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An Analysis of University Students' Self-Labeling and Perception of Feminism

A Senior Project
presented to
the Faculty of the Frederik Meijer Honors College of
Grand Valley State University

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Bachelor of Science

By

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Introduction

Research has shown that individuals' definitions of feminism and willingness to self-label are extremely variable. Over time, the ideologies and major topics of concern of feminism have fluctuated, and likewise people have formulated many varying definitions of feminism. Even among pop culture stars there are immense discrepancies in definitions. For example, pop singer Miley Cyrus says she is a feminist "because I tell women to not be scared of anything," whereas movie star Emma Watson takes a more traditional stance on feminism and describes it as a "belief that men and women should have equal rights" (Ogletree et al., 2019, p. 1576). Meanwhile, another pop singer, Katy Perry says, "I am not a feminist, but I do believe in the strength of women" (Meijs et al., 2017, p. 294).

These three famous women highlight the diversification of definitions of feminism. Katy Perry's statement, in particular, highlights a growing group of people who researchers have deemed, 'nonlabelers.' Nonlabelers are people who believe in feminist ideals and values but do not self-label or identify as a feminist (Duncan, 2010, p.499-500). Many nonlabelers will make statements similar to Katy Perry's, in which they will say "I'm not a feminist but..." (Houvouras & Carter, 2008). Although, feminist ideologies are relatively widespread among people, there are less people willing to identify with the movement and thus feminist recruitment levels are low (Houvouras & Carter, 2008). However, the multiple definition model empowers people to determine what feminism means to them and creates a more individualistic approach. In turn, this individualism allows people to identify with feminism, even if they don't feel like they fit into a "stereotypical" definition. In all, this fosters a less constrained and more welcoming approach to feminism.

There is currently no research that investigates self-labeling as a feminist among the current generation of college students in the United States. There is some research on the generational differences in self-labeling between Baby Boomers and Generation Xers, but there is little research on how Millennials or Generation Z may compare to these generations. The current generation of students has witnessed major feminist movements such as the #MeToo movement and the Women's March in Washington, D.C. (and other major cities). Additionally, this generation of students has access to more information via the internet and social media than previous generations, which is likely to influence their opinions on feminism (Vogels, 2020). Understanding the perspectives of these students is important as they have the potential to become activists and impact the future of the feminist movement. This project will investigate students' perceptions of feminism, whether or not they identify as feminist, and how closely their ideals align with basic feminist ideals.

Literature Review

Despite the immense benefits to holding a feminist identification, it is estimated that only about 21% of the United States population identifies as a feminist (Swirsky & Angelone, 2014, p. 230). The overall rates of research participants identifying as feminists, non-labelers, or non-feminists varies by study but there are few overarching themes. The first is that there is a significant number of people who agree with feminist ideals but refuse to self-label as a feminist, i.e., nonlabelers (Swirsky & Angelone, 2014, p. 230; Duncan, 2010, p. 505; Houvouras & Carter, 2008; Meijs et al., 2017, p. 294). The second is that self-labeled feminists are more likely to hold positive stereotypes about feminists and agree with gender equality goals, whereas non-feminists are significantly more likely to hold negative stereotypes and reject equal rights views (Duncan,

2010, p. 503; Houvouras & Carter, 2008; Meijs et al., 2017; Weis et al., 2018, p. 286). Non-labelers fall somewhere within this spectrum; they are more likely than non-feminists to define feminism in terms of gender equality and use more positive stereotypes. However, this pattern is not as strong as it is among self-labeled feminists (Duncan, 2010, p. 505). McLaughlin and Aikman (2020) suggest that this demonstrates that “individuals who downplay stereotypical portrayals of feminism ...identify as feminist.” In other words, the less likely someone endorses negative stereotypes surrounding feminism, the more likely they will identify as a feminist. In addition, it was found that providing a definition of feminism causes self-labeling as a feminist to increase significantly (Houvouras & Carter, 2008). This suggests that the immense confusion and ambiguity surrounding the definition of feminism has led people to simply avoid the label altogether.

This reluctance (or outright refusal) to identify as a feminist is often due to a multitude of components. One major contributing factor is the negative stereotypes and stigmas surrounding feminism. Feminists are often seen as extremists, man-hating, unhappy, anti-family, ugly, stubborn, aggressive, bra-burning, and/or lesbians (Dyer & Hurd, 2018, p.437; Foster, 2015; Marine & Lewis, 2014, p. 12; Moore & Stathi, 2020). Contrary to popular belief, there is no record of bra-burning ever occurring during a feminist protest (Houvouras & Carter, 2008). Similarly, other misconceptions of feminism have led women to believe that a majority of women maintain negative stereotypes associated with feminism, despite feminism generally holding positive stereotypes among most women (Moore & Stathi, 2020). The attempt by women to remove themselves from an association with feminism due to fear of being labeled as a lesbian or unattractive to men suggests that homophobia may play a role in the hesitation to identify as a feminist (Moore & Stathi, 2020). As a result, being labeled feminist has become

synonymous with being insulted (Houvouras & Carter, 2008). People often fear the judgments of others and thus do not want to be associated with the negative connotations of feminism.

Another major contributor to the reluctance to self-identify as a feminist, particularly among younger generations, is the belief that feminism is not necessary because gender equality has been achieved (Dyer & Hurd, 2018, p. 447-448; Houvouras & Carter, 2008; Swirsky & Angelone, 2014, p. 229; Anderson & Robnett, 2016, p. 138). This view that feminism is no longer needed may be due to the fact that central feminist ideals have become so engrained in everyday life that they are no longer seen as distinctly feminist (Houvouras & Carter, 2008). Additionally, women may view their experiences of sexism as individual cases and not connected to a larger issue of structural sexism (Dyer & Hurd, 2018, p. 443). Consequently, they do not see how feminism would be needed to address their individual issues.

Other reasons for not identifying as a feminist include an endorsement of traditional gender roles, disagreements on various feminist tenets, the ideas that you have to be a woman to be a feminist, feminism violates religious ideals, feminism is anti-equality (pro-female supremacy), and you need to engage in activism to be a feminist (Anderson & Robnett, 2016, p. 138; Houvouras & Carter, 2008; Swirsky & Angelone, 2014, p. 236-241). As such, self-labeling as feminist is greatly impacted by personal experience and relationships with others (Dyer & Hurd, 2018, p. 436).

Even with the immense uncertainty that many have about identifying as feminist there are a multitude of benefits associated with self-identification. These include increased self-esteem, increased life satisfaction, decreased issue with eating disorders and body shame, better coping skills, decreased symptoms of depression, and overall better well-being (Marine & Lewis, 2014,

p. 12; McLaughlin & Aikman, 2020, p. 92; Meijs et al., 2017, p. 304). These benefits are not found in people who simply hold feminist beliefs; they must actively self-label as feminists (Weis et al., 2018, p. 280). In addition, self-labeling as feminist has a higher correlation with political activism to address feminist issues than nonlabeling and non-feminist identification (Yoder et al., 2011, p. 16; Moore & Stathi, 2020; Meijs et al., 2017, p. 294; Duncan, 2010, p. 500; Dyer & Hurd, 2018, p. 437). It is possible that the political activism, and the community-building it creates, may cause many of the benefits of self-labeling as a feminist; however, there is currently no existing research that concretely establishes activism as the cause of these benefits. Nonetheless, the link between self-labeling and activism, and the importance of activism to achieving feminist goals, may make this a special interest to the feminist cause.

The rates of feminist identification are even more varied when broken down by gender, race, and age. Considering the importance of social context, culture, and background to feminist identification it should not be surprising that understandings of feminism vary largely by group and social perspective (Dyer & Hurd, 2018, p. 124; Marine & Lewis, 2014, p. 15). Multiple studies have found that men are significantly less likely to identify as a feminist than women (Dyer & Hurd, 2018, p. 129; Ogletree et al., 2019, p. 1576; Anderson & Robnett, 2016, p. 137). This may be due to the fact that men often feel that you must be female and/or a man-hater to identify as a feminist (Ogletree et al., 2019, p. 1580). In addition, Duncan (2010) found generational differences in feminist identification; Baby Boomers were more likely to label as strong feminists than Generation Xers.

Additional differences in feminist identification are found across racial groups. This is often because the mainstream feminist movement frequently leaves out people of color and

makes them “believe that they are not ‘part of the group’” (Swirsky & Angelone, 2014, p. 231). Many Black people are kept from identifying as feminists because the movement is viewed as a threat to Black “group solidarity,” and leads to “whitewashing” (Swirsky & Angelone, 2014, p. 232; White, 2006, p. 455). These viewpoints come from a long history of racism in the feminist movement, leading many Black folks to believe that anyone who identifies as a feminist today has effectively abandoned their Black identity to become a part of a white culture (White, 2006, p. 456). This results in racial minorities being less likely to self-label as feminists in comparison to white people (Anderson & Tobnett, 2016). In addition to racial differences, Dyer & Hurd (2018) found that higher economic classes were more likely to have a feminist orientation; this effect was statistically significant among women but not men (Dyer & Hurd, 2018, p. 131-134). In total these studies suggest that feminist self-labeling varies significantly among age groups, race, and socioeconomic classes.

This project contributes to this existing research by analyzing the current generation of college students' perceptions of feminism. The classes of 2022 through 2026 that were surveyed for this project are largely Generation Z and late Millennials. Much of the existing research is focused on Generation X and Baby Boomers. Additionally, the modified Liberal Feminist Attitude and Ideology Scale (LFAIS) scale utilized in this research survey is specifically inclusive of marginalized genders, a factor that is not taken into account by most of the past research. This means that most existing research investigates feminism centered on women and does not include other marginalized genders.

Research Design

In order to study feminist self-labeling and perceptions amongst current college students, a survey of open-ended and Likert Scale questions was constructed. The survey was described to participants as an investigation of "belief systems, and how people self-identify in social groups." This very generic introduction was used to avoid deterring participants from completing a survey about feminism. Yonder, Tobias, and Snell (2011) used this method as a result of their prediction that feminism's negative connotation may result in fewer people finishing their survey.

The survey included demographic questions on age, race, and gender. If a participant answered that they are less than 18 years old, then the survey was immediately ended, and the participant was asked no further questions. The questions on race and gender were included to see if comparisons could be drawn between demographics and their identification with feminism. Participants were then asked to define feminism in an open response question to find their perception of feminism; whether or not they identify as a feminist on a 5-point Likert scale; and why or why they do not identify as feminist in another open response question. The open responses questions were generated to be as unrestrictive as possible to create a space for students to discuss feminism in their own words. This method was employed to truly gauge how students perceive and define feminism without input from the researcher.

The questions included in the survey were designed to answer the research questions of students' perception of feminism and whether or not they self-label as a feminist. The first question was stated as: "How would you define feminism?". By framing it in this way participants were encouraged to provide their own unique definitions of feminism instead of a dictionary definition. By giving their own definitions, participants are more likely to reveal their

perceptions and thoughts on feminism. After the 5-point Likert scale on whether or not the participant identified as a feminist, the following open response question was provided: "Why do you or why do you not identify as a feminist?". This allowed participants to state in their own words, why they answered the previous Likert question the way they did. This again provides a much deeper look at how students perceive feminism, and more specifically how this perception affects their self-labeling.

Next, the survey included a modified form of the Liberal Feminist Attitude and Ideology Scale (LFAIS) to gauge how closely students identify with feminist ideologies and attitudes (Morgan, 1996). The scale was modified to include gender neutral terminology and be inclusive of all marginalized genders. The survey ended with the following definition of feminism, "the ideology that all genders should be treated equally politically, economically, socially and culturally," (Foster,2015), and re-asked if participants would identify as a feminist. This question was included because Hovouras & Carter (2008) found that there was an increase in self-labeling as a feminist when participants were provided a dictionary definition. This may have been the result of confusion surrounding the term 'feminism' as found in several studies (McLaughlin & Aikman, 2020; Ogletree et al., 2019; Hovouras & Carter, 2008).

Participants' free-response answers were then coded and categorized for data analysis. Grounded theory was utilized as the basis for coding, and categories were established from the data instead of "preconceived hypotheses" (Charmaz, 2006). In other words, the categories were derived based on the data at hand, not from the researcher's expectations or existing literature. The researcher read all responses as a whole and then sorted responses in accordance to recurring themes. Utilizing the research questions of students' perceptions of feminism, whether or not

they identify as feminist, and how closely their ideals align with basic feminist ideals as a guide; responses were coded based on categories that stood out in participants' responses. All responses for a question were first read as a whole by the researcher, then reread, and notes were taken to identify themes. The responses were sorted into their themes, and then reanalyzed to find themes that could be combined. Once themes were established, they became sub-categories that were sorted into overarching categories. Each question's coding categories are described in Table 1.

Descriptive statistical analysis was used for quantitative data to find frequencies, standard deviations, and means of the data. The qualitative data was quantified, and the frequencies of all coded themes were calculated. Only participants who completed the entirety of the survey were included in the final analysis. Participants whose open-ended responses did not fit into coded categories were excluded from the thematic analysis.

Participants

The survey was emailed to all members of a large Midwestern university's honors college. It was also posted to the Facebook group pages of the class of 2022, 2023, 2024, and 2025 (classes who were currently enrolled at the time of the survey). After incomplete responses were excluded, the survey had a total of 278 participants. Participants identified as overwhelmingly female (70.4%) and white (90.3%). As a result of the lack of diversity, no conclusions could be drawn about correlations between gender and racial identities and feminist self-labeling.

Results

Overall, 45.4% of participants said that they strongly agreed that they are feminists, 33.5% agreed, 11.3% neither agreed or disagreed, 5.7% disagreed, and 4.1% strongly disagreed. These results show that a majority of participants strongly agreed or agreed to self-labeling as a feminist. The reasons why participants identified or did not identify as a feminist were broken down into the categories of: I am not a feminist, Hesitant about feminism, and I am a feminist. These frequencies and the frequencies of all subcategories within their individual coded categories can be found in Table 2.

Participants' LFAIS scores were negatively skewed, as seen in Graph 1, with a mean of 57.35 and a mode of 62. The maximum LFAIS score was 66, while the minimum was 30. The higher the LFAIS score, the more closely a participant aligns with feminist ideologies and attitudes (Morgan, 1996). Several tests were run to compare participant's LFAIS scores with whether or not they self-label as feminists. Responses of strongly agree/agree and strongly disagree/disagree were collapsed to simplify sample sizes for the statistical analysis. The sample sizes for participants who strongly disagreed/disagreed, neither agreed nor disagreed, and strongly agreed/agreed were different sizes and failed Levene's test for Homogeneity of variances. However, because the strongly agree/agree group had the smallest standard deviation (5.31) and two times this standard deviation ($5.31 \times 2 = 10.62$) is larger than the group with the largest standard deviation (neither agree nor disagree std dev.= 7.82), it can be assumed that the equal variances of these sample sizes are satisfied. As a result, the mean LFAIS scores of each group are significantly different from each other. Participants who strongly agreed/agreed had the highest mean score of 60.26, neither agree nor disagree had a mean of 50.42, and strongly

disagree/disagree had a mean of 42.21. In other words, LFAIS scores can predict whether or not someone self-labels as a feminist. The higher a participant scores on the LFAIS, the more likely they will identify as a feminist.

When asked to define feminism the most frequently coded themes in descending order were Equality/Rights Based (79.90%), Uplifting Women (15.10%), Negative Connotations (4.00%), and others (1.10%). A Monte Carlo Estimate was run to find the association between the coded responses of the question "How would you define feminism?" and the Likert scale responses to the statement "I identify as a feminist." This statistical analysis found a statistically significant p-value of <0.0001 , or that there is evidence of an association between how participants define feminism and whether or not they self-label as a feminist. Of those participants in the category Equality/Rights Based, 52.20% strongly agreed they would identify as a feminist, 31.98% agreed, 9.91% neither agreed or disagreed, 3.60% disagreed, and 1.80% strongly disagreed. In the Uplifting Women category, 35.71% strongly agreed, 35.71% agreed, 11.90% neither agreed or disagreed, 11.90% disagreed, and 4.76% strongly disagreed. Lastly, in the Negative Connotations category, 36.36% strongly disagreed, 36.36% neither agreed nor disagreed, 27.27% disagreed, and 0.00% strongly agreed or agreed.

When provided with a definition of feminism, 82.01% agreed that they would identify as a feminist when defined in that way, 10.79% were hesitant, and 6.83% disagreed. A Monte Carlo estimate was done between the coded responses of respondents' willingness to self-label as a feminist when provided a definition of feminism and the Likert scale responses to the statement "I identify as a feminist." A p-value of <0.0001 was found, demonstrating a significant association between the two variables. Participants who strongly agreed/disagreed originally

were still more likely to self-label as a feminist when provided a definition, those who said neither were still likely hesitant and; participants who strongly disagreed/disagreed were still likely to be non-labelers.

Discussion

As described above a majority of participants strongly agreed or agreed to self-labeling as a feminist (78.9%). This suggests that a majority of the sample of current college students, who are mostly Generation Z, are likely to identify as a feminist. This rate of self-labeling is significantly higher than the estimated national average of 21% (Swirsky & Angelone, 2014, p. 230). This is also significantly higher than in Houvouras & Carter's (2008) study on college students, which found only 30% of respondents self-labeled as feminists and Ogletree et al.'s (2019) college student study, which found that less than half self-labeled as feminists.

The existing research on generational feminist self-labeling shows that Baby Boomers are often more likely to identify as feminists than Generation X. However, Duncan's (2010) study on self-labeling among Baby Boomers and Generation X does not provide any individual rates of self-labeling among generations. Consequently, no comparisons can be drawn between these generations and the current study on Generation Z. Further study should be conducted in order to make this comparison. However, Duncan (2010) suggests that high rates of feminist self-labeling among Baby Boomers could be explained by their young adulthood during the second wave of feminism. Likewise, Duncan (2010) hypothesizes that Generation X may have lower rates of self-labeling due to anti-feminist backlash of the 1980s.

It is possible that high rates among the Generation Z participants in this study are a result of being born into the third wave of feminism and coming into young adulthood with the development of the fourth wave of feminism (Dearman, 2019). The effect of lingering anti-feminist backlash is nonetheless found in the responses of the present study. Many participants who expressed hesitation to self-labeling as feminists attributed it to the fear of negative stereotypes associated with the term (60.78% of respondents that were in the Hesitant about feminism category). Additionally, a majority of those who strongly disagreed/disagreed with labeling as a feminist did so because they thought feminism had taken a radical shift towards stereotypes promoted by anti-feminist backlash. For example, participants said things like feminism is about “women’s superiority,” it has become “toxic,” or “leads to degrading men.”

The negatively skewed LFAIS scores suggest not only that a majority of participants identify as feminists, but also that a majority align themselves with feminist ideologies and attitudes. In addition, this study is consistent with the existing research that finds a significant number of people agree with feminist ideals but do not self-label as feminists (Swirsky & Angelone, 2014, p. 230; Duncan, 2010, p. 505; Houvouras & Carter, 2008; Meijs et al., 2017, p. 294). This is evidenced by the high mean LFAIS score for the neither agree nor disagree group of participants (50.42). This suggests that these participants align themselves with feminist attitudes and ideals but are still hesitant to label themselves as feminists.

Participants’ definitions of feminism were also consistent with those documented by existing research. Like Duncan’s (2010) and Houvouras & Carter’s (2008) studies, Equality/Rights Based definitions were the most frequently used, while those with Negative Connotations were among the least frequently used. Further, in the current study participants

who self-labeled as feminists were more likely to define feminism in terms of Equality/Rights Based or Uplifting Women, whereas people who did not self-label as feminists were more likely to define it in terms of Negative Connotations. This is consistent with other studies, which have found that self-labeling feminists tend to hold positive stereotypes about feminists and agree with gender equality goals, whereas non-feminists are significantly more likely to hold negative stereotypes and reject equal rights views (Duncan, 2020, p. 503; Houvouras & Carter, 2008; Meijs et al., 2017; Weis et al., 2018, p. 286).

When participants were re-asked if they would self-label as feminist when provided with a definition, there was not a significant increase in self-labeling. This is contradictory to Houvouras & Carter's (2008) analysis of public opinion polls that found that there was a 23-55% increase in self-labeling when a definition was provided to participants. At the beginning of the study approximately 78.9% of participants self-labeled as a feminist (strongly agree/agree), 11.3% were hesitant/nonlabelers (neither agree nor disagree), and 9.8% were non-feminists (strongly disagree/disagree). At the end of the study when provided with a definition there was only a 3.11% increase in self-labeling, a 0.51% decrease in hesitation, and 2.97% decrease in not self-labeling. Consequently, this study did not find as dramatic a change in self-labeling among participants when given a definition of feminism. It is possible that this pattern occurred because participants were generally more informed about feminism than participants in previous studies, as evidenced by lower percentages of people defining feminism with common misconceptions. However, further research should be conducted to explore the sources of this difference.

Conclusion

This study found that the majority of participants, mostly Generation Z college students, defined feminism in terms of equality or rights-based terms. The minority of students defined feminism utilizing negative connotations, suggesting that most student participants have positive and equality-based perceptions of feminism. Additionally, a majority of participants self-labeled as feminists and had ideals that aligned with feminist ideals.

The majority of participants that did not label as feminists did so because they feared negative stereotypes or because they believed feminism had shifted towards common negative stereotypes. This implies that many participants hold misconceptions about feminism, an issue which has been identified in existing research (Duncan, 2020, p. 503; Houvouras & Carter, 2008; Meijs et al., 2017; Weis et al., 2018, p. 286). Educating people on feminism may help to encourage more people to self-label and better understand the movement (Duncan, 2020, p. 506; Dyer & Hurd, 2018, p. 435). Marine and Lewis (2014) found that many of their interview participants experienced their awakening to feminism as a gradual process that involved education, interacting with peers/community, and a growing consciousness of oppression. As a result of the individual health and wellness benefits (Marine & Lewis, 2014, p. 12; McLaughlin & Aikman, 2020, p. 92; Meijs et al., 2017, p. 304) and the increase in activism (Yoder et al., 2011, p. 16; Moore & Stathi, 2020; Meijs et al., 2017, p. 294; Duncan, 2010, p. 500; Dyer & Hurd, 2018, p. 437) associated with self-labeling as a feminist, there are clear incentives to increase the numbers of self-identified feminists.

To encourage more people to self-label, Swirsky & Angelone (2014) argue that “a continuum approach may end the practice of isolating women who believe in some tenets but not others” (p. 243) As described by Swirsky & Angelone (2014), the continuum approach allows multiple definitions of feminism to exist simultaneously. In other words, people can identify with the ideals of feminism that they align with, instead of having to fit into a singular mold of feminism. This may help to bring in the nonlabeler group that holds various hesitations about feminism; creating an environment that encourages discussion, education, and a wider range of beliefs may help to increase feminist identification. Similar to Ogletree et al.’s (2008) findings, the college students in this study had definitions of feminism that were highly varied and unique. It is clear that there is a wide range of definitions and as discussed previously, this is not necessarily an issue. This broad variation allows for a more inclusive approach to feminism. It gives people the opportunity to join feminist causes and support the issues they feel passionate about without having to commit to every issue. The key is to find a balance between educating people on feminist goals and creating an inclusive environment so that people can define the movement in their own way.

Appendix

Table 1

Coding Categories and Examples for Free-Response Questions

Coding Category	Sub-Category	Example
Definitions of Feminism		
<i>Equality/Rights Based-</i> equality between genders/sexes and all people, and/or the support for 'women's rights'	<i>Equality for All People-</i> quality not specific to gender but to all people in general	"political, economical, and social equity for all genders, races, sexual orientation, abilities, religion, etc"
	<i>Women's Rights/Equal Rights for Women-</i> defines feminism in terms of 'women's rights' or equal rights for women specifically	"The advocacy for the betterment of women's rights and treatment, with the goal of gender equality."
	<i>Equality of the Sexes/Genders-</i> defines feminism in terms of equality between sexes/genders but does not specify as equality along the binary (men and women)	"Equality/equity of the treatment and opportunities of all genders."
	<i>Equality between Men and Women-</i> specifically defines feminism in terms of equality between men and women (does not include other genders)	"A movement for the to match equality and equal opportunity between men and women.
<i>Uplifting Women-</i> participants defined feminism in terms of improving women's roles/status and supporting them.	<i>Improving Role of Women in Society-</i> defines feminism in terms of bettering the role/place of women in society.	"At its most basic, feminism is a collection of ethical concepts about and actions to improve women's roles and treatment in society."
	<i>Liberation of Women-</i> defines feminism as the 'freeing' or 'liberation' of women.	"Women's liberation from patriarchy."
	<i>Female Empowerment-</i> defines feminism in terms of empowering or strengthening women.	"Feminism, to me, is the belief in woman empowerment and self-confidence. It's all about being proud to be a woman, as women should be!"
	<i>Female Support-</i> defines feminism in terms supporting women or encouraging women through struggles or life.	"supporting women and respecting their choices, even if those choices are different from what you would do in their situation. Also looking out for each other as women."
<i>Negative Connotations-</i> participants define feminism with negative connotations.	<i>Female Superiority-</i> participant defines feminism as a movement to place women as superior to me, or simply against men.	"Men haters"
	<i>Radical Shift in Feminism-</i> participants write that feminism used to be about equality but there has been an extreme/radical shift in feminism towards a more negative direction.	"I understand that the dictionary definition of feminism is the notion that all people are equal in value regardless of their sex or their gender identity. I also think it is naive to say "I am a

		feminist" without also identifying with the strong sociopolitical implications this title has, regardless of your alignment with those sociopolitical values. Because of this, I am most certainly NOT a feminist, because I believe that the feminist movement, starting with women's suffrage in the early 20th century, has developed into an extremely harmful ideology that praises masculinity and frowns upon femininity under the guise of "equality.""
Reasons for Identifying (or not identifying) as a Feminist		
<i>I am not a feminist-</i> participant does not identify as a feminist	<i>Feminism Doesn't Need to Exist-</i> participants do not think that feminism needs to exist either because equality has been achieved or that any inequality that does exist is acceptable.	"Because I'm fine the way things are and I think men are nice and lovely and most of them aren't oppressive."
	<i>Disagrees with Feminist Views-</i> participants disagree with various feminism tenants or ideologies.	"I don't identify as a feminist because I believe that the goals of the "feminist movement" are not aligned with my thoughts and beliefs."
	<i>Inherent Differences Between Men & Women-</i> participants do not identify as a feminist because they believe that there is an inherent difference between men and women and thus they do not believe in equality.	"Men were created to do the work and provide for their families"
	<i>Conflicting Identities/Activism-</i> participant does not identify as a feminist because they have another identity that keeps them from identifying as a feminist or they do not actively participate in the movement.	"Because I'm not female and it's not my place to participate in that."
	<i>Radical Shift in Feminism-</i> participant does not identify as a feminist because they believe it has shifted towards a radical/negative movement.	"I believe modern feminism has turned a sharp corner and is no longer fighting for equality correctly. I don't believe they are fighting the battle correctly so I would not identify as a feminist."
<i>Hesitant about feminism-</i> participant does not fully identify as a feminist.	<i>Not Actively Engaging-</i> participant agrees with feminism but does not identify as a feminist because they do not participate in any form of activism.	"I do think women should be treated equal to men, however I'm not actively taking measures to make that standard true."
	<i>Mixed Feelings-</i> participant expressed mixed feelings about feminism which has led them to not fully identify as a feminist. They may agree with some portions of feminism but not others.	"I think women should be treated as men's equals but don't necessarily agree with everything baked into modern day feminism so I don't identify really for or against the movement broadly as there are sects within it I agree and disagree with."
	<i>Fear of Negative Stereotypes-</i> Participant may agree with feminism but does not necessarily identify as a feminist because they do not want to	"I believe that feminism is positive but carries strong connotations in the public mind to views I do not support"

	be associated with the negative stereotypes/radical feminism.	
<i>I am a feminist</i> - participant identifies as a feminist.	<i>Has Experienced Discrimination</i> - participant identifies as a feminist because they have either witnessed or experienced discrimination against women.	"I am a woman and have experienced inequality and abuse because of my sex/gender and have seen/heard stories of other women facing the same or worse abuse just because they are women. I want this abuse to stop and I want women to be able to have the same chances in the workforce and other places as men do."
	<i>Believes in Equality</i> - participant identifies as a feminist because they support equality	"I believe in equality among all people, regardless of race, gender, ethnicity, etc."
	<i>Inherent Rightness</i> - participant identifies as a feminist because there is an inherent rightness or moral justness about it	"I identify as a feminist because I view oppression of a group of people as morally wrong."
	<i>Agrees with Specific Causes</i> - participant identifies as a feminist because they agree with specific feminist causes.	"I am very strongly for women's rights, especially in regards to healthcare. As someone who wants to go into healthcare, I believe it is very important for women to have rights to procedures such as abortion. Men shouldn't be able to say what a woman can do with her body, it is her choice."
	<i>Women Deserve Better</i> - participant identifies as a feminist because they believe that women deserve better treatment than what they currently receive.	"I identify as a feminist because I strongly believe in the power and potential that women hold that has been suppressed by years is societal norms and patriarchal standards. I want people to be able to live freely without the weight of gender norms bringing them down. "
Level of Agreement with Provided Definition of Feminism		
<i>Agree</i> - participant says that they will identify as a feminist when feminism is defined in this way.	<i>Simple yes</i> - participants simply stated 'yes' or gave generic agreement with no supporting reason why.	"Yes, I support this idea"
	<i>Yes, this matches my definition</i> - participants stated that they agreed because the provided definition matched their own.	"Yes, because that's essentially the definition I define feminism as."
	<i>Yes, I believe in equality</i> - participants agreed with the definition because they support equality	"Yes, because all people should be treated equally"
	<i>Yes, it's inherently right</i> - participants agreed because they thought the definition had an inherent rightness or it was morally just.	"Yes because that's just how the world should work. "
	<i>Yes, other</i> - participants who agreed with the definition for other reasons.	"Yes I would, and do, identify as a feminist. I think this is a fantastic definition and I would like to see this ideology become commonplace rather than something looked down upon by a majority of the people in power."

<p><i>Hesitant</i>- participant does not fully identify as a feminist when provided with this definition. They are uncertain for various reasons.</p>	<p><i>Yes, but disagrees with part</i>- participants agree with the provided definition but may disagree with specific words in the definition or various parts of feminism (i.e. ideologies or radical feminists).</p>	<p>“Yes, but I have an issue with the use of equally. Equal does not always mean fair, where equity might be a more appropriate term here. People are given what they need to be treated equitably, because equality does not fix the ways that people have less access to resources, money, etc.”</p>
	<p><i>Yes, but this is not what feminism is</i>- Agrees with the definition but does not think it fits what feminism actually is.</p>	<p>“Yes. I would then identify as a feminist if that was actually how feminist acted and believed. But like I said, that is not how it is in the world today.”</p>
<p><i>Disagree</i>- participant does not identify as a feminist when feminism is defined in this way.</p>	<p><i>No, inherent difference between males and females</i>- participants disagree with the definition because they believe there are differences between males and females that keeps them from being equal.</p>	<p>“Absolutely not. Men and women are different in many different aspects. That’s just how the way things are both biologically and just how americans have grown up to be.”</p>
	<p><i>No, because of negative stigma</i>- participants still will not identify as a feminist because there is still a negative stigma associated with it.</p>	<p>“No, I would not identify as a feminist because that term has more cultural and political weight attached to it. There have been a number of feminists I have interacted with that more or less bolster the "all men are pigs" mentality. Due to that I would not identify as feminist.”</p>
	<p><i>No, other</i>- participants who disagreed with the provided definition for other reasons</p>	<p>“Probably not, I still don’t actively seek that out and I still think there are more pressing matters than equality based on gender”</p>

Graph 1

Histogram of LFAIS Score

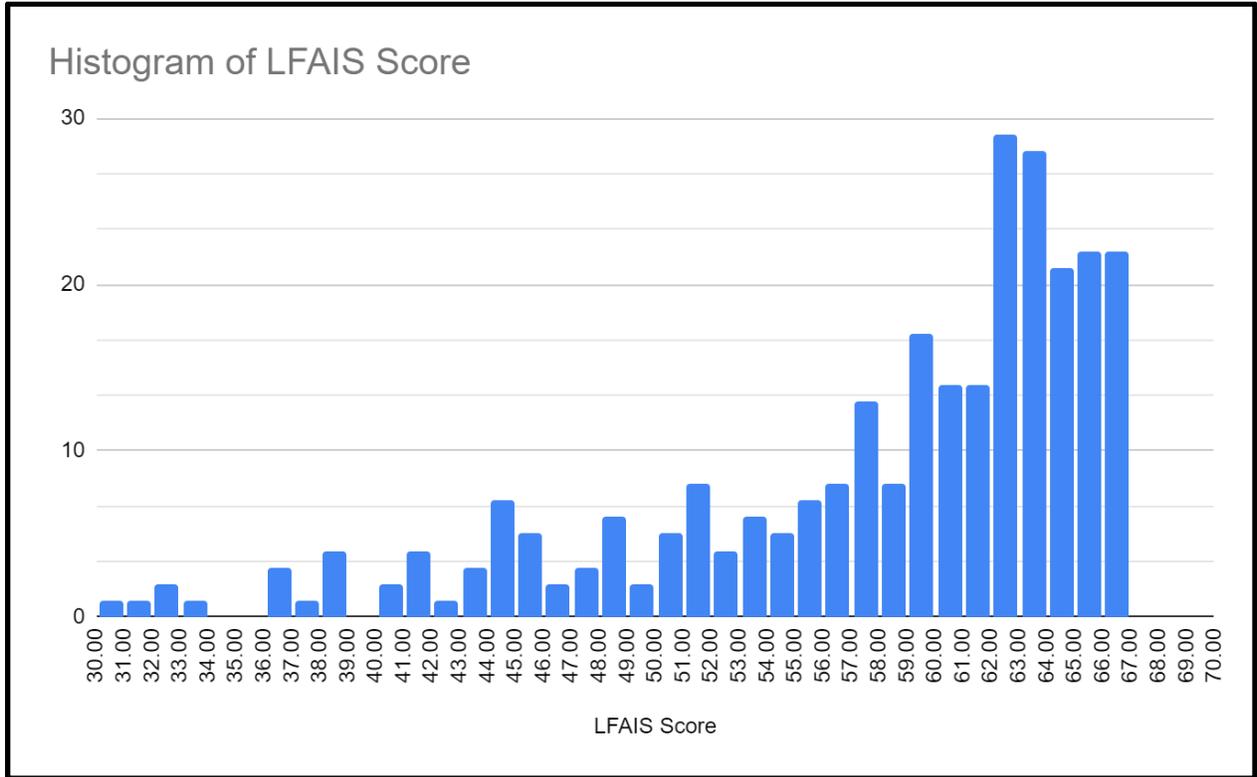


Table 2

Frequency of Subcategories Among Respondents

Coding Category & Percentage of Total Responses	Subcategory	Percentage of Coded Responses
Definitions of Feminism		
Equality/Rights Based <i>79.90%</i>	Equality for All People	8.12%
	Women's Rights/Equal Rights for Women	21.17%
	Equality of the Sexes/Genders	24.32%
	Equality between Men and Women	46.40%
Uplifting Women <i>15.10%</i>	Improving Role of Women in Society	7.14%
	Liberation of Women	14.29%
	Female Empowerment	59.52%
	Female Support	19.05%
Negative Connotations <i>4.00%</i>	Female Superiority	54.55%
	Radical Shift in Feminism	45.45%
Reasons for Identifying (or not identifying) as a Feminist		
I am not a feminist <i>12.20%</i>	Feminism Doesn't Need to Exist	11.76%
	Disagrees with Feminist Views	20.59%
	Inherent Differences Between Men & Women	8.82%
	Conflicting Identities/Activism	14.71%

	Radical Shift in Feminism	44.12%
Hesitant about feminism <i>18.30%</i>	Not Actively Engaging	17.65%
	Mixed Feelings	21.57%
	Fear of Negative Stereotypes	60.78%
I am a feminist <i>67.60%</i>	Has Experienced Discrimination	14.36%
	Believes in Equality	65.96%
	Inherent Rightness	10.11%
	Agrees with Specific Causes	4.79%
	Women Deserve Better	4.79%
Level of Agreement with Provided Definition of Feminism		
Agree <i>82.01%</i>	Simple yes	21.93%
	Yes, this matches my definition	17.11%
	Yes, I believe in equality	50.88%
	Yes, it's inherently right	6.14%
	Yes, other	3.95%
Hesitant <i>10.79%</i>	Yes, but disagrees with part	80.00%
	Yes, but this is not what feminism is	20.00%
Disagree <i>6.83%</i>	No, inherent difference between males and females	47.37%
	No, because of negative stigma	15.79%
	No, other	36.84%

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