



Introduction to Feminism

Overview: Using a simple social analysis tool, women examine their own understanding of feminism and other perspectives about its meaning as well. This process opens up a dialog on what feminism means to different people and how it is perceived. It provides a first step in analyzing and demystifying feminism.

Purpose: This exercise introduces the notion of feminism and some of the ways it is interpreted. It provides an initial moment for people to examine their own meanings of the idea and contrast them to those of others and the stereotypes that predominate about feminism. It gets people off their feet and involves standing which can provide a good alternative to seated activities. Certain levels of trust are needed to create the open and accepting environment that helps people explore different perceptions of feminism without fear of judgement. By identifying the commonalities, differences and challenges that participants bring to their understanding of feminism, people can better grapple with the concept and its meaning in their lives. As facilitator, you need to take special care not to be judgmental as you ask the questions since that will prevent the open examination that you want to encourage. This exercise can be adapted and used in conjunction with the activity "Different Meanings of Feminism."

Time: 45 minutes to 1 hour

Credit: Adapted by Patricia Ardon

Materials:

- Masking tape
- Flip Chart
- Newsprint
- Markers



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Process:

Prior to the exercise:

With masking tape, make long line on floor that will allow all women in the workshop to form clusters along a continuum – obviously if you have a larger group you will need to make a longer line.

In plenary:

- Describe purpose and process of exercise, reassuring people that the idea is to get an understanding of the groups' ideas of feminism – not to judge their ideas, recognizing that there are many perceptions of what feminism is.
- Ask women to stand along the line in relation to how much they feel they know about feminism. For instance those who know a good deal about feminism stand at one end, those who know something about feminism stand in the middle, and those who know little or nothing at the other extreme.
- After they position themselves, ask some of the participants, why they placed themselves where they did on the continuum. Encourage them to speak freely.
 - What do you know about feminism – what do you think it is?

In the three clusters:

Discuss among yourselves:

- What do you like and dislike about feminism?
- What do you have in common about what you like and dislike?

In plenary:

Still standing in clusters: Ask groups what were their common likes and dislikes?

In small groups:

- Everyone returns to their seats and forms three groups and discusses:
- What are the main ideas we have about feminism?
- Where did we learn and get these ideas?
- How might these ideas of feminism be relevant or not to our lives?

In plenary:

- Report back by groups, followed by an open conversation about what have you learned from the discussion and what questions does it raise for you? Record on flip chart.

Optional: You could do another round of conversations here – e.g. in pairs: What do you find most freeing or useful about the ideas of feminism? What feels challenging or threatening? Why? Then discuss as whole.



- Wrap up: As facilitator, provide a synthesis of group reflections, followed by your own reflections:
 - o Emphasizing that there are many versions of feminism and many different kinds of feminists who have contributed key ideas to an on-going history of struggle and resistance, ideas and activism that continue to bring about profound change in power relationships in the world and with that change, encourage greater equality, justice and dignity for all.
 - o Recognizing that feminists are not all the same just as women are not all the same; we want to recognize the different knowledge and ideas that we all bring to our work and lives and by sharing those, deepen our thinking and understanding together. Some people may choose to identify themselves as feminists; some may not, but we need to be clear on what our definition is and what factors influence that definition.