THE F-WORD:

Feminist (Non-)Identification among Undergraduate Women

A Thesis Submitted to the
Departments of Sociology and Women's Studies
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ABSTRACT

A surprisingly low percentage of young women classify themselves as feminists given their overwhelming support for gender equality. I use survey data and focus groups to investigate potential explanations of this trend among undergraduate women. I explore how family background, life experiences and personal beliefs are associated with self-labeling as a feminist (or not). I also examine how the personalization of gender discrimination and gender inequality influences feminist identification. I find that undergraduate women do not view social hierarchies in gendered terms nor do they see gender discrimination as personally affecting their lives. They also tend to reject the feminist label despite adhering to the ideals that mobilize the feminist movement. Finally, women who self-identify as feminists view society in very different ways than those who don't.

Keywords: college, feminism, gender discrimination, identity, women

FEMINISM AND FEMINIST IDENTIFICATION: AN INTRODUCTION

Feminism of the late 19th and early 20th century is viewed today as a powerful social movement. However feminism in contemporary society is often narrowly defined and feminists are frequently depicted in negative ways. In fact, the media has identified a feminist backlash that has arisen due to an overt rejection of feminism and antifeminist attitudes coinciding with an era of postfeminism that began in the late 1980s (Faludi 1991; Hall and Rodriguez 2003). One of the most striking examples of this shift is how few women associate themselves within the feminist movement, and specialized polls and nationalized survey results show that only a quarter to a third of women self-identify as feminists despite strong support for gender equality and women's rights (Hall et al. 2003; Huddy, Neely, and Lafay 2000; Schnittker, Freese, and Powell 2003). Table 1.1 presents the General Social Survey's (GSS) feminist measures[1] by generation. I employed the methodology used by Schnittker et al. (2003) to establish generational cohorts, dividing the sample by those who were born before the second wave of feminism, those who were young adults during the second wave of feminism (birth years 1936-1955), and those who were born after the second wave of feminism. Although the GSS surveyed both men and women, only women are represented in the table below. Table 1.1 illustrates the dearth of feminist identification on a national scale, where only approximately 29% of women self-label as feminists. While the youngest generation of women are the strongest supporters of women's rights and believe in egalitarian gender roles more strongly than do women of older generations, they self-identify at lower rates, and only 25% of those who fall into the youngest

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[1] The GSS has tracked the opinions of Americans over the last four decades, however the GSS Gender Module of 1996 was the only time respondents were asked about feminist self-identification.

generational cohort classify themselves as feminists (as compared to approximately 33% and 30% of those in the older generational cohorts).

Table 1.1 Feminist Measures by Generation, *General Social Survey 1996*

Generation	Feminist Identification		Importance of Women's Rights		Gender Role Ideologies: men in the workforce and women at home	
	Yes	No	Important	Not Important	Agree	Disagree
Ages 18-40…........	80 25.0%	240 75.0%	237 71.0%	97 29.0%	128 23.4%	420 76.6%
Ages 40-60……....	76 32.6%	157 67.4%	157 65.7%	82 34.3%	130 33.9%	253 66.1%
Ages 60 and older…………….	34 30.4%	78 69.6%	69 59.0%	48 41.0%	105 58.7%	74 41.3%
Total…………….	190 28.6%	475 71.4%	463 67.1%	227 32.9%	363 32.7%	747 67.3%

So what happened? Do younger women not believe the issues of feminism are still salient today? Do they believe in the foundational ideals of feminism (e.g., gender equality) but reject the label? Is the decline in feminist identification a by-product of decreases in women's participation in social movements more generally (cf. Putnam 1995)? In this study I use a mixed-methods approach to examine why young (college-aged) women do or do not identity as feminists and determine what experiential and socio-demographic factors are associated with feminist identification. Moving beyond the characteristic demographic predictors of feminism, I also delve into how perceptions of discrimination and a social-structural analysis or individualistic beliefs have a bearing upon one's view of feminism and the feminist movement as a vehicle for social change. To explore whether feminist identification matters in terms of women's daily lives, I also investigate how feminist discourses are related to gendered beliefs and gendered day-to-day behaviors.

In the section that follows, I discuss the evolution of the feminist movement in the United States over the past century in order to better contextualize feminist identification among undergraduate women today.

WHAT IS FEMINISM?

The history of the feminist movement in the United States has been divided into three waves. The first wave of the feminist movement dealt primarily with the issue of women's suffrage, referring to the time period beginning in the 19th century and ending with the ratification of the 19th Amendment in 1920. The second wave of the feminist movement refers to the time period lasting from the 1960s through the1980s, which was primarily concerned with establishing protective laws to explicitly support women. The feminist movement during this era produced many tangible results including the enactment of Title IX (requiring gender equity in every educational program receiving federal funding), the congressional approval of the Equal Rights Act and its ratification in 30 states (attempting to guarantee equal rights by sex under constitutional law), and the passage of Roe v. Wade (securing reproductive rights for women). The third wave of the feminist movement beginning in the1990s and continuing through today has been defined by its efforts to include the concerns of women of color, sexual minorities, and other women with multiple marginalized identities within mainstream feminism.

Feminism is centrally concerned with the issue of gender equality and can be defined as the belief advocating for social, political, economic and all other rights of women to be equal to those of men. Despite this simplistic rendering, there is real ambiguity regarding what feminism means in practice (Aronson 2003). There are many strands of feminism and the term "feminist"

is multifaceted, holding different meanings for different people based on social and historical context. A number of studies have found that undergraduate women espouse multiple definitions of what a "feminist" is, ranging from a person who supports gender equity and actively works to promote equality in society to a person who believes that women should be superior to men, burns bras, is a lesbian, and rejects traditional gender roles (Houvouras and Carter 2008). This incertitude about what feminism means parallels the proliferation of strands of the feminist movement in the United States today, so it is not surprising that feminism is sometimes a source of confusion. The implications of this for participation in women-oriented movements, however, remains an area for further investigation.

THE CAUSES AND CONSEQUENCES OF FEMINIST IDENTIFICATION

Why should we care about feminist self-labeling? Figure 1.1 presents a conceptual framework that shows both the determents of feminist identification (according to the literature) and also lays out the potential broader social consequences of a decline in feminist identification. The solid arrows represent directional relationships, where dashed arrows indicate indirect relationships, and the plus and minus signs indicate whether each relationship is (or is hypothesized to be) positively or negatively correlated.

Figure 1.1 Conceptual Framework
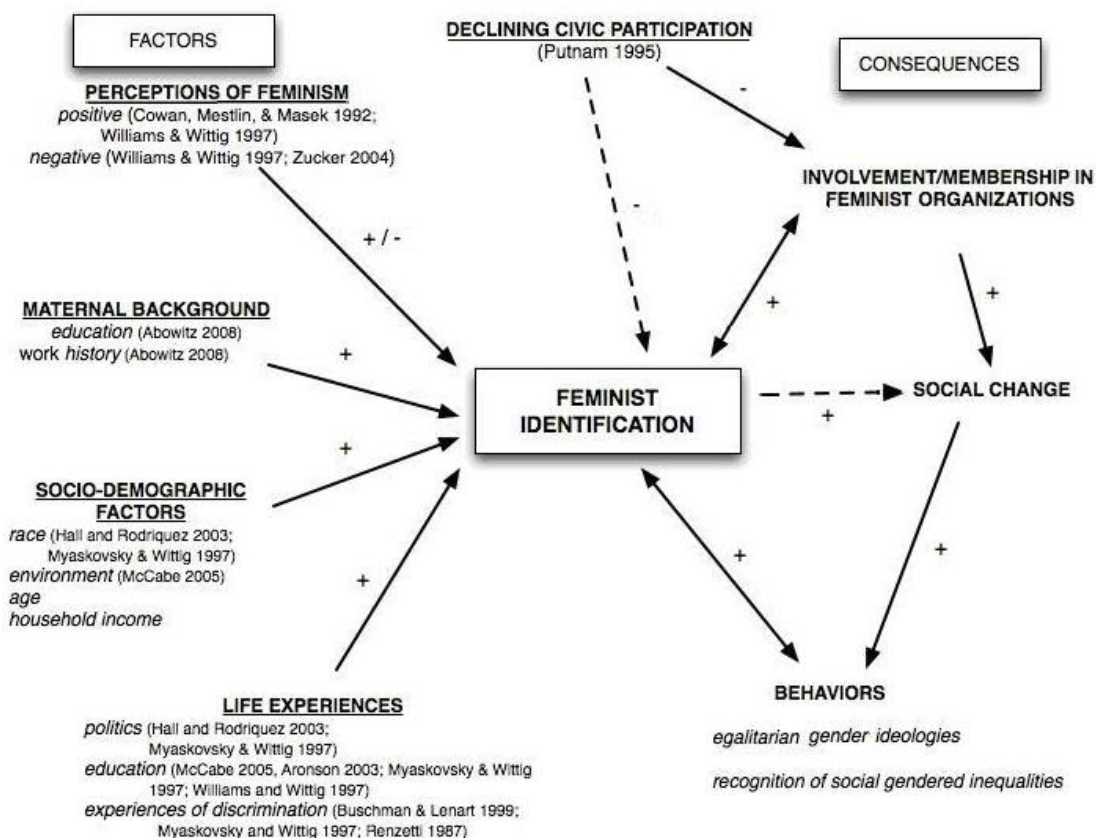
Based on a review of the available literature, I identify life experiences, socio-demographic factors, maternal background, perceptions of feminism, declining civic participation, and certain behaviors as predictive of feminist identification, all of which will be discussed in greater detail in the next section. Whereas life experiences (operationalized in my work as political orientation, education and experiences of discrimination), socio-demographic factors (race, environment, age and household income) and maternal background (educational attainment and work history) are all positively correlated with feminist identification, perceptions of feminism are either positively or negatively correlated (depending on the nature of one's feminist beliefs). Putnam (1995) asserts that declining civic participation in general negatively influences involvement and membership in feminist organizations (for example: NOW, the largest organization of feminist activists in the United States; Emily's List, supporting pro-choice

democratic women running for congress; and Planned Parenthood, the nation's leading sexual and reproductive health care provider). Moreover, participating in a feminist organization as a member is related to feminist identification, however the directional relationship here is unclear; it is possible that self-labeling as a feminist may lead to involvement in feminist organizations, or self-labeling may in fact be an artifact of membership in a feminist organization. Thus, this pattern of declining civic participation in the United States has an additional potential indirect, negative effect on feminist identification as well. Certain behaviors, such as egalitarian gender ideologies and the recognition of social gender inequalities, may also be predictive of feminist identification; however it is difficult to speculate on the potential causal forces at work. For example, feminists may be more likely to recognize patterns of gender discrimination, or perhaps women who view personal experiences of differential treatment as discrimination may be more likely to self-identify as feminist, as a social-structural understanding may be related to feminist identification.

My interest in feminist identification is primarily motivated by the potential consequences of self-labeling. As feminist organizations inherently work towards social change, and due to the relationship between the feminist movement and feminist identification, the process of self-identification, or the label of "feminist" in itself, could be related to social action. When looking to feminism and feminist organizations, no other social movement of the 1960s or later has produced the rich variety of organizations that the feminist movement has (Katzenstein 1987). These feminist organizations have played a vital role in the success of the feminist movement within the United States and are key to understanding and perpetuating the development and spread of feminism as an instrument of personal and collective change (Martin

1990). Feminist organizations are broad in scope and influence.[2] As the feminist movement is reliant upon younger generations to continue the movement's progress now and into the future, there are several potential consequences for this social movement as well as society at large resulting from a lack of feminist identification. Feminism in conjunction with feminist organizations challenge the status quo and inherently work towards change, impacting our legal realities and social climate through political action. Feminist organizations also take a stand for marginalized people and women's rights nationally and abroad. Thus, a lack of feminist identification has the potential to influence not only the feminist movement, but broader social processes as well.

LITERATURE REVIEW

In this next section, I will discuss the relevant literature that touches on feminism and feminist identification. The topic of feminism and patterns of self-labeling has caught the attention of many academics and scholars, and there is a rather large body of work regarding feminist identification among undergraduate women, especially over the past two decades.

The Gender Hierarchy

Over the past 100 years, gender relations have drastically shifted in the United States as evidenced by the greater inclusion of women in the workplace and the establishment of laws explicitly benefiting and protecting women (e.g., the Violence Against Women Act). However, a gender hierarchy continues to persist in our society to this day. Ridgeway (1997: 218) defines a

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[2] Martin (1990:184) defines an organization as feminist if it falls into one or more of the following categories: has a feminist ideology; has feminist guiding values; has feminist goals; or produces feminist outcomes.

gender hierarchy as a system that advantages men over women in terms of material resources, power, status, and authority: this system is most noticeable within employment (wage inequality and sex segregated jobs) and the household division of labor. Although the gender wag gap is decreasing, the ratio of women's to men's annual earnings remains at 77.1 (Hartmann, Hegewisch Liepmann and Willams 2010). While the reasons for this persistent gap are not entirely clear, there is evidence that employment discrimination is still affecting women's participation in the labor force. For example, Correll, Benard and Paik (2007) found that employers discriminate against women who are mothers; mothers suffer a substantial wage penalty and are penalized for perceived competence, however men do not receive the same discriminatory treatment, and often even benefit from being a parent. Women are also more likely to be exhausted or sleepless, and Lipman (2009) depicts "spent women" as making up the bulk of the U.S. exhaustion epidemic. Additionally, women in the United States (and globally) are more likely than men to live in poverty and be victims of sexual assault (U.S. Census Bureau 2003). The United States is also the only developed nation that has not ratified CEDAW (the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women), an international convention adopted by the United Nations General Assembly. Thus, despite expanded opportunities for women, gender continues to be a salient force that structures our society and our social understandings.

Support of Feminism and Feminist Identification

Young women are among the feminist movement's strongest supporters, endorse feminist goals at rates similar to women in the 1970s, and hold more favorable opinions of the feminist movement than do older women (Hall et al. 2003; Huddy et al. 2000; Zucker and Stewart 2007).

However, there is a gap between young women's personal support for feminist goals and their willingness to identify as a feminist (Abowitz 2008; Aronson 2003; Cowan, Mestlin, and Masek 1992; Nelson, Liss, Erchull, Hurt, Ramsey, Turner, and Haines 2008; Renzetti 1987; Rich 2005; Williams and Wittig 1997). Perceptions of feminism affect one's willingness to self-label, and negative perceptions may leave individuals unwilling to describe themselves as feminists even though they support the social justice goals inherent in feminism as an ideology (Williams et al.1997; Zucker 2004). Responses to the word "feminist" itself are illuminating: for example, Huddy et al. (2000) found that there is more support for the women's movement than there is for feminism; each term represents different cognitive constructs. It may be easier to care about a cause than it is to accept a label, especially if that label carries negative connotations (Abowitz 2008). Failing to self-identify as a feminist should not necessarily be interpreted as a rejection of the ideals of the movement, rather it is possible that young women simply reject the label.

Quinn and Radtke (2006) found that female undergraduate students resolved this dilemma by continually redefining what it means to be a feminist during a conversation. Zucker (2004) modified her analysis by creating an additional category of "liberal egalitarian" to accommodate for those who endorse feminist beliefs but reject the feminist label. She found that the behaviors of the women categorized as liberal egalitarians, measured in terms of political participation on behalf of feminist-activist causes, were indistinguishable from the behaviors of non-feminists despite having higher levels of feminist consciousness (Zucker 2004). Thus self-identifying as a feminist might be related to activism and other social participatory behaviors.

Predictors of Feminist Identification

Experiences of Gender Discrimination

Feminist self-identification has been shown to be positively correlated with personal experiences of gender discrimination. However, the extent to which this is a galvanizing force is unclear. Some studies support the notion that gender discrimination, by raising one's awareness of gender inequality, may serve as a catalyst for feminist identification, while other studies suggest that additional factors, such as support of feminist goals and a positive evaluation of feminists, outweigh the effect of individual recognition of gender discrimination in forming a feminist identity (Bushcman and Lenart 1996; Cowan et al. 1992; Myaskovsky and Wittig 1997; Renzetti 1987; Williams et al. 1997). As there are many intervening social mechanisms that condition our world view (i.e., gender, race/ethnicity, social class), it is difficult to disentangle the importance of one experience relative to others. However, if one believes that discrimination does have implications for feminist identification, one could argue that the actual reduction of discrimination due to the successes of the feminist movement has ironically resulted in a decrease of feminist self-identification over time. However, this speculation is contradicted by various studies that show that the recognition of gender-based obstacles is still prevalent in society today (Aronson 2003).

In order for gender discrimination to lead to increases in feminist self-identification, instances of discrimination must be acknowledged and accepted by the individual. Crosby (1984) found that women appeared to believe (incorrectly) that they personally avoided sex discrimination while recognizing that women are generally disadvantaged. This may be attributed to the emotional barriers present in an acknowledgment of personal discrimination, cognitive distortions that arise through efforts to believe in a just world (aka denial), or a belief

that group disparities emerge from the inadequacies of individuals (and have thus developed legitimately) (Crosby 1984; Gurin 1986). All of these responses may be viewed as consequences of oppression, where disempowered group members internalize and personalize the dominant group's negative image of them (Crosby 1984). Therefore, collective action is much more likely to occur when individuals' perceptions of *group deprivation* are most salient, rather than perceptions of *personal discrimination* [emphasis added] (Foster 1999; Zucker 2004).

Worldview

An additional predictor of self-labeling as a feminist may be whether individuals see their outcomes as individually or collectively determined (Rich 2005). Feminism represents a view in which problems and solutions are viewed as social, not personal. To acknowledge oneself as a feminist suggests that the problems and difficulties of women are attributed to external causes, such as institutional and societal sexism, and hence are to be solved by collective (rather than individual) action. The American emphasis on personal choice may prevent young women from embracing feminist cultural critiques and activism. Young women are, therefore, disinclined to associate with a group that acknowledges their oppression in society as it would ultimately undermine the carefully constructed sense of agency that is integral to their identity narratives (Rich 2005). This is not only restricted to gender, as we can see from MacLeod's (1987) analysis of social background and its impact on the American promise of equal opportunities. In fact, an acknowledgement of structural causes of group inequalities is rare (Lopez, Gurin and Nagda 1998). Individualism can act as an empowering force, but it can also obscure structured and socio-cultural inequalities, focusing instead on individual responses to discrimination (Aronson 2003).

<u>Socio-demographics</u>

Access to feminism is also limited by a woman's social position; therefore race/ethnicity, family background, exposure to feminism, and all other axes of power that cut through women's lives have a bearing on feminist identification. With regards to race/ethnicity, the pathways to self-identification within feminism may be different for women of color than for white women. American feminism has historically been the domain of white women, and Myaskovsky et al. (1997) found that a greater proportion of white college women call themselves feminist publicly as compared to women of color (33% of white women as compared to 8% of African-American women, 12% of Asian women, and 19% of Latina women). However, McCabe (2005) found that race/ethnicity is not an important factor in feminist self-identification, and Hall et al. (2003) found that more African Americans support the feminist movement than any other racial group (73% as compared to 66% of white women).

The factors which promote a feminist identity are much more varied and complex than those which determine a rejection of the label (Abowitz 2008). In fact, attitudes toward feminism may be shaped not only by one's racial background, but also by family background. Some women may have greater support for the development of feminist identities than others. For example, Abowitz (2008) found that higher maternal education and maternal labor force participation are positively related to feminist self-identification among undergraduates, and McCabe (2005) found that individuals living in rural or medium sized areas are less likely to self-identify as feminists than those residing in urban areas. However, Cowen et al. (1992) found that income was not an important factor in self-labeling as a feminist. Politics are also predictive of feminist self-identification, and Democratic and liberal political ideologies are associated with feminist self-identification (McCabe 2005; Cowen et al. 1992).

Exposure to feminists and feminist ideas in college can also promote self-identification (Myaskovsky et al. 1997; Williams et al. 1997). McCabe (2005) found that feminist identification increases with education, and Aronson (2003) found that feminists are more likely to be college educated and have taken Women's Studies courses. However, the causal chain of events here is not clear. Exposure to feminism may be a result of feminist beliefs rather than the cause of these beliefs: self-labeling as a feminist may make one more likely to enroll in Women's Studies courses, or perhaps enrollment in Women's Studies courses may make one more likely to identify as a feminist.

Coda: Declining Rates of Social Participation

It is worth mentioning the larger historical context of the changing roles of women and civic engagement in the United States. Rates of feminist identification are a part of a more secular decline in American civil society over the past several decades. One of the most significant changes in the 20th century has been the movement of women into the labor force, and according to Putnam (1995) this may partially explain the decline in women's civic participation which could in turn lead to a decline in women's identification with the feminist movement.

SUMMARY

<u>What We Know</u>

The existing literature has established a paradox surrounding feminist identification, where young women support gender equality and feminist goals while simultaneously resisting a feminist label. Several demographic characteristics predictive of feminist self-identification

(race/ethnicity, political identity, maternal background, education) have also been recognized.

Enrollment in Women's Studies courses and experiences of discrimination may also influence

feminist identification, but the causal relationship remains unclear. However, these recorded

relationships between socio-demographic characteristics, life experiences and feminist identity

are not consistent across studies. Individualistic forces may additionally work to deter

understanding the social-structural forces at play in influencing personal problems, and may also

work to inhibit the applicability of the feminist label.

Digging Deeper

I replicate survey research from past works and merge my results with a focus group

analysis in an attempt to move beyond the findings that the literature has achieved to present a

more nuanced view of how and why feminist identities are formed. By looking at various

demographic characteristics, I hope to illuminate their relationship to feminist identification

while working to clarify the existing discrepancies. This thesis also delves deeper into the

feminist paradox by looking to the meanings young women ascribe to feminists and feminism in

an attempt to move beyond simply discerning who does or does not identify as a feminist; I hope

to gain a better understanding of the ways in which young women construct feminists and

feminism, as these perceptions may also be relevant in producing or refuting a feminist label.

Finally, I hope to explore how individualism (rather than structural views of change) may

prevent feminism from catalyzing young women's lived experiences into social action.

In the chapter that follows, I will introduce my survey instrument and methodology,

present my survey data, and analyze my results.

AN EXPLORATION OF FEMINIST IDENTIFICATION: SURVEY RESEARCH, DATA AND TRENDS

The goal of my survey research is to document the relationships among socio-demographic characteristics and the beliefs of women and their likelihood to identify as a feminist. I administered my survey instrument to undergraduate women at a large, Midwestern University in various lecture halls and discussion classroom settings. I collected survey data in two waves from October 2008 through November 2009, and my survey instrument can be found in Appendix A. My data show: (1) a discrepancy between undergraduate women's willingness to identify as a feminist and their personal support for feminism and feminist goals; and (2) that respondents identified specific instances of gender inequality but were unwilling or unable to view gender discrimination as personally applicable, and failed to make connections between gendered social structures and their lived realities. These findings are broadly consistent with past studies, but point to one's worldview as a potentially unexplored factor in explaining low rates of feminist identification. In order to determine a sound explanation as to why undergraduate women do or do not identify as feminists, I undertake an additional research component to be discussed in the next chapter. Next, I describe my survey methods and discuss the key results that arose from my data analysis.

METHODOLOGY

Sampling Framework

I do not aim to have a random sample of the female undergraduate population at the large, Midwestern University where my research is situated. Instead, I strategically chose classes to sample by using a loosely stratified framework (cf. Glaser and Strauss 1967). By doing this, I

attempt to get a representative sample by age (through surveying both upper and lower level courses) and field (by administering my survey to students in courses in the departments of American Culture, Biology, Program in the Environment, Sociology, Statistics, and Women's Studies), thus striving to achieve a diverse sample of undergraduate women. After disregarding the surveys of the male respondents, my sample population consists of 186 undergraduate women. Exposure plays an important facilitative role in developing a feminist social identity (Myaskovsky et al.1997; Williams et al.1997). Thus, this study approached a wide range of academic disciplines, including upper level Social Sciences and Women's Studies courses where students will have most likely been exposed to the institutional legitimization of feminist ideas, in order to achieve a sample population composed of both women who do and do not identify as feminists (Aronson 2003). My goal is to explore the potential mechanisms that foster or discourage the development of a feminist identity to better understand the factors that determine feminist identification, rather than to make general summary statements on the undergraduate female population as a whole.

Potential Sample Bias

In collecting my surveys I received only those that were completely or partially filled out, leaving me with the impression that I achieved an overall response rate of 100%. It is difficult to compute my actual survey response rate due to the fact that it is impossible to know whether all potential respondents filled out his or her surveys (perhaps some failed to fill out their surveys and did not hand their blank survey instrument back to me). However, as I approached lecture halls and discussion classroom settings at the beginning of their session the large majority of the time, I believe that my overall response rate should remain high due to personal observations and

experiences that students will do just about anything to delay the start of their inevitable class session, including filling out my 5-10 minute survey.

It is also possible that there are certain types of undergraduate women missing from my data: women who were late or simply did not come to class; women who were unprepared for class or uninterested, and used the time given to fill out my survey to work on other things; or women that were turned off by the topic of feminism or simply did not care enough to complete my survey. However, I do not think that the variable relationships I observe in my data would change were these women included.

Formulation of Survey Instrument

Feminist identity is a multidimensional concept that encompasses feminist self-identification, feminist attitudes, and support of feminist goals. My question design and survey structure explore the mechanisms that give rise to identification with the feminist movement for undergraduate women. My survey is comprised of several sections intending to measure: feminist self-identification,[3] socio-demographic variables, exposure to feminism, mother's background, gender role ideologies, feminist attitudes, gender discrimination, and a belief in collective action or individual solutions to solve problems.

I explore the pathways to self-identification within the feminist movement for white women as well as for women of color. According to the literature, attitudes toward feminism are shaped not only by racial background, but also by class background and life experiences

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[3] The questions measuring feminist self-identification were originally placed last in the survey pretest. However, by posing said questions to respondents at the end of the survey, the accuracy of their responses could potentially be skewed through exposure to questions about feminist attitudes and gender discrimination earlier in the survey. Thus, after feedback and consideration, these questions were moved to the beginning of the survey.

(Aronson 2003). Therefore I include questions measuring socioeconomic status, educational experiences and mother's background.[4] Political ideology may also be predictive of feminist self-identification, where a Democratic and liberal political ideology is associated with feminist self-identification (McCabe 2005). Thus I also include a question dealing with political identification.

I measure exposure to gender discrimination using the open ended format suggested by Aronson (2003). She found that respondents were hesitant to label their own experiences as discrimination, and only after the telling of their stories did they realize that gender inequalities were a part of their lived realities. I asked "Do you believe that women are equal to men in our society?" and "Have you ever been discriminated against due to your gender?" I coded these open-ended questions in terms of both answer and content; a full explanation of my coding scheme can be found in Appendix B. Finally, feminism represents a collective social movement in which solutions are viewed as societal, not personal. Individualism places emphasis on personal choice, and may therefore prevent young women from embracing feminism. Therefore, I included a question measuring a belief in collective action or individual responsibility.

Features of the sample

<u>Underrepresentation of Women of Color</u>

Due to the small sample size, it was necessary for my analysis to collapse the multiple racial and ethnic categories of the respondents into two: "white women" and "women of color."

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[4] The question regarding household income resulted in the largest amounts of refusals overall. Despite this setback, the response rate of this question remained high, at about 94%.

However, by lumping together various racial and ethnic categories,[5] the different realities of oppression that exist for each group is effectively rendered invisible. There is room here for future research to deconstruct the binary classification system used by this study in order to attempt to discern the subtleties that exist for different racial and ethnic groupings. In the future, it might also be necessary to oversample minority populations to make better comparisons and to obtain a more representative sample overall.

Exclusion of Men

Although my research was structured around college women, I acknowledge that the success of the feminist movement cannot rely on women alone; rather it needs to broadly encompass all people. The term "feminist" holds different meanings for women than for men, and to this day feminism continues to be coded as female, resulting in the hesitancy of males to accept the feminist label (McCabe 2005; Toller, Suter, and Trautman 2004). To effectively restructure the feminist movement, grass roots organizing and mobilizing campaigns need to increase support among men by emphasizing definitions that do not view support for feminism as inconsistent with a masculine identity.

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[5] Caucasian, African American, Asian or Pacific Islander, Spanish/Hispanic/Latino, and Other are the categories listed on my survey instrument.

RESULTS

General Characteristics of the Surveyed Population

Table 2.1 presents summary statistics for the surveyed population. This table shows both the statistics for the overall population as well as by levels of feminist identification (non-feminists, feminists, and those who are unsure or neutral about their feminist status).[6]

Looking at the far right column, which lists the marginal characteristics of the surveyed population, we can see that the undergraduate women sampled in this study are mostly white (70%). This is in line with the larger make up of the undergraduate female population as a whole, where in 2009 around 61% of enrolled undergraduate women were white (The University of Michigan 2009). The women have had an average of 2.3 years of college, and the average age of the sample is 19.4 years old, with respondents ranging from 18-22 years of age. Thirty-five percent are freshman, 22% are sophomores, 20% are juniors, and 23% are seniors. Most respondents have had discussions about the political, legal, or social challenges facing women (around 84% of the sample) and approximately 40% of the sampled population has been enrolled in a Women's Studies course. When looking to maternal background, the respondents' mothers have completed 16.6 years of schooling on average (roughly the time it takes to receive a four-year college degree), and the overwhelming majority of the respondents' mothers have worked (with only about 16% not working for pay while the respondent was in grades K-12). The average household income is $83,865, and the majority of the respondents came from suburban environments (about 77%) and self-identified as Democrats (about 64%).

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[6] Pairwise t-tests identify statistically significant demographic differences among women who do identify as feminists, those who do not, and those who are unsure or neutral.

Table 2.1 Descriptive Statistics by Feminist Identification, *Feminist Identification among Undergraduate Women Survey 2008-2009*

	Feminist Identification			
	No	Unsure/Neutral	Yes	Total
Opinion of the Feminist Movement (% in favor)………………………………..	25.0	68.1[***]/[+++]	94.4[***]	68.1
Belief that Feminism is Necessary (% yes)……………………………..........	27.3	72.1[***]/[+++]	94.3[***]	70.0
Age (years)…………………………………	18.8	19.1[+++]	20.0[***]	19.4
Undergraduate Year………………….......	1.8	2.0[+++]	2.9[***]	2.3
Participation in a Discussion about the Challenges facing Women (% yes)……....	79.6	79.7[++]	91.7[*]	84.4
Enrollment in a Women's Studies Course (% yes)……………………...................	20.5	23.2[+++]	69.4[***]	40.3
Mother's Work Status (% full or part time)………………..........	81.8	84.1	85.9	84.3
Mother's Educational Background (years in school)………………………………	16.4	16.2[+]	17.0	16.6
Household Income (dollars)…………..........	90,250	84,531	79,311[**]	83,865
Environment				
Urban (% yes)……………………………	11.4	14.7	20.0	15.9
Suburban (% yes)………………………	79.5	77.9	74.3	77.1
Rural (% yes)…………………...........	9.1	7.4	5.7	7.1
Race/Ethnicity (% women of color)……....	25.0	34.8	28.6	30.1
Political Orientation				
Democrat (% yes)……………………	51.2	61.5	73.6[**]	64.1
Republican (% yes)…………………	32.6	15.4[**]	8.3[***]	16.6
Other (% yes)………………………..	16.3	23.1	18.1	19.3
Belief in Equal Career Opportunities (% agree)…………………………………..	100.0	100.0[+]	95.8	98.4
Belief that Women Should be Able to Combine Work and Family (% agree)......	72.1	75.4	69.4	72.4
Belief in Sexual Autonomy for Women (% agree)………………………………….	90.7	94.1[++]	100.0[***]	95.6
Belief in Male Participation in Work and Child Rearing (% agree)…………………	81.4	92.8[*]	95.8[**]	91.4
Individual Responsibility (% agree)……....	25.0	8.7[**]	4.2[***]	10.8
Collective Action (% agree)...…………....	52.3	78.3[***]/[++]	92.9[***]	77.7
N=………………………………………....	44	69	72	185
	23.8%	37.3%	38.9%	100%

Mean difference between no/others based on pairwise t-tests (***=significant at 0.01, **=significant at 0.05, *=significant at 0.1)
Mean difference between yes/others based on pairwise t-tests (+++=significant at 0.01, ++=significant at 0.05, +=significant at 0.1)

Moving onto feminist beliefs, about 68% of women have a positive opinion of the feminist movement and 70% believe that feminism is necessary in society today. The large majority of the undergraduate women sampled adhere to some key values of the feminist movement, and approximately 98% of respondents are in favor of equal career opportunities for women and men, about 96% are in favor of women's sexual autonomy, and around 91% are in favor of men taking a role in child rearing.[7]

Attitudes about Feminism

We now turn to differences among those who identify as feminists, those who do not, and those who are unsure or neutral. Looking at the 1st two rows of Table 2.1, we see that around 94% of those who self-label as feminists are in favor of the feminist movement and about 94% of those who self-label believe that feminism is necessary in our society today. This is striking in contrast to the women who do not consider themselves feminists, among whom only 25% are in favor of the feminist movement and about 27% believe that feminism is necessary in our society today. It stands to reason that if young women are unable to see feminism as applicable in their lives they will be less willing to identify as a feminist (Rudolfsdottir and Jolliffe 2008).

The respondents who are unsure or neutral about whether or not they identify as feminists fall in the middle when looking to opinions of the feminist movement (68% are in favor) and a belief that feminism is necessary in society today (72% agree). This "movable middle" is not only noticeable within the feminist discourse, but can also be found in other areas as well, from

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[7] An additional question asking about women combing work with family received only a 72% agreement rate, approximately. I am fairly certain that this is the result of faulty question wording rather than a lack of support for women in the workplace, as respondents noted having a problem with "women *should* combine work with family" (emphasis added) implying a mandate for all women to combine their personal and professional lives, where the intended implication of the question's meaning was empowerment and individual choice.

voting records on LGBTQ issues to discussions on health care reform (Hogarth 2010). These feelings of uncertainty in conjecture with the positioning of oneself as liberal and egalitarian may result in inactivity in the area of social change (Riley 2001). It is not clear from the survey data why women identify as unsure or neutral in regards to feminism rather simply rejecting this identity completely. This topic will be explored further in my focus group research to be presented in the next chapter.

Socio-demographic Correlates of Feminist Identification

There is a slight positive relationship between maternal background, childhood environment and feminist identification, although these relationships are not statistically significant. While the respondents' mothers have had approximately the same amount of education, there is a statistically significant difference in the respondents' socioeconomic status, as measured by household income; the average household income amongst those who self-label as feminists is $79,311 whereas the average household income amongst those who do not self-label as feminists is $90,250. However as these undergraduate women, on average, came from middle to upper-class family backgrounds, it is impossible to know whether this relationship between socioeconomic status and feminist identification holds true for women living near or below the poverty line.

When looking at age as a factor in self-identification as a feminist, women are more likely to self-label as feminists as they age and this relationship is statistically significant. Self-identification steadily increases over each subsequent age group, and on average those who self-identify as feminists are 20.0 years old, those who do not self-identify as feminists are 18.8 years old, and those who are unsure whether or not they identify with the feminist movement fall in the

middle and are 19.1 years old. This parallels undergraduate year; on average, those who self-identify as feminists have completed 2.9 years of college, those who do not self-identify as feminists have completed 1.8 years of college, and those who are unsure or neutral about whether or not they identify with the feminist movement fall in the middle and have completed 2.0 years of college. The relationship between age, undergraduate year, and self-identification could potentially be due to a growing exposure of feminist thought and enrollment in Women's Studies courses over the undergraduate academic career, at least among members of my sample.

Enrollment in a Women's Studies course increases the likelihood of having a discussion about the challenges facing women today. Ninety-three percent of those enrolled in Women's Studies courses have had such a discussion where only 78% have if they were not enrolled. Although most of the surveyed women have participated in a discussion about the challenges women face in our society today, Women Studies courses may provide a certain framework for undergraduate women to look at their gendered situation within society in a different way than their non-Women Studies peers. Women's Studies enrollment is highly correlated with feminist identification, and this relationship is statistically significant at the 0.01 level: about 70% of those who do identify as feminists have taken a Women's Studies course, whereas only approximately 23% of those who are unsure or neutral about whether or not they identify as feminists and 21% of those who do not identify as feminists have taken a Women's Studies course. However, it is impossible to determine the direction of causation from a cross-sectional survey. If I had administered a longitudinal survey, documenting feminist standpoints before and after enrollment, I would be in a much better position to understand the correlation between Women's Studies enrollment and feminist self-identification; here I can only note an observed pattern.

The fact that fewer women of color are enrolled in Women's Studies courses (only 26% of Women's Studies enrollees were women of color) may help to explain the racial difference in feminist identification. Table 2.1 reveals that only approximately 29% of the self-identified feminists are women of color. However the relationship between race/ethnicity and feminist identification is difficult to discern as women of color make up only 30% of my sample. Therefore, we don't know much about the likelihood of a woman of color self-labeling as a feminist, we only know how many women of color fall into the categories of feminists and non-feminists. Similarly, Democrats make up the majority of my sample at 64%. Thus it may be more illuminating to make comparisons within these groups of race/ethnicity and political ideology.

Table 2.2 Feminist Identification among Selected Demographic Groups, *Feminist Identification among Undergraduate Women Survey 2008-2009*

Feminist Identification	Race/Ethnicity				Political Orientation			
	White	Women of Color	Total		Other	Democrat	Republican	Total
No……………...	33	11	44		7	22	14[+++]	43
	25.8%	20.0%	24.0%		20.0%	19.1%	46.7%	23.9%
Unsure/Neutral...	45	24	69		15	40	10	65
	35.2%	43.6%	37.7%		42.9%	34.8%	33.3%	36.1%
Yes………...........	50	20	70		13[##]	53	6[+++]	72
	39.1%	36.4%	38.3%		37.1%	46.1%	20.0%	40.0%
Total...………...	128	55	183		35	115	30	180
	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%		100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Mean difference between women of color/white women based on pairwise t-tests (***=significant at 0.01,**=significant at 0.05,*=significant at 0.1)
Mean difference between democrat/others based on pairwise t-tests (+++=significant at 0.01, ++=significant at 0.05, +=significant at 0.1)
Mean difference between republican/others based on pairwise t-tests (###=significant at 0.01, ##=significant at 0.05, #=significant at 0.1)

Table 2.2 reports the demographic make up of the sampled undergraduate women by feminist identification percentiled within categories. Looking down the 1st three columns of Table 2.2, we see that white women are most likely to identify as feminists (39% of all white women) and women of color are most likely to be unsure or neutral about whether or not they

identify as feminists (approximately 44% of all women of color). With respect to political ideology, Democrats are most likely to self-identify as feminists (about 46% of all Democrats) and Republicans are most likely to not self-label as feminists (20% of all Republicans), where those with another political mindset are most likely to be unsure or neutral about whether or not they identify as feminists.

An additional predictor of self-labeling as a feminist may be whether individuals see their outcomes as individually or collectively determined. Previous research suggests that young women are disinclined to associate with a group that acknowledges their oppression in society as it would ultimately undermine the carefully constructed sense of agency that is integral to their identity narratives (Rich 2005). Table 2.1 shows that amongst those who identify as feminists, the large majority (approximately 93%) believe that women need to unite and work together to achieve equal political and societal rights. However amongst those who do not identify as feminists, only about 52% believe that women should work together, and a much larger proportion of these women adhered to ideologies of individual responsibility than the women who identified as feminists or those who were unsure or neutral (25% as compared to approximately 4% and 8%, respectively). A strong individualistic worldview may therefore relate to feminist identification independently of the opinions that surround the feminist movement in itself.

The Feminist Paradox

Table 2.1 documents a disconnect between respondents' personal support for feminism and their willingness to identify as a feminist. Where 70% of the undergraduate women sampled believe that feminism is necessary in society today and about 68% are in favor of the feminist

movement, only around 39% self-labeled as feminists. This shows that many individuals refuse to associate themselves as feminists even though they support the ideas inherent in feminism as an ideology. This hesitancy cannot be explained by perceptions of the feminist movement as marginal, irrelevant, or inapplicable in society today. In fact, support for the feminist movement has increased among this age cohort overtime, and young women remain some of the movements' strongest supporters (Huddy et al. 2000; Hall et al. 2003).

Table 2.1 demonstrates that the majority of those who self-label as feminists have a positive opinion of the feminist movement (about 94%). In fact, only 3% of my sample was willing to say that they are against the feminist movement. Similarly, when looking to the relationship between feminist self-identification and the belief that feminism is necessary, an overwhelming majority of those who self-label as feminists believe that feminism is necessary in society today (around 94%). While Table 2.1 describes general features of the sample, it is useful to look more closely at the relationship between feminist beliefs and feminist identification.

Table 2.3 shows opinion of the feminist movement and belief that feminism is necessary by feminist identification. While the women who identify as feminist are more likely to believe feminism is necessary in society today and have strong opinions regarding the feminist movement, when we percentage within categories, Table 2.3 illustrates that only 54% of those who have a positive opinion of the feminist movement and 52% of those women who believe that feminism is necessary in society today self-identify as feminist.

Table 2.3 Opinion of the Feminist Movement and Belief that Feminism is Necessary by Feminist Identification, *Feminist Identification among Undergraduate Women Survey 2008-2009*

Feminist Identification	Opinion of the Feminist Movement				Belief that Feminism is Necessary			
	Against	Neutral	In Favor	Total	No	Neutral/Unsure	Yes	Total
No…………….	5	28[**/+++]	11[***]	44	9	23[*/+++]	12[***]	44
	100.0%	51.9%	8.8%	23.9%	81.8%	52.3%	9.4%	24.2%
Unsure/Neutral..	0	22[+]	47[*]	69	2	17	49	68
	0.0%	40.7%	37.6%	37.5%	18.2%	38.6%	38.6%	37.3%
Yes……………	0	4[+++]	67[**]	71	0	4[+++]	66[***]	70
	0.0%	7.4%	53.6%	38.6%	0.0%	9.1%	52.0%	38.5%
Total…………..	5	54	125	184	11	44	127	182
	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100%	100.0%

Mean difference between against or no/others based on pairwise t-tests (***=significant at 0.01, **=significant at 0.05, *=significant at 0.1)
Mean difference between in favor or yes/others based on pairwise t-tests (+++=significant at 0.01, ++=significant at 0.05, +=significant at 0.1)

Perceptions of Gender Discrimination

Respondents were asked two open-ended questions that attempted to measure instances of discriminatory treatment and their perceptions of gender inequality in our society today.

After coding theses questions, I found that the respondents' gendered understandings of society fell within a wide spectrum. In answering the question "Do you believe that women are equal to men in our society?" about 67% of respondents answered in the negative, stating that they did not believe that men and women are equal in society today (while acknowledging that privileges are improving for women). However, approximately 14% believe that women and men are equal for the most part and around 19% believe that women and men are in fact equal. Among those who believe that gender inequalities persist, three areas emerged in which inequity was expressed: economics, employment, and in society (or through media objectification more specifically).

However, when answering the second of the two questions which asked "Have you ever been discriminated against due to your gender?" about 41% of the respondents did not believe that they had personally experienced gender discrimination and around 13% were unsure or gave a mixed reaction. When personal experiences of gender discrimination were cited, a few key

themes appeared within the categories of societal double standards (e.g., differential gendered curfews), gendered stereotypes and feelings of objectification (about 23%), the workplace (about 6%), athletics and in measures of strength (11%), and in academia, in terms of perceived capabilities and differential treatment (around 19%). Humor was also used to deal with the topic of discrimination, and approximately 5% of the respondents believed that they were discriminated against because of their gender only in jokes. The use of humor as a coping mechanism will be explored further in my next section describing my focus group data and results.

It is possible that the pattern of accepting gender inequality (67%) while viewing gender discrimination as personally inapplicable (54%) is in part due to participant fatigue, as both of these variables are open-ended and were placed at the end of the survey questionnaire. It is also possible that my survey was not long enough or of broad enough scope to adequately measure perceptions of gender discrimination. However, it is also possible that the aversion the respondents exemplified in acknowledging the personal impact that gender inequality holds in their lives is instead due to the tendency to not identify discriminatory acts (regardless of whether or not these respondents have experienced instances of such) as discrimination. This mirrors a study done by Crosby (1984) who found that women deny their own disadvantage but recognize that women are generally disadvantaged. This occurrence could also potentially be caused by the pressure women feel to ignore discrimination when it occurs in order to lessen its negative effects and to avoid feeling like victims.

SUMMARY

As American feminism has historically been the domain of white women, the pathways to self-identification within the feminist movement may differ for white women and women of color. My data show that white women are most likely to identify as feminists, and women of color are most likely to be unsure or neutral about whether or not they identify as feminists.

In regards to political ideology, Democrats are more likely to self-identify as feminists then are Republicans, and those with another political mindset are most likely to be unsure or neutral about whether or not they identify as feminists. I additionally found that the average household income amongst those who self-label as feminists was less than that of those who do not self-label as feminists. Women's Studies enrollment is also highly correlated with feminist identification. However, the relationship between enrollment in Women's Studies courses and feminist identification is unclear, and I was only able to identify an observed pattern.

When looking to the differences amongst those who identify as feminists, those who do not, and those who are unsure or neutral, those who self-labeled as feminists had a higher opinion of the feminist movement and more strongly believed that it was necessary in our society today than those who did not self-label as feminists. This suggests that if young women are unable to see feminism as applicable in their lives they will be less willing to associate themselves as a feminist. Previous research has identified a disconnect between a general *support for feminism* and a willingness to *identify as a feminist* that was mirrored within my cohort of study. Thus, this hesitancy to self-identify as feminists cannot be explained by perceptions of the feminist movement as marginal, irrelevant, or inapplicable in society today.

Feminism represents a collective social movement in which solutions are viewed as societal, not personal. Individualism places emphasis on personal choice, and may therefore

prevent young women from embracing feminism. Amongst those who identify as feminists, the large majority believed that women need to unite and work together to achieve equal political and societal rights. However, those who did not identify as feminists tended to instead favor a more individualistic approach to their problems. This emphasis on individualism has a clear effect on the respondents' perceptions of inequality and gender discrimination: respondents either reported instances of societal gender inequality but failed to see gender discrimination as personally applicable, or failed to identify societal gender inequality at all.

To conclude, the mechanisms that lead to a rejection of the feminist label are not entirely clear. Feminist identity is a multidimensional concept that encompasses feminist self-identification, feminist attitudes, and support of feminist goals. In order to explore why undergraduate women do or do not identify as feminists and to delve more deeply into the disconnect between feminist beliefs and the formation of feminist identities, I have additionally administered a series of focus groups. In the next section, I will report on my focus group data in order to further my exploration of feminist identification.

UNDERGRADUATE WOMEN'S FEMINIST NARRATIVES EXPOSED: FOCUS GROUP ADMINISTRATION

I have found that the undergraduate women in my sample who identify as feminists differed from their non-feminist peers in terms of socio-demographic factors (age, socioeconomic status and race), life experiences (exposure to feminist thought through enrollment in Women's Studies courses and political orientation), and perceptions of the feminist movement (opinion of the movement and a belief that feminism is necessary).

These undergraduate women also subscribed to some of the fundamental tenets of feminism. Ninety-eight percent believe in equal career opportunities for men and women, 96% believe in sexual autonomy and freedom for women, and 91% believe that men should participate in domestic work and child rearing. Although 67% of my surveyed respondents believe that gender inequality persists, only 39% self-identify as feminists, suggesting a disconnect between feminist beliefs and an acceptance of the feminist label. These respondents were also able to recognize instances of differential treatment (i.e., societal double standards, within athletics, in academia and the workplace) but were unable or unwilling to name these experiences as gender discrimination and did not consider feminism as an appropriate vehicle to dissolve the existing gender inequalities that they identified.

I was unable to reveal the meanings behind these patterns through survey research alone, and several new research questions emerged as it was not possible to determine what the term "feminist" actually meant to the surveyed women, why they did not interpret their own experiences of gendered treatment as discriminatory or why they did not view feminism as relevant to their experiences. Thus through focus group administration, I hope to discern how undergraduate women relate to feminist discourses and construct feminism and feminist

identities and to better understand how one's worldview, perceptions of gender inequality and structural gendered barriers influence feminist identity formation.

METHODOLOGY

Framework and Methodology

The explicit use of group interaction inherent in the focus group methodology can provide insight into how people construct meaning while discovering what and why participants think as they do (Krueger and Casey 2000). Focus groups are thus an appropriate strategy to approach the wide range of ideas, feelings, and differences in perspectives when addressing the multifaceted nature of feminism (Gamson 1992). I employ a multiple-category design used by Krueger et al. (2000) to make comparisons in two ways: within categories (e.g., among non-feminists) as well as across categories (e.g., comparing non-feminists to feminists). Gamson (1992) developed a specialized form of the focus group, the "peer group," and I closely follow his methodology in approaching the topic of feminist identification among undergraduate women. Rather than organizing random groupings of people, I arranged my focus groups purposefully around separate campus social organizations to bring together friends and close colleagues, rather than strangers, and I held discussions after each groups' respective weekly meetings in the setting of their choosing to enhance feelings of comfort and ease; the closer a focus group comes to a natural peer group, the taken for granted knowledge and assumptions that a group holds will become more easily visible (Gamson 1992). By providing a space for open dialogue, focus groups also have the potential to uncover factors that influence opinions through the exploration of the range of perceptions, attitudes and beliefs regarding feminism.

Theory and Question Route

I began each focus group by posing a general question about the role of women in society today. Aboud, Burn, and Moyles (2000) stressed that an agreement with gendered stereotypes and a belief that women are socially devalued may translate into a hesitancy in announcing feminist viewpoints. Thus, my aim was to uncover the participants' perceptions about how women are valued relative to men in our society today.

Through my survey research, I found that undergraduate women resisted labeling their life experiences as discrimination and failed to identify a gendered social hierarchy as personally impacting their lives. By creating a forum for respondents to listen and share within the focus group setting, I wanted to get a more accurate picture of undergraduate women's experiences and perceptions of gender discrimination. This setting is conducive for respondents, who are hesitant to label their own experiences as discrimination, to think deeply about gender inequalities and their life experiences.

I asked the focus group participants to discuss their perceptions of feminism and opinions regarding the feminist movement. I was interested in whether only radical aspects were reported as the core beliefs of feminism (rather than the broader perspectives encompassed by feminism), contributing to the rejection of the feminist label that was apparent in my survey research (Liss, Crawford and Popp 2000). Additionally, I hoped to better understand how undergraduates from different backgrounds approach the topic of feminism to learn whether a feminist identity affects one's ability to recognize social barriers and gender inequality. Finally, I am interested in the extent to which undergraduate women have personal or social-structural beliefs and the connection between one's worldview and the formation of a feminist identity.

Sample Recruitment and Sample Characteristics

When researching what campus organizations to recruit, my goal was to sample diverse peer groups in terms of social background and life experiences. I approached four social organizations, and my focus groups presented here are comprised of: 1) sorority women; 2) women from the engineering school; 3) women from a feminist organization; and 4) women from a racialized-religious group. I conducted these focus groups after completing my survey analysis in January and February of 2010, and each session lasted anywhere between 30 minutes to one hour. Each focus group was made up of between 4 and 8 undergraduate women, each given a pseudonym in the write-up to follow, and as an incentive during the recruitment process I offered a $5 Starbuck gift card to all focus group participants.

At the beginning of each focus group, I had the participants fill out the same survey that I administered to gather data for my section on survey research. Table 3.1 presents the aggregate data gathered from the focus group participants. I do not attempt to test for statistical significance of the survey data collected from this small grouping of women nor do I intend to make any inferences to the general population as a whole. Rather, I hope to give an illustration of who these women are and to better situate the responses of my focus group participants comparably to those of my survey respondents.

Table 3.1 Descriptive Statistics by Feminist Identification, *Feminist Identification among Undergraduate Women Survey 2010*

	Feminist Identification			
	No	Unsure/Neutral	Yes	Total
Opinion of the Feminist Movement (% in favor)……………………………....	11.1	60.0	75.0	45.5
Belief that Feminism is Necessary (% yes)……………………………..........	11.1	40.0	100.0	50.0
Age (years)………………………………	20.2	19.8	20.8	20.3
Undergraduate Year………………..........	3.2	2.8	3.5	3.2
Participation in a Discussion about the Challenges facing Women (% yes)……...	55.6	20.0	62.5	50.0
Enrollment in a Women's Studies Course (% yes)……………………...................	33.3	20.0	50.0	36.4
Mother's Work Status (% full or part time)………………..........	88.9	100.0	87.5	90.9
Mother's Educational Background (years of schooling)…………………..…	18	17.6	18.5	18.1
Household Income (dollars)…………......	88,750	88,500	84,063	86,905
Environment				
Urban (% yes)……………………...	0.0	20.0	0.0	4.5
Suburban (% yes)…………………	88.9	60.0	87.5	81.8
Rural (% yes)………………..........	11.1	20.0	12.5	13.6
Race/Ethnicity (% women of color)……..	33.3	0.0	50.0	31.8
Political Orientation				
Democrat (% yes)…………………	55.6	100.0	75.0	72.7
Republican (% yes)………………	22.2	0.0	0.0	9.1
Other (% yes)……………………...	22.2	0.0	25.0	18.2
Belief in Equal Career Opportunities (% agree)………………………………...	100	100	100	100
Belief that Women Should be Able to Combine Work and Family (% agree)......	66.7	40	12.5	40.9
Belief in Sexual Autonomy for Women (% agree)………………………………...	66.7	100	87.5	81.8
Belief in Male Participation in Work and Child Rearing (% agree)…………………	100.0	100.0	87.5	95.5
Individual Responsibility (% agree)……..	55.6	40.0	12.5	36.4
Collective Action (% agree)..…………..	55.6	40.0	100.0	68.2
N=………………………………….........	9 40.9%	5 22.7%	8 36.4%	22 100%

Sample=*Focus Group Participants*

Table 3.1 presents the summary statistics for the focus group participants. Feminist self-identification rates are similar amongst the focus group participants and the larger population of undergraduate women who were surveyed, and approximately 36% of those who participated in a focus group self-identified as a feminist. Looking at the marginal characteristics of the surveyed population listed in the far right column, we can see that the focus group participants are largely white (approximately 68%). This is in line with my sampled population of undergraduate women as well as the larger make up of the undergraduate female population as a whole, as discussed previously in the chapter describing my survey data and results. The differential trends between those who identify as feminists, those who do not, and those who are unsure or neutral present for my survey analysis are mirrored within the aggregate focus group data. The main difference between these two cohorts centers around feminist beliefs, and a much lower percentage of the focus group participants as compared to the surveyed respondents have a positive opinion of the feminist movement and a belief that feminism is necessary today (only 46% and 50% of the focus group participants, respectively). However, the large majority of the undergraduate women who participated in a focus group adhered to some of the key values of the feminist movement, although a belief in collective action as an appropriate strategy to solving the challenges facing women today was less widespread amongst the focus group participants than the surveyed respondents.

KEY THEMES

Each focus group touched on a number of key themes when discussing gender, discrimination and feminism. First, the majority of the women in my focus groups believed that

gender equality has not been completely achieved despite significant social changes that have wrought expanded opportunities for women, and differential gendered treatment (i.e., within an academic setting, cat calls, a motherhood penalty) remains. However, despite recognizing gender as a salient stratifying force in society, these women were unable or unwilling to report gender discrimination in their own lives. In general, the undergraduate woman viewed experiences as personal and idiosyncratic and did consider feminism as an appropriate vehicle to resolve gender inequalities. I have identified individualism as a force clouding structural understandings that inhibit the potential of the feminist movement.

Gender Inequality

Gender Discrimination, Roles and Expectations: Perceptions and Misconceptions

Similar to the undergraduate women in my surveyed population, there was an overall agreement amongst the focus group participants that women and men are not equal in our society today. Alison, a participant in the engineering school, even bluntly remarked that "it's not ever going to be 100% equal" for women and men. Despite shifts in normative gender roles over the past century, our society remains highly stratified by gender. While acknowledging a general rise in available opportunities for women, a participant in the racialized-religious cohort, Aadila, believed that women will continue to be "criticized more along the way then will their male colleagues." Rehana, another woman in this cohort, expanded upon this, stating that: "I really do think that there are different outputs based on your gender. Guys can input less and get more, and girls can input more and get less." Karen, a participant in the sorority cohort, equated the situation of women and status achievement to African Americans in the aftermath of slavery: "even though the law says, you know, in the work place women must be given equal opportunity

just like any person of any different race, it doesn't necessarily mean that they are given that."

There was a general consensus that, despite societal advances, gender equality has not been

completely achieved and differential gendered treatment persists.

An example of differential treatment that these women were most able to clearly

recognize relates to gender roles and expectations that they believed were explicit for women in

our society today: the duel role of employee and mother. Rehana described this double bind,

explaining that:

> "it's a no win situation for women. If you dedicate your time to your family
> …people are like "you didn't even try to put out a career" and criticize you in all
> sorts of ways. If you do the opposite, and you focus on your career…people are
> like "oh she's ice cold, she doesn't want to do x, y, z." If you combine them, then
> people are always criticizing which one you gave more to because there is no
> perfect balance, or at least I haven't seen it."

A participant in the engineering focus group, Lillian, felt similarly and pointed out that "a lot of

us may want to be stay at home moms, but we don't want to be bound to it." These women

foresaw this extreme role constriction as potentially permeating and dictating the direction of

their lives, even though these women do not have families of their own and have yet to fully

enter the workforce. Rachel, a participant in the feminist cohort, further expanded upon this

double bind and identified instances of gendered segregation in the work force, believing that

many jobs are "not designed with women in mind." Many participants felt like women are still

seen in the household, and there was a general agreement that women have obligations (that is,

domestic duties and child rearing) that men simply do not have to deal with. Thus, these focus

group participants saw differential gendered treatment as salient in society and were able to

identify a restrictive double bind that women face tangibly in what is expected of them.

Aadila further reflected on the role of women in society and noted that: "it is harder for

women [than men], of course, to go into a field and work and to take care of kids and to manage

everything that they want, *unless for some reason men should take care of the kids*" [emphasis added]. The belief demonstrated here, that men could not or should not participate in child rearing, was not seen as problematic in itself as evident by Aadila's nonchalant tone. Aadila and the other participants generally assumed that child rearing responsibilities would lie primarily with them as women, despite having potential career aspirations of their own. Although this double bind stemming from what is expected of women differentially when compared to men was seen as problematic, it was very normalized, and there were no suggestions offered to approach this situation on a systematic level to create change in their lives and their forthcoming experiences as employees and mothers.

Beyond societal gender roles that dictate differential behaviors for women and men, the focus group participants identified an additional mental barrier present for women, influencing interpersonal relationships and trust. Rehana saw this effect as even more detrimental than the double bind itself:

> "I think that the worst effect of these things isn't necessarily that I am going to make less money then my male colleagues…I think what is worse is the psychological toil…which really takes it's effect on your personal relationships because it makes a lot of women unable to trust people, especially males."

Despite an awareness and an acceptance of differential gendered treatment influencing gender relations and resulting in gendered expectations and a double bind, perceptions of established protective laws and regulations left many participants feeling personally unbothered by potential instances of gendered discriminatory acts. Taylor, a respondent from the sorority cohort, noted that that "technically [men and women] are equal, legally like on paper" and later gave the following example: "I think that the legal issues for the most part are established to date, you know. Like if I was ever discriminated against in the workplace I could sue, and it would be fine, and I would probably win the case." The widespread belief that there are established protective

laws and social institutions are fair and inherently protective of women's best interests effectively render feminism as an unnecessary tool to combat gender discrimination. Although these women were able to identify the weight gender holds in determining future prospects and what is differentially expected of women when compared to men, these focus group participants were personally unconcerned about being a woman about to enter the work force. Beth, a participant in the engineering focus group, voiced: "I think I'm going to have a good job, I think I'm going to have equal opportunities in the work place, like that's going to be fine." Whereas gender was identified as a stratifying social category more generally, it held little actual meaning for these women in their lives at present. Differential gendered treatment was thus far removed and not seen as personally applicable. This belief may partially explain the pattern of support for the feminist movement more generally but a rejection of the personal feminist label.

Sexual Harassment

Even while the focus group participants were unconcerned about potential experiences of gendered treatment personally affecting them in the workplace, there was a general consensus that sexual harassment was prevalent, especially here on campus. Sexual harassment was viewed along a spectrum, and instances of such could be considered innocent (sexual innuendos) to uncomfortable (groping) and extreme (rape). This ambiguity left acts of sexual harassment difficult to interpret at times. Participants justified and coped with sexual harassment in various ways, relegating meaning as dependent upon the specific situation. Participants also assigned different meanings to acts of sexual harassment dependent upon who perpetrated them ("if it was like this gorgeous guy walking down and he did something then you would be like, oh cool") and if they believed the perpetrator was serious and actually meant to be offensive. Regardless, the

participants unanimously noted that acts of harassment and cat calling left them highly uncomfortable, albeit sometimes flattered. However, notions of individualism removed gender as a salient category in analyzing instances of sexual harassment, and several women asserted that men and women were equally culpable committing these acts.

The women in the feminist focus group disagreed, illustrating feminism's inherent connection to a gendered social analysis. These women asserted that instances of sexual harassment were not about individuals, but rather stem from one's gendered performance. Lindsay, a member of the feminist focus group, expanded upon this line of thought to explain sexual harassment as:

> "a knee-jerk reaction of the system…it is not about me, this is more about our gender identities and enacting this particular script… it's a pattern of gender dynamics, gender power and gendered interactions that don't really have much to do with individual agents in them sometimes."

The women from this focus group were able to identify the patterns of sexual harassment that they experienced as gendered and discriminatory in ways that the women from the other focus groups did not. Furthermore, these women working within a feminist framework identified experiences of sexual harassment as differential gendered treatment and as objectifying, and therefore discriminatory, reducing their agency and resulting in a loss of power.

<u>Gender and Academics</u>

The focus group participants additionally recognized the classroom as another source of gendered differential treatment, and the unique academic experience of the women in the engineering focus group best expresses this. The underrepresentation of women in this department made gender an especially salient category for these women. Catherine shared her views of the derived effects, recalling that "in the beginning you always have to prove yourself,

every single time…you prove yourself once and then they look at you as a person. But before then, they just think they got stuck with a girl." Another participant, Priti, said that she overheard "a group of guys once being like…"our lab group is SO smart it doesn't matter who you get paired with, and there are no girls in it!"" Beyond creating feelings of inadequacy, the disproportionate ratio of men and women in the engineering school is related to the gendered performances of these women as well, and Alison noted that "a lot of guys assign the girl the secretarial work." This atmosphere also lead to an overall diminishment of these women's accomplishments, and Dana noted that: "when I got into the engineering school [my friend]…was like "oh, I heard that all women who apply get accepted into the engineering school."" These women said that they often felt marginalized and put on the defensive from a barrage of remarks equating their successes to a gendered handicap.

The participants in the other focus groups centered their academic and professional experiences around the category of gender as well, despite being in a more gender balanced atmosphere. Aadila commented on the difficulty she felt in expressing her ideas and opinions in the classroom: "if a guy sees something, you kind of go along with it. It's much harder for a girl to bring up something and for that idea to be chosen." Jae, a participant in the feminist cohort, remarked on the representation of women in all males spaces, sharing a frustration that "in predominantly female spaces men are welcome in ways that women are not in predominantly male space." When looking to academic experiences and gendered differential treatment, several coping strategies stood in the way for these women to utilize feminism as an appropriate response. Humor was one such mechanism used to ward off ill feelings in the classroom, and Aadila gave the following example:

"in class one day we were working on this activity where we had to design a hotel... the guys drew the top part of it to be like some sort of a bar that would have a lot of women, and I found it to be really degrading. They were making all sorts of comments and all of a sudden the girls weren't saying anything anymore, they were just like "hahaha" and laughing. It was kind of funny…but it was also really degrading."

As women, these focus group participants felt like it was necessary to sometimes laugh off uncomfortable moments.

Coping Mechanisms

The perpetual presence of differential gendered treatment in the classroom and within society through experiences of sexual harassment lead not only to the adoption of humor as a coping mechanism, but to a sense of defeat amongst the focus group participants as well. Catherine, a participant in the engineering focus group, expressed this when saying: "I can't really change most of it, it's the way that it is, I just have to deal with it. But it is bad…I know I'm up against a losing battle so I just kind of give up in a way." Moving beyond a general acceptance, participants were also able to name some positives of differential gendered treatment as well. Although being a woman was seen as a marginalized identity within the academic setting, many participants believed that this, in fact, worked in their favor. Priti explained that she had "no problem using [gender] to [her] advantage." By viewing differential gendered treatment as individually beneficial or uncomfortable strictly on an individual level, the focus group participants were left unwilling to address the larger social issue of gender stratification. Thus, notions of individualism and the coping strategies of defeatism, acceptance and humor left women unable to view instances of differential treatment or sexual harassment as indicative of some broad structural inequity but rather of individual agents themselves. These women viewed each experience as a separate entity rather than as a part of a collective whole and as a systemic

social problem that needs to be addressed. Thus, although these instances were sometimes seen as problematic, feminism, and for that matter social movements more broadly, were not viewed as an adequate strategy to combat differential gendered treatment.

Individual Responsibility or a Social Problem?

The focus group participants were able to give examples of how gender shapes the social world in which they are situated, however these women shared the general sentiment that gender was not an applicable category in defining their personal lived experiences, instead favoring individualism as an explanation. These women focused on individual responsibility and their personal choices to explain the disconnect between societal gender inequalities and the lack of gendered discrimination in their lives. Ari argued that she "would never put [herself] into certain situations" that would lead to discriminatory treatment. Additionally, when reflecting upon sexual harassment, Karen stressed that: "it's more like I would feel threatened as a human being, like I would just feel that my safety was threatened." Instances of differential or discriminatory treatment were understood only on an individual level, devoid of a gendered social analysis.

The focus group participants were also unable to see connections between media representations of gender and the societal expectations of women. In fact, instances of media objectification were seen as normal and not related to gender at all: "sex sells in the media. So like yeah, there are a lot of commercials with…like essentially naked girls…but then how many times in commercials do you see a guy's body? It's pretty equal." In contrast, Madison, a woman from the feminist cohort, stated that "being a woman on campus, you are sort of always like given things…the media tells us you should look like this…Even if you don't accept stereotypical images as what you should look like, you criticize them. So you are always like on

one side." Madison and the other participants in the feminist focus group made connections between media, other cultural forms and societal gendered expectations, viewing gender inequalities in a very different light than the other cohorts of women.

In general, the women from the feminist cohort viewed differential gendered treatment and sexual harassment as a gendered pattern, and as "a larger part of the patriarchy, the system of gender discrimination in society." Gender discrimination was seen on multiple interconnected levels, and these women situated individual interactions within the larger institutional and societal context that create and perpetuate these acts. Lindsay believed that her fellow undergraduate female peers did not accept gender discriminatory acts as personally applicable because "the label of outright discrimination often implies a form of activity or an event or something along those lines, but if we are talking about attitudinal biases, they *are* discriminatory." The undergraduate women working without a feminist viewpoint did not make the connection between endemic discrepancies in gendered opportunities and their life path. The women in the feminist cohort were working with an expanded definition of discrimination that moved beyond tangible actions to include gender biases and prejudices to better explain the social inertia that creates and perpetuates differential gendered treatment and discriminatory acts.

Gender Discrimination as Not Personally Salient

The focus group participants, with the exception of those making up the feminist cohort, perceived gender discrimination as "furthering one's gender past the other." This specific conceptualization of gender discrimination defined by tangible actions left the women unwilling or unable to relate the personal instances of differential gendered treatment and sexual harassment that they identified as discriminatory. In fact, theses participants had not thought

much about gender as a source of potential discriminatory treatment in their lives, illustrating a disconnect between gendered experiences and their gendered understandings. In fact, these focus group participants felt as if they had completely avoided gender discrimination, and Dana illustrates these feelings when saying: "I haven't felt any discrimination really…I don't know if I'm just lucky or something." A restrictive view of gender discrimination has left these women unable to see the personal impact of societal gender inequality in their lives despite an acknowledgement of societal gendered discrepancies more generally. Karen saw gender discrimination as something that she "personally hasn't had to face so [she didn't] think that it affected [her] as much." While these women widely acknowledged differential gendered treatment, whether that be in the workplace or due to societal expectations and gender roles, these women failed to make a connection between these identifiable trends and their lived experiences.

Summary

As the undergraduate women in the non-feminist focus groups tended to "think of discrimination as the boss behind the desk like slapping his secretaries ass or women not getting into college or these really potent, clear moments," women without a feminist framework did not view gendered patterns of inequality as personally relevant in their lives today. It is difficult to see and to name overt examples of gender inequality. Thus, these undergraduate women tended to believe that gendered barriers have disappeared for them and gendered discrimination was not at all germane, despite acknowledging differential gendered treatment, instances of sexual harassment and gendered role expectations more generally. If one cannot personally see how gender impacts her or someone she knows, it is hard to identify gender as a meaningful category.

Life is politicizing for women, and my cohort of study is relatively young. As a top tier undergraduate institution, most students are hard working and have many opportunities available to them, and experiences of inequality are softened and buffered for many undergraduate women in this academic setting. Thus, raising ones awareness of the systemic nature of gender inequality, potentially through a feminist framework, may enable connections to be made between life experiences and an understanding of gender discrimination.

Feminism

Gender Discrimination (or the lack thereof) and its Connection to Feminism

As feminist discourses are intrinsically connected to notions of societal gender inequalities, a belief that gender discrimination does not exist or is not personally applicable would render feminism as unnecessary. Karen's guidelines for accepting a feminist label illustrates this: "someone close to me would have to have been extremely effected by [gender discrimination]…not that I'm ignorant, but I personally haven't experienced [gender discrimination] or seen a lot of it." Although these participants did recognize social gendered inequalities, they failed to make connections between isolated instances of differential gendered treatment and therefore did not view gender discrimination as a systemic pattern, contributing to their belief that gender discrimination was absent in their lives. This effectively renders feminism as an unnecessary framework unable to advance the individually motivated change that these women are seeking.

Feminism is…?

The feminist movement was viewed as beneficial, expanding the rights and opportunities of women. However, there was a lot of uncertainty in each group of how to best define feminism and feminist goals. Beth embellished, hypothesizing as to why: "it means something else to everyone. Everyone has their own opinion of it…it is changing all the time, one minute it means one thing and the next someone else is going to think it means something completely different." Even when accepting that feminism is necessary in society today, women tended to be unable to eloquently explain why: "I think that feminism still is important, um just to keep things equal and to keep, you know, laws happening to protect women and stuff like that." The unclear and vague language used here by Lillian illustrates a typical confusion surrounding the feminist movement, its goals and values. A general ambiguity about the place of feminism in society today made it difficult for women to self-label as a feminist.

The women in the feminist cohort –not surprisingly–were more easily able to define what feminism means for them and in their lives: "feminism is not one philosophy, it's a movement. It's many philosophies that overall talk about gender, talk about gender equality, and talk about our social structures in a critical sense." Although those who self-labeled as feminists gave differing definitions of feminism and related to the feminist movement in different ways, each participant was able to explicitly state several tangible goals of the feminist movement and clearly define what feminism means to them in their lives. Moving beyond the gap in support for the feminist movement and the acceptance of the feminist label, the responses of these focus group participants illustrates an additional disconnect between the perceptions of feminism and the feminist movement for those who self-identify as feminists and for those who do not.

Negative, Radical, and Extremist Perceptions

Although certain positive aspects of feminism were identified, the undergraduate women who participated in my focus groups were able to pinpoint several negative stereotypes of feminists as well, from "short haired, non-shavin' hippies" to women who "burn those bras" and "women that are not satisfied, or you know, don't think that anything is ever good enough, and are discriminatory in return towards men." There was a consensus, that in general, "people just think badly" of feminists. These women believed that the stigma ingrained into our understandings of feminism is a key reason why people are often hesitant to identify as feminists. Jae was able to give some further insight as to why college women do not self-label as feminists: "There are some problems with the feminist movement. It has been, by and large, a white, heterosexual, able-bodied movement, gendered as well. There is often a conflation between feminism and radical feminism which is in itself problematic but I don't feel like feminism can really disentangle itself from that history." Madison was also able to offer additional insight, stating that "most people [she] know[s] who refuse to call themselves a feminist are like, "well I'm not crazy" you know or like "I'm not a lesbian."" The multiple negative stereotypes surrounding feminism and it's meaning clearly influenced perceptions of the feminist movement and made it difficult to take on the feminist label.

Delving deeper into the various negative stereotypes surrounding feminism, each grouping of women unanimously identified extremist perceptions of feminism as either potentially deterring feminist identification for others, or as a reason to personally avoid taking on the feminist label. Taylor believed that feminism "takes it too far…[feminists] like making us seem like we're a lot different instead of making us more equal." Understanding feminism as extreme or radical may help to explain the hesitancy undergraduate women feel in taking on the

feminist label. Beyond potentially deterring self-labeling for some of the women, these negative perceptions left some undergraduate women wondering if feminism could adequately address their needs: "I still worry about if I'm going to have a husband who's going to help me as much as I want and is he going to share the responsibility with me the way I need to…I don't think necessarily that an extremist feminist movement would help with that." In some ways, the feminist movement was believed to be potential harmful to women, and Dana noted that feminism "could even hurt because some women are happy with the way things are." In this participant's view, feminism is not only extreme, but forceful and potentially harmful. Participants who felt that feminism was extremist identified having a problem with the term "feminist" itself: "I think just like the word feminism has that connotation." This participant, Hannah, offered a suggestion: "that the word would almost have to be redefined to not have that negative connotation in the back of my head." Priti also voiced feelings of guilt as a possible reason to avoid self-labeling as a feminist: "I almost feel bad for saying I'm a feminist when I know that there are some feminists out there who would have completely different or opposite ideas about some issues then me." Negative, extreme, radical, and conflicting perceptions of feminism affect the extent that one will accept or reject a feminist label.

Feminism as Overly Critical and the Concept of Choice

The feminist cohort identified feminism as empowering, yet the other focus groups identified feminism as being overly critical, and a few participants voiced feeling judged because of their personal choices. In fact, Chloe explained that: "I work at Hooters and people come in and like yell at me for taking the job that I chose…So like I kind of see feminism as something

that is way overdone because like, they'll come in to my place of work and yell at me for my own decisions." Priti told a similar story:

> "I was at a party for new years and there was a girl there who was a self-proclaimed feminist and she was like "I would get so mad if a guy like opened a door for me." So like for me, I still appreciate chivalry and things like that, so when certain feminists maybe identify with things like she did, then I don't feel comfortable saying that I'm a feminist."

The unique experiences and social context of the women from the racialized-religious focus group best expresses the view that feminism is critical, or even oppressive. One participant, Rehana, from this focus group stated that "I don't think this is representative of all people who identify themselves as feminists, but my experience is that there is just this judgmentalness." Rehana further explained this when pointing out that "feminism gets this bad rep because there is a sort of arrogance, it's absolutely arrogant to me…to see western women go to places like Egypt and say that we are going to liberate you and give you sexual autonomy." In fact, this group generally agreed that "a lot of the extreme women's rights, and therefore human rights, violations that occur in places like Afghanistan are a response to western feminism." Whereas Madison, a participant in the feminist focus group, reported that: "when people ask me about what feminism is, I tell them it's about choice," the women in the racialized-religious focus group defined feminism as leaving absolutely no room for choice. Aadila interpreted feminism as being "solidified as one particular idea. It even alienates people within America, because feminists are like "this is who a proper woman is" and they didn't come along and say "women should have the right to say what they want to be."" Rehana agreed, believing that "the biggest issue of contention is choice. Will I be judged by feminists?" Many did feel judged, and that their choices were wrong just because it wasn't what they believed feminism wanted of them.

This rigid and domineering definition and understanding of feminism left women completely unwilling to associate themselves as feminists.

I'm Not a Feminist, But…

Table 3.1 shows that approximately 64% of the focus group participants did not self-identify as a feminist, however there was an extreme hesitancy to completely reject feminism and the feminist principal of gender equality. Chloe clearly pointed this out: "I would say no [I'm not a feminist] just because of the connotation…but then I do obviously like think women should have equal salaries and equal opportunities and everything." The conflation of feminism with the extreme may place self-identified feminists on the defensive. This may also prevent women from accepting a feminist label in the first place despite egalitarian beliefs.

Women were able to identify some positive aspects of the feminist movement, even if they did not label themselves as feminists or saw it as extremist, and the progress that the feminist movement made in the past was commonly cited. Ari recalled that "when I initially think about feminism, I think of you know like female rights, getting the female vote, things that took place years ago." Ari's usage of the past tense, situating women's suffrage as the main accomplishment of feminism, displaces feminism to the past. In fact, Alison stated that "the feminist movement did happen, and for the most part, the active part is now over…I do think there may be more equality than people realize." Continuing on this line of reasoning, it is logical to assume that the participants who saw the benefit of the feminist movement residing largely in the past were unsure about the place of feminism in our society today. Believing that feminism has done it's job, Hannah declared that "we have the same rights and as far as concrete things, those we have achieved." The fact that some participants saw men and women as equal

under the eyes of the law despite recognizing that gender inequalities remain left them uncertain about the applicability of feminism in their lives today.

Individualism as a Feminist Deterrent

By equating the achievement of equality to individual ability, feminist views and discourses were depicted as unnecessary. Karen stressed that: "being an active feminist right now is much different then it use to be…because I feel like in today's day and age, a lot of people think we have the ability to like be equal, we just haven't necessarily achieved it. Like a woman needs to provide it for herself. You need to work on your own and achieve that." Alison mirrored those sentiments and stated that: "women should stand up for themselves, but I don't think they should stand up for themselves as a woman, they should stand up for themselves as an individual." In adhering to individualistic principals to explain the stratification by gender in our society, social inequalities are manifested into justifiable treatment and are understood as completely warranted. Despite viewing society as inherently comprised of unequal gender relations, by understanding these gender interactions within an individualistic mindset, feminism becomes unnecessary.

Feminism and Social Action

Finally, a general lack of civic participation may also explain the rejection of the feminist label. Ari, a participant who did not self-identify as a feminist, noted that: "I personally don't feel like a very causey person…there are many issues I feel strongly about…but there hasn't been something that's really got me angry enough or upset enough." Even when participants did identify a particular cause that was of interest, tangible actions striving for social change were

not considered. Taylor, another participant who did not identify as a feminist, explained: "I'm very for freedom…but I could never see myself as going picketing for it. Maybe if it was on the ballet and I had to vote, I would vote a certain way." Generally, these women had opinions on certain issues, but nothing that entirely motivated them to action. Social movements as a whole may seem as an inappropriate strategy to address the needs of these women. When looking at the reasons given in instances of social action, results were an important motivating force. Lillian explained that: "I personally like to participate in causes where I feel like I'm actively making change…I tend to feel more impassioned about smaller events where you can tangibly see what you're doing. That helps me feel very passionate about what's going on." For those who are drawn to social change, the broad nature of feminism and feminist goals may deter participation in feminist oriented action.

SUMMARY

Several key findings emerged from my focus group research. Firstly, although these undergraduate women recognized persistent social gendered inequalities, they failed to make connections between isolated instances of differential gendered treatment and therefore did not view gender discrimination as a systemic pattern, contributing to their belief that gender discrimination was absent in their lives. Although they did identify personal experiences of differential gendered treatment, they tended to view them as idiosyncratic or personal, rather than structural. This is but one reason as to why feminism was not viewed as an appropriate strategy to combat social inequalities. In navigating within an individual understanding of

society, these undergraduate women did not feel feminism would create the personally motivated change that they were seeking.

Additionally, there was a lot of uncertainty surrounding what feminism actually is, contributing to a disconnect between the perceptions of feminism and the feminist movement for those who self-identify as feminists and for those who do not. This is most clearly visible around the topic of feminism and choice: whereas feminists saw the feminist movement as inclusive and offering choice, where those who did not identify as feminists saw the feminist movement as radical, extreme and even oppressive. These multiple negative stereotypes surrounding feminism and it's meaning clearly influences perceptions of the feminist movement and made it difficult to take on a feminist label. Beyond potentially deterring self-labeling, these negative perceptions left some undergraduate women wondering if feminism could adequately address their needs, and many women relegated the successes of feminism to the past.

CONCLUSION

In this study, I have found that women produce or refute a feminist identity contingent upon their context. In general, undergraduate women tend to support the feminist movement but reject the feminist label. These women were also able to recognize gendered social inequalities but did not view personal instances of differential treatment as discriminatory nor did they make connections between isolated examples of discrimination and an overarching pattern of systemic gendered inequity. The self-identified feminists in my sample had a greater understanding of the social structures that impact their lived realities, and from these results I believe that feminism can be viewed as a powerful discourse and explanatory framework that people are able to draw strategically upon, allowing them to navigate within society aware of systemic social barriers and gendered obstacles.

Gender Discrimination

These undergraduate women showed an extreme hesitancy in identifying personal experiences of gender discrimination despite acknowledging societal gender inequalities more generally. This is troubling for society as a whole and the future of the feminist movement more specifically as an internalization of gendered social norms that render social structures invisible may lead to a lack of social action, leaving social shifts improbable. As feminism rests its theoretical bases on the premise of unequal opportunities and subjugative social structures, the dismissal of the very premise feminism rests upon does not bode well for the future of the movement, in terms of membership recruitment and ability to tackle social issues effectively.

The Feminist Identity

Identity is thought of in terms of commonality and connectedness; the very language of "identity" disposes us to think in terms of bounded groupness (Brubaker and Cooper 2000). Although identity, and the act of naming, is powerful and can articulate experience while mobilizing loyalty to work towards social and political action, the nature of groupness and the ways we conceptualize it can also be problematic. The assignment of an identity often leaves many people "caught between a hard identity that does not quite fit and a soft rhetoric of hybridity, multiplicity and fluidity that offers neither understanding nor solace" (Brubaker et al. 2000:31). Thus, the language of identity may prevent women from accepting the term "feminist" as salient in their self-understandings due to the homogenization and bounded groupness that occurs. This also has implications for the future of social organizing more generally, as identity problems are in no way confined within the feminist movement.

Moving from personal support of the feminist movement to taking on a feminist label is a huge step, as a feminist identity is a description of the self that is often hard to deal with in social terms. A feminist identity is rebellious by nature, inherently working against the status quo and the mainstream, and is therefore not very socially flexible. The feminist identity therefore goes home with you in ways that other identities do not (for example, being a Democrat may not change your relationship with your boyfriend, but being a feminist sure could).

There is also a great deal of ambivalence surrounding feminism, where positive social change and negative connotations are simultaneously combined in our understandings of feminists the feminist movement. Holding a feminist identity may put women at risk for criticism, but it is also not easy to reject as it is one which emphasizes equality (Quinn and Radtke 2006). However, there is much more at stake in accepting a feminist label then holding

egalitarian gender beliefs alone. I saw this tangibly in the undergraduate women that I survived who refused to take on a feminist label but were simultaneously hesitant to completely reject it: those who were unsure or neutral about their feminist status. I found that these undergraduate women differed from their self-proclaimed feminist peers as they were only able to conceptualize equal rights in the abstract, but were unable to translate this into meaningful categories in their own lives. Thus, despite a general support for equality, these undergraduate women are individualistic in nature. A feminist identity and the process of taking on the feminist label may serve as a catalyst in the development of structural understandings and a gendered analysis of the social world.

APPENDIX A – Survey Instrument

STATEMENT OF INFORMED CONSENT

My name is Alex Cooperstock, and I am an undergraduate Sociology and Women's Studies double major at the University of Michigan.

This survey is a part of my sociology honor thesis. The topic of this survey is feminist identification among undergraduate women. The goal of this survey is to better understand why undergraduate women do or do not identify with the feminist movement. In this survey, I will ask you a series of questions about your family background, gender beliefs, and feminist ideology. The survey will take less than ten minutes. Answering the questions will not pose any risk to you as the questions are about topics that arise in everyday life. There is no benefit to you for participating in the survey, but I would appreciate your time.

Your participation in this survey is completely voluntary. You may decide to stop participating at any time, and you may skip or refuse to answer any questions you wish. Your information will be kept completely confidential, and no identifying information will be recorded. All survey forms will be destroyed upon the completion of my thesis.

The Behavioral Science IRB has reviewed this study and has determined that it is exempt from IRB oversight.

If you have any further questions or concerns, please feel free to contact me:
     Alex Cooperstock
     alexcoop@umich.edu

You can also contact my supervising faculty member:
     Professor Elizabeth Bruch
     Assistant Professor
     Department of Sociology
     ebruch@umich.edu

SURVEY QUESTIONNAIRE

1. Do you agree with the statement: "I consider myself a feminist"? Please check one.

Yes [ ]   No [ ]   Neutral [ ]   Unsure [ ]

2. What is your opinion of the feminist movement?
    a) strongly in favor
    b) in favor
    c) neutral
    d) against
    e) strongly against

3. Do you think feminism is necessary in our society today?

Yes [ ]   No [ ]   Neutral [ ]   Unsure [ ]

4. What is your age? Please specify _____

5. What is your undergraduate year? Please specify _____

6. What is your gender? Please specify_____

7. Have you ever participated in a discussion about the political, legal, or social challenges facing women today?
    a) yes
    b) no

8. Have you taken a Women's Studies course during your undergraduate career?
    a) yes
    b) no

9. Did your mother work for pay while you were in grades K-12?
      a) yes
      b) no
      c) part time

10. What is the highest level of education completed by your mother?
      a) did not graduate high school
      b) high school
      c) some college
      d) college
      e) professional or doctoral graduate degree

11. What is the total household income of your parents per year?
      a) under $25,000
      b) between $25,000 and $50,000
      c) between $50,000 and $75,000
      d) between $75,000 and $100,000
      e) over $100,000

12. In what environment did you grow up?
      a) urban
      b) suburban
      c) rural

13. What is your race/ethnicity?
      a) Caucasian
      b) African American
      c) Asian or Pacific Islander
      d) Spanish/Hispanic/Latino
      f) other
          _____

14. What is your political orientation?
      a) democrat
      b) republican
      c) other
          _____

15. Do you agree with the following statements?
      a) Women and men should have equal career opportunities.

    strongly agree   agree   neutral   disagree   strongly disagree

      b) Women should combine work with family.

    strongly agree   agree   neutral   disagree   strongly disagree

      c) Women should have sexual autonomy and freedom.

    strongly agree   agree   neutral   disagree   strongly disagree

      d) There should be male participation in domestic work and child rearing.

    strongly agree   agree   neutral   disagree   strongly disagree

16. Do you believe that women are equal to men in our society? Please explain below.

17. Have you ever been discriminated against due to your gender? Please specify below.

18. Do you agree with the following statements?
      a) Most women have only themselves to blame for not doing better in life.

    strongly agree   agree   neutral   disagree   strongly disagree

      b) Women need to unite and work together to achieve equal political and societal rights in our society.

    strongly agree   agree   neutral   disagree   strongly disagree

APPENDIX B – Survey Open Ended Coding Explanation

Respondents were asked two questions that attempted to measure their perceptions on gender inequality and gender discrimination in society today. These questions were open-ended, and Respondents were therefore free to reply in anyway they saw fit.

The first of these two questions asked: "Do you believe that women are equal to men in our society? Please explain below." The respondents answered this question in varying ways, and their answers were coded on a spectrum. The responses ranged from acknowledging that men and women are not equal ("No. Although our society is "suppose" to be gender equal, it is not. Men and women do not have equal opportunities"), to recognizing that women's opportunities have increased substantially ("The gap has been decreasing in the recent years, but there are still some instances in which women are not considered equal"), believing that men and women are equal for the most part, or espousing a belief that men and women are, in fact, equal ("Yes, I believe that women are equal to men in our society because now we are given the same rights as our male counterparts"). There were many themes that appeared within the respondents' answers, and I have identified three main categories through which respondents tended to express gender inequality: economics, employment, and in society-or through media objectification more specifically.

The second of the two questions asked: "Have you ever been discriminated against due to your gender? Please specify below." The respondents answered this question in varying ways as well, and similarly, these answers were also coded on a spectrum. The responses ranged from not identifying gender discrimination as personally applicable ("No. Luckily not in my lifetime"), to listing a mixed reaction or expressing an uncertainty ("It's very possible that I have, but I forget those things on purpose because I don't look at my gender as a hindrance"), believing gender

discrimination was restricted to jokes ("Jokingly, all the time"), to giving clear examples as to how they have been discriminated against. I have identified themes that appeared throughout the respondents' answers when expressing instances of gender discrimination, and they fall into the categories of: double standards or gender preferencing, stereotypes and judgments, in the workplace, athletics and in measures of strength, chivalry and objectification, and in academia.

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