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# Society's Negative Perception of Feminism

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### **Society's Negative Perception of Feminism**

From a young age, I have always believed that men and women should have the same rights. As I grew older, I learned that this equality for the sexes has a name—feminism. When I came to Western Kentucky University for orientation day and signed up for classes, I came across a gender and women’s studies course. I decided to take the class because I was interested in learning more about feminism. Last semester, in gender and women’s studies, we discussed the history of feminism in the United States, read articles from feminist authors, and viewed different documentaries about feminist issues. Taking this course was the best decision I have ever made. The class showed me different feminist views and changed the way I look at society. Most importantly, it taught me that people have their own personal definitions of feminism. Although individuals may define feminism differently, feminists all have the same goal in mind, to end domination and oppression in society. My personal favorite definition comes from author and social activist bell hooks. Her definition, that was featured in her book *Feminism is For Everybody: Passionate Politics*, says that “feminism is a movement to end sexism, sexist exploitation, and oppression.” I like this definition because it calls for the end of sexism, which is the discrimination of men and women. However, it also calls to end oppression. Oppression includes the unjust treatment of any minority or minority group. This includes people of color,

disabled, and LGBT people, just to name a few. In general, people have a negative perception of feminists because they are not educated about what feminism is.

People often use negative language to describe feminists. This language can influence the public's perception of feminism. There are many stereotypes that are associated with feminists. The first stereotype is that feminists are abortion advocates. This stereotype is not true because feminists do not advocate for abortions. Feminists do, however, work with and advocate for the nonprofit organization Planned Parenthood. Planned Parenthood is an organization that provides reproductive health care in the United States and all over the globe. Although through Planned Parenthood women can receive abortions, that is not the only service that the organization provides. Planned Parenthood offers breast exams, cervical cancer screenings, STD testing, birth control, hormone therapy, and more. Feminists are known to work closely with Planned Parenthood because this is an organization that respects feminist values. Feminists do not advocate for women to have abortions but believe that it is the woman's choice to decide whether or not she wants one.

The second stereotype associated with feminism is that feminists hate men and want power over them. This stereotype is not true. Feminists just work to end the patriarchy, or male dominated society, that we live in. Because we live in a male dominated society, destructive male behavior is often excused or ignored. For example, men are not held accountable when they sexually assault and/or harass women. Often, the blame is placed on the woman. Since being in college, I have overheard disturbing conversations about sexual assault. Males and females alike make comments such as "what was she wearing?" or "she was asking for it." The language that people use has a negative impact on how people treat sexual assault survivors. No woman has the right to be violated by anyone. No matter what the woman was wearing, any unwanted form

of sexual intercourse is considered rape. Women should be able to go out and have a good time without being followed home, stalked, or assaulted. Feminists want to end the patriarchy that allows males to get away with this destructive behavior.

The public has created negative stereotypes that are associated with feminism. Despite this, there are some positive examples of feminism in the media. There are many celebrities—that range from Grammy winning singer Beyoncé to comedian Andy Samberg—who identify as feminists. They set a positive example of what feminism should look like. Currently in Hollywood there is a movement known as Time's Up, which works to end sexual harassment and inequality in the workplace. This movement was created in response to women coming forward with sexual abuse allegations against film producer Harvey Weinstein. To stand in solidarity with the survivors of harassment and abuse, many celebrities including Lady Gaga, Cardi B, and Cyndi Lauper, wore white or a white rose at the 2018 Grammy Awards. They wore this symbol to show support for survivors of sexual assault and abuse. Many feminists support the Time's Up movement because it fights to improve laws, employment agreements, and corporate policies in the workplace. Hopefully with the positive feminist role models and movements in Hollywood, normal people in society will become more comfortable with feminism and join the feminist movement as well.

People generally have a negative perception of feminism, and do not want to identify as a feminist because of language that society uses to describe feminism. I believe that if more people were educated about feminism, they too would identify as feminists. Society has created stereotypes that are associated with feminism. These stereotypes have influenced the language that people use to describe feminists. People use words such as “pro-abortion” and “man haters” to describe feminists, when they are working to end domination and oppression in society.

Celebrities in the media who identify as feminist can help change the public's perception of feminism. I am proud to be a feminist because I believe that we should all work together to end sexism and all other forms of oppression and domination in society. I wear a "100% feminist" button on my backpack that I carry around with me every day. Sometimes I am afraid that someone will say negative things directly to me. However, that has not happened, and I hope it never does. As a feminist, I feel like it is my job to help educate people about what feminism is. One day, I hope to live in a world where everyone is a feminist.

**Works Cited**

hooks, bell. *Feminism is For Everybody: Passionate Politics*. 2000.