

Womanism: universal black feminism essay sample

[Sociology](#), [Feminism](#)



The term womanism is coined by Alice Walker, the author best known for her book "The Color Purple." Walker used the term for the first time in 1983, when she talked about the womanist theory in her book *In Search of Our Mother's Gardens: Womanist prose*. The womanist movement centres on the feminist effort of black women. Womanism grew because activists felt that the feminist movement did not fully cover the plight of black women. Rather than focusing on social change or activism, womanism (sometimes referred to as "black feminism") focuses more on celebrating womanhood and the African American woman's strength and experiences. When they push for change and attention to social issues, womanists focus on racism and class oppression.

One of the reasons many prefer the term womanism is that feminism has traditionally been a middle-class white-women's movement. Feminism fought for suffrage rights for white women, but never got involved in the civil rights movement to help guarantee black women social equality. So womanism looks out not only for women but also for the rights of women of color, who are sometimes a step behind white woman when it comes to social equality. Alice Walker in her first collection of non-fiction "In Search of our Mother's Gardens: Womanist prose", referred primarily to African-American women, but also for women in general. In her own words, she says: "A womanist is to feminist as purple is to lavender." She defines a womanist in her literary work as: A woman who loves other women, sexually and/ or non-sexually. Appreciates and prefers women's culture, women's emotional flexibility (values tears as natural counterbalance of laughter), and women's

strength. Sometimes loves individual men, sexually and / or non-sexually. Committed to survival and wholeness of entire people, male and female.

For Walker, a “ Womanist” is one who is “ committed to the survival and wholeness of an entire people” (Aldridge). The theory of womanism is committed to the survival and wholeness of all people, including men as well. Womanism like black feminism, provides a space for black women and women of color to create dialogues in a non threatening environment.

Womanism and Black Feminism:-

In scholarly academia, there exists discussing approaches about whether women and feminism should be assessed as separate or intrinsically linked elements (Alexander-Floyd and Simien 2006). Seemingly, womanism purports a racial framing of black gendered strugglers, whereas black feminism constitutes a national alignment to gendered black politics (Alexander-Floyd and Simien 2006).

There are differences between Black Feminism and Womansim. Black Feminism is still a derivative of Feminism, which is female- centered.

Womansism as defined earlier is centered around the natural order of life, family and a complimentary relationship with men and women. It is all inclusive and universal Black Feminism tackles the social, political, and educational struggle of African-American women in the United States but it does not address all the global issues that women in the African Diaspora are dealing with. Infact, there are many elements in Black Feminism that are many elements in Black Feminism that are considered womanists values, such as the recognition of African roots, the pattern of defining a Black

women's stand point and the struggle to rectify sexist attitudes. Africana Womanism

Africana Womanism can be viewed as “ an ideology” created and designed for all women of African descent. It is grounded in African culture, and is therefore, it necessarily focuses on the unique experiences, struggles, needs and desires of Africana Women. It critically addresses the dynamics of the conflict between the main stream feminist, the Black Feminist, the African Feminist and the Africana Womanist. The conclusion is that Africana Womanism and its agenda are unique and separate from both white feminism and Black Feminism, and more over, to the extent of naming in particular, Africana Womanisms differs from Africana feminism”(Alexander-Floyd & Simien 2006: 67). Critiques of Womenism

Patricia Hill Collins addresses the issue of how focussing on the naming of particular struggle can become a “ political distraction” from gendered racist and sexist oppression that Black Women face (Alexander-Floyd & Simien 2006) Collins contends that womanism “ exaggerates out group differences and minimises in group variation by assembling a stable and homogenous racial group identity” (Alexander-Floyd & Simien 2006) potentially, this comes with the ubiquitous essentialisation of Black Women struggles, which denies varied experience of Black Women who align with various social-culture heritages.