge*<sup>4</sup>, and *Oxford Dictionary*<sup>5</sup> all agree that feminism is the advocacy for women's rights and the belief that men and women are equal. Clearly, not much has changed in the past fifty years in regards to the definition. In fact, this is often pointed out by feminists when debating with "anti-

feminists" or those who do not identify a specific way to educate them about what being a feminist entails at the core. *AreYouAFeminist.com* uses these relatively simple definitions. The site asks two questions: "Do you think all human beings are equal?" and "Do you think women are human beings?" After answering "Yes" to both, you are taken to a page that says "Congratulations, you are a feminist!" (Note: if you answer "No" to either of these questions, the first one takes you to a web page quoting the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and the second links to a *Wikipedia* article on women.) The point of the website is that it normalizes the idea of feminism, as well as encourages people to adopt it as part of their identity without fear of needing to be a "man hater", "bra burner", or "radical."

There are two separate changes happening with the word "feminism": one within the feminist community and one in popular culture and society. Within the feminist community, "feminism" still

Deleted: '

**Commented [EO6]:** I googled this because of the asterisk. I like that you are using this inclusive title, but maybe add a note explaining it for readers who might not know. An audience of academic scholars are not necessarily up to date on marginalized societies. Also, they might think the asterisk is referring to a note below and consider it an oversight that there isn't one.

Deleted: to

Deleted: ever-

Formatted: Font: Italic

Formatted: Font: Italic

Formatted: Font: Italic

**Commented [EO7]:** Are these the full names of these dictionaries? For example, should *Oxford Dictionary* be *Oxford English Dictionary*?

Formatted: Font: Italic

Formatted: Font: Italic

**Commented [EO8]:** Consider using transitions between sentences in this area, such as "In comparison" to show that you are comparing sources to see whether or not the definition actually changes.

**Commented [EO9]:** Is this pronoun referring to feminists or the "anti-feminists" and others? Consider rephrasing the sentence to clarify

**Commented [EO10]:** This source should be cited in the endnotes

Formatted: Font: Italic

Deleted: is

tends to be separated into different branches, yet the goal is to unite as one powerful force. *Urban Dictionary* is the only definition online that specifically includes that “feminism also, by its nature, embraces the belief that all people are entitled to freedom and liberty within reason—including equal civil rights—and that discrimination should not be made based on gender, sexual orientation, skin color, ethnicity, religion, culture, or lifestyle.”<sup>6</sup> Feminism is taking on a deeper, broader meaning in today’s society: one that includes people of all colors, genders, and sexual orientations. “White feminism” is a term often used in regards to mainstream feminism giving privilege to white women, whereas “intersectional feminism” is the view that there is no one-size-fits-all feminism<sup>7</sup>. It will look different depending on the individual and their story because their wants and needs are different.

While feminists are undergoing change within their community, there is simultaneous change happening with the general connotation of the word in society. There are a multitude of social media campaigns like #YesAllWomen encouraging the education of others about the word “feminism” in culture. Emma Watson is a recent and profound example of this. In the past few months, she accepted a position as a United Nations Goodwill Ambassador. She gave a speech on feminism, specifically giving a call to arms for all men who love their female friends, children, wives, mothers, etc.<sup>8</sup> Watson is by no means the only celebrity speaking out about it; Amy Poehler and Tina Fey are both outspoken talented women who hold feminist values and often use them in their comedy. Taylor Swift, a huge role model for many young women but there, recently “came out” as a feminist for all of the press to see. The response was overwhelming warmth, especially considering that she admits that she was not educated enough a few months prior to have an informed position on the matter. Swift said that it was specifically her friendship with Lena Dunham that opened her eyes to what feminism truly is and what it advocates for.<sup>9</sup>

Through all of these different mouths, “feminism” is becoming a word more commonly brought up at the dinner table. It has been referred to as the “F-Word” and has negative synonyms like “man

**Formatted:** Font: Italic

**Commented [EO11]:** Is this the same formatting used in the *Urban Dictionary* definition, or does it use an en or em dash?

**Commented [EO12]:** Using the word “different” twice in this sentence sounds repetitive. Is this intentional? Consider rephrasing the sentence to be “It will look different depending on the individual and their wants and needs.”

**Deleted:** in

**Deleted:** Then, s

**Commented [EO13]:** Your audience of academic scholars may want to know more specific details about the location and cultures of these women. Consider rephrasing this to “in the world” or “in a variety of cultures” to show that you mean young women not just in the United States and Europe.

**Deleted:** ‘

**Deleted:** ‘

**Commented [EO14]:** While I understand as a reader that you are trying to say it is being discussed a lot more, perhaps change this to “in public discussions, especially on social media.” You don’t have evidence of it being discussed at dinner tables, but you did talk about its social media presence.

**Commented [EO15]:** Since this hasn’t been mentioned previously in your essay and could have led to added analysis on the likeness to the “f-bomb,” I recommend removing this entire portion of the sentence.

hater” and “bra burner”; however, despite those things, there are still countless people advocating for it to be normal, human even, to identify as a feminist. “Feminism” has developed from a word used to describe a specific group of people to opening up the entire globe to identify as feminists. The word will never stop changing connotations, but the community can hope that it only continues to be a positive change.

**Commented [EO16]:** You argued earlier that the word actually hasn't changed definitions; rather, the feminists themselves change the breadth of what they are advocating for and society is starting to learn the real definition and erase assumptions. I recommend rewording this sentence to mention that the way non-feminists or people uneducated about feminism see the word, and how that is changing in a positive way (keep the second clause about the community, but clarify that it's the feminist community).

## Notes

1. Jennifer Baumgardner, "Is There A Fourth Wave? Does It Matter?," *Feminist.com*, 2011.
2. *Webster's New World Dictionary* (Cleveland: Webster's New World, 1966).
3. "Feminism," *Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary*, accessed September 25, 2014, <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/feminism>
4. "Feminism," *Cambridge Dictionaries Online*, accessed September 25, 2014, <http://dictionary.cambridge.org/us/dictionary/american-english/feminism>
5. "Feminism," *Oxford Dictionaries*, accessed September 25, 2014, [http://www.oxforddictionaries.com/us/definition/american\\_english/feminism](http://www.oxforddictionaries.com/us/definition/american_english/feminism)
6. "Feminism," *Urban Dictionary*, accessed September 25, 2014, <http://www.urbandictionary.com/define.php?term=Feminism>
7. Ava Vidal, "'Intersectional feminism'. What the hell is it? (And why you should care)," *The Telegraph*, January 15, 2014, accessed on September 24, 2014, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/women/womens-life/10572435/Intersectional-feminism.-What-the-hell-is-it-And-why-you-should-care.html>
8. "Emma Watson HeForShe Speech at United Nations | UN Women 2014," YouTube video, 11:47, posted by "HeForShe," September 22, 2014, <http://youtu.be/Q0Dg226G2Z8>.
9. Rachel McRady, "Taylor Swift Credits Lena Dunham For Helping Her Understand Feminism, Girls Creator Calls Singer Her 'Feminist Role Model,'" *US Weekly*, August 24, 2014, accessed September 25, 2014, <http://www.usmagazine.com/celebrity-news/news/taylor-swift-lena-dunham-feminism-2014248>.

**Commented [EO17]:** Please match the style of your endnotes with the examples given on the style sheet.

**Formatted:** Font: Italic

**Formatted:** Font: Italic

**Formatted:** Font: Italic

**Formatted:** Font: Italic

## Bibliography

"Always #LikeAGirl." YouTube video, 3:18. Posted by "Always," June 26, 2014.

<http://youtu.be/XjQBjWYDTs>.

In the video, an assortment of men, women, and boys are asked to do a series of actions "like a girl." When asked to run, they run with their hands flying everywhere and not really giving their all. They give the camera the stereotype. However, they asked young girls the same question, and all of them ran, fought, and hit the way they would normally. The message being conveyed is that somewhere around the time of puberty, a girl's self-esteem plummets because society constantly tells her she does a specific action "like a girl," and the meaning is unfortunately negative. When asked what it means to run "like a girl", one of the younger ones said "It means to run as fast as you can." This source was relevant because the idea of women and how they are portrayed in society is evolving almost as quickly as the word "feminism" itself. They go hand in hand. This video is a result of previous feminist work and the change they have made.

AreYouAFeminist.com. "Are you a feminist?" Accessed September 20, 2014.

<http://areyouafeminist.com/>.

This site is just one example of how feminism is becoming normalized in society. This "quiz" asks two questions, and when you answer Yes, it congratulates you and tells you you're a feminist. The site breaks down the two basic elements of what feminists stand on. They are points easy to understand, and people tend to be under the impression that feminism is a complicated concept and movement, when really it can be broken down into two questions.

Baumgardner, Jennifer. "Is There a Fourth Wave? Does It Matter?" *Feminist.com*, 2011. Accessed September 23, 2014.

<http://www.feminist.com/resources/artsspeech/genwom/baumgardner2011.html>.

In this article, Baumgardner is making an argument for a fourth wave of feminism that came in 2008 with the rise of social media and digital tools. I did not end up putting it into the paper because I did not feel as though it was totally relevant, and it could be more confusing to try to explain the fourth wave after explaining the three waves than just explaining the three. However, Baumgardner does a thorough job explaining the initial three waves before going into the fourth wave argument, and I did use that part of her writing. Another issue with using her work too excessively is that she is clearly a feminist speaking to other feminists, and my audience is not that specific.

Cambridge Dictionaries Online. "Feminism." Accessed September 25, 2014.

<http://dictionary.cambridge.org/us/dictionary/american-english/feminism>.

*Cambridge Dictionaries* defines "feminism" as specifically an organized effort for women and men to have equal rights. It does not mention the belief behind it. This source was useful to my research because it turned out to match what many other definitions were defining as "feminism."

"Emma Watson HeForShe Speech at United Nations | UN Women 2014." YouTube video, 11:47. Posted by "HeForShe," September 22, 2014. <http://youtu.be/Q0Dg226G2Z8>.

Despite the active work within the feminist community to bring a common understanding to the word in

**Commented [EO18]:** Please match the style of your citations with the examples given on the style sheet.

**Deleted:**

**Deleted:** this super

**Deleted:** ing

**Formatted:** Font: Italic

society, Emma Watson took the initiative and completely blew it out of the water. Watson's fame is insurmountable with her role in the *Harry Potter* series and *Perks of Being a Wallflower* movie. She is fully aware of the sway she has over people because she is so well-known, and she is a prime example of using it in a way that brings about awareness. The response to her simple speech defining feminism and inviting everyone (men, specifically) to join has been outrageous. Some have responded extremely well, others have become so upset that they have threatened Emma Watson's safety and online privacy, while quite a few people have come to identify as feminists. It is important to remember that Emma Watson's speech was not perfect. It was not the end-all-be-all to sexism. Instead, she opened up the floor for discussion. All of social media completely blew up with the news, and conversations were happening all over the place. This was her purpose, and it is representative of the goals many people within the feminist community share.

**Commented [EO19]:** While this is certainly a true statement, it is not really appropriate for an audience of academic scholars. Please revise it or delete it.

**Deleted:** had

**Deleted:** own

McRady, Rachel. "Taylor Swift Credits Lena Dunham For Helping Her Understand Feminism, Girls Creator Calls Singer Her 'Feminist Role Model.'" *US Weekly*, August 24, 2014. Accessed September 25, 2014. <http://www.usmagazine.com/celebrity-news/news/taylor-swift-lena-dunham-feminism-2014248>.

Taylor Swift is another recent feminist "coming out" story. She denied it for some time until she befriended Lena Dunham, who openly identifies as a feminist. Although the representation is important, what is even more important is how it was only from the friendship that education was present. Oftentimes, the relationship-building method of education is the most reliable and influential. Here is an example of it happening amongst celebrities, a situation that has been happening across the United States. With some celebrities coming forward and admitting that their initial definition is wrong, the standard has been set for others who have a skewed definition in their heads. It was relevant to the paper because these same celebrities are actively participating in the normalization and redefinition of the word in popular culture.

Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary. "Feminism." Accessed September 25, 2014.

<http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/feminism>.

This standard dictionary defines "feminism" as both the belief that women and men should have equal rights and organized activity fighting for those rights. This definition does not vary much from the other definitions, which in itself is an important piece. It was useful research because when compared to other dictionary definitions, they all stood on the same solid ground; however, society views the word with a myriad of definitions, despite this fact.

**Commented [EO20]:** You state that the dictionary definitions are similar while society views the word in a variety of ways very clearly here, but I'm not sure this argument was clearly made in your essay.

NinjaCate. "This Is What I Mean When I Say 'White Feminism.'" *Jezebel*, January 10, 2014. Accessed on September 24, 2014. <http://groupthink.jezebel.com/this-is-what-i-mean-when-i-say-white-feminism-1498799007>.

Although it may not be the most accurate fact-checking site, Jezebel is great for analyzing cultural definitions and phenomena. Feminism is a prominent topic, and this article in particular (written by user NinjaCate and no other full name) gives a full diagram displaying the difference between "white feminism" and "intersectional feminism". She spends the few paragraphs defining "white feminism" and why she uses it the way she does. I had previous knowledge of this term, so in relation to my paper, I

sought out this source to have a reference point. (The point of the paper was not to exercise my own knowledge but to use research.)

**Commented [EO21]:** Consider combining these two sentences, since they say the same thing.

Oxford Dictionaries. "Feminism." Accessed September 25, 2014.

[http://www.oxforddictionaries.com/us/definition/american\\_english/feminism](http://www.oxforddictionaries.com/us/definition/american_english/feminism).

*Oxford Dictionaries* defines "feminism" as the advocacy of woman's rights, focused on the action and movement. Oxford also delves into a brief history of women rights, which is not found in any of the other definitions. Although I did not specifically use this source to reference the waves, they are briefly mentioned. Oxford clearly wants anyone who uses their website to walk away more informed about the topic as a whole.

**Formatted:** Font: Italic

Rampton, Martha. "Three Waves of Feminism." *The Magazine of Pacific University*, Fall 2008. Accessed September 23, 2014. [http://archive.pacificu.edu/magazine\\_archives/2008/fall/echoes/feminism.cfm](http://archive.pacificu.edu/magazine_archives/2008/fall/echoes/feminism.cfm).

In this article, Rampton summarizes the three waves of feminism beginning from a point when "feminism" as a word did not exist, but the ideas did. This source was the one of the most effective because it was strictly informative. Other articles had opinions that snuck in there, but this source was informative and relatively unbiased. With a word that is so run on bias and interpretation, it was nice to have some concrete evidence to support my arguments (besides the dictionary definitions).

Urban Dictionary. "Feminism." Accessed September 25, 2014.

<http://www.urbandictionary.com/define.php?term=Feminism>.

*Urban Dictionary* did not have a short definition, and the top option chosen for "feminism" focused on all the things included in other definitions, but also on how feminism does not stop at women. It goes on to define "feminism" as embracing the belief that "all people are entitled to freedom and liberty."

**Formatted:** Font: Italic

Feminism protests against any discrimination toward any body of people. *Urban Dictionary* is a site whose content is from users; without users, *Urban Dictionary* would be a bust. This definition embraces the views that feminists on social media share and advocate for. It is the most holistically representative definition (of the third wave) out of all the dictionaries I referenced.

**Formatted:** Font: Italic

**Commented [EO22]:** Please rephrase this for your audience of academic scholars.

**Formatted:** Font: Italic

**Deleted:** used

Vidal, Ava. "'Intersectional feminism'. What the hell is it? (And why you should care)." *The Telegraph*, January 15, 2014. Accessed on September 24, 2014

<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/women/womens-life/10572435/Intersectional-feminism.-What-the-hell-is-it-And-why-you-should-care.html>.

The message in this article is that intersectional feminism recognizes that feminism is not one-size-fits-all. It is complicated and twisted depending on the individual, and all stories need to be taken into account when generalizing something as broad as feminism. This is another example of a term that I have learned in the past, but needed a source to reference. The author breaks down where the word originated, and she proceeds to give societal implications of it. The term "intersectionality" also is an illustration of how even though we may have different stories, we are united under the same movement, which is the point of third wave feminism and why it was important to mention in the paper.

**Deleted:** back



*Webster's New World Dictionary*. Cleveland: Webster's New World, 1966.

Webster's New World did not have a definition that varied greatly from the others. The reason this is so crucial to the paper is because it was published at least fifty years earlier than all of the other dictionary definitions, yet it remains the same. This stability in definition is one of the key points in the paper.

Formatted: Font: Italic