2013

Claiming the Feminist Label: A Cross-Generational Exploration of Self-Identified Feminists

Kaitlyn Kenealy
Minnesota State University - Mankato

Claiming the feminist label: A cross-generational exploration of self-identified feminists

Kaitlyn E. Kenealy

Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for

Master of Arts

in

Gender and Women's Studies

Minnesota State University

Mankato, Minnesota

May 2013

This thesis paper has been examined and approved.

Examining Committee:

_____

Dr. Maria Bevacqua, Advisor

_____

Dr. Laura Harrison

_____

Dr. Lisa Perez

Abstract

The word feminist is often associated with negative connotations that prevent many individuals from adopting the feminist label and self-identifying with the women's movement. This creates challenges for feminists and the movement because individuals choose to believe stereotypes and distance themselves from feminism before fully understanding its purpose or positive aspects. The negative stereotypes and misconceptions associated with feminism and the women's movement contribute to individuals' hesitation to claim the feminist label.

Conservative media outlets and social groups would like members of society to believe feminism is dead. As a gender and women's studies graduate student, I know that is inaccurate. Over the years, the women's movement has grown and become more diverse, but there remains much resistance towards being associated with feminism. If progress and equality are to be achieved within the United States, it is important to understand the history of feminism and gain an accurate outlook on the movement

For my research, I interviewed self-identified feminists across generational lines ranging from ages 18 to 85. I then analyzed their stories to find common themes and patterns. Through this research, I give voice and agency to feminism and the women's movement by sharing the personal experiences of feminists. I also reveal how feminists across generational lines have come to self-identify and show how diverse stories may be connected within the larger social movement.

Table of Contents

Chapter 1: Introduction

The word feminism often elicits various reactions and emotional responses. These emotions or reactions range from fear and hesitation to empowerment and equality. As a feminist myself, I have always been intrigued by people's reactions and beliefs toward feminism. Throughout this paper, I argue the value of hearing self-identified feminists' stories. The sharing of these stories and experiences creates a sense of community within the movement. There are many seen and unforeseen consequences associated with claiming the feminist label. My cross-generational analysis of feminists demonstrates the multiple ways feminists come to self-identification, but also examines the common themes and patterns of this process. Researching and understanding the process of identification with feminism enables the movement to reveal its diversity. This research and understanding of feminism aids in facilitating a collective culture where individuals support one another through the self-identification process; additionally, it helps to form bonds and a sense of community within the feminist movement.

I was very strong-willed and fiercely independent child. It was never part of my agenda to follow others or do what others did. At the age of 13, I experienced a traumatic event. To this day, my family and even closest friends remain unaware of the details. I lost many things after that experience, but I mainly lost myself. I became detached and wanted nothing to do with others. I lacked ambition and lost motivation to engage in social activities. This disconnect was a dramatic shift from my childhood, but everyone blamed it on being a teenager.

It was not until I was about 20 years old that I resolved to not allow that experience to control my life. I was commencing my first year of college during my early twenties and I was starring in a university theater production. I felt a sense of liberation and euphoria while I was on the stage. This was the first time in over seven years that I felt like myself again. During this first year, I also met a professor who taught gender and women's studies courses. This professor told me about her class and I decided to enroll. My "click" moment occurred within those classroom walls. Everything started to make sense when I found feminism, and myself, that semester.

Once the process of claiming the feminist label is understood and normalized, the fear, anxiety, and other negative associations with the word may dissipate. By contrasting different generations of feminists, my research reveals the history and evolution of the movement. It demonstrates that there are multiple reasons behind self-identification and it examines why individuals continue to claim the label despite the backlash and negative connotations. This research illustrates reasons feminism remains relevant and necessary in individuals' lives.

A review of the literature examines the historical timeframe of feminism and the women's movement. This literature review discusses feminism as a social movement as well as the various ways individuals identify with feminism. By discussing and sharing feminist history, my research informs others on feminism and facilitates the adoption of a broader perspective on the movement.

Within the methodology section of this paper, I discuss how my research utilized qualitative research methods to examine the process of identifying with feminism. The

use of semi-structured interviews, with open-ended questions and oral history, was most

appropriate for conducting this research. That is, the interviewees had partial control of

the interview process and were not compelled to answer questions in any specific way.

As a result, the information gathered was candid and thorough.

I provide an evaluation of the data in the discussion and analysis section. During

the analysis, common themes between interviewees were noted. To examine the multiple

ways individuals come to claim the feminist label, I conducted qualitative research in

which I interviewed self-identified feminists. Once an individual claims the feminist

label, they are typically defined by their actions or ideological stance on feminist and

social justice issues. Although feminists' actions are an important element in self-

identification, my research uncovers the various ways individuals have come to identify

with feminism. The critical events that often serve as catalysts to self-identification are

too often forgotten or simply unspoken.

Along with understanding the story behind feminists' self-identification, I

interviewed multiple generations of feminists to uncover common themes and patterns

between stories. By contrasting different generations of feminists, I demonstrate the

diversity of experiences and identities of women and men who choose to adopt the

feminist label. A better knowledge of the multiple reasons associated with how and why

individuals come to identify with feminism and the feminist label, will enable others to

endorse and embrace the movement.

Feminism and the women's movement allow individuals to feel connected on a

personal level as well as a larger social level. I asked the interviewees to define what

feminism meant to them; I found that the definition differed from person to person.

Although the definitions of feminism varied across generational lines, common themes of

equality, inclusion, and empowerment emerged. One of the many attributes of the

women's movement is this inclusive[1] dynamic.

The emotional challenges associated with claiming the feminist label are not

typically discussed. My research reveals that even feminists have conflicting emotions

about the feminist label. These emotions range from hesitation with claiming the label to

selective and situational self-disclosure. Across generational lines, feminists face similar

challenges and my research reveals some common reactions. This research aids in

developing a sense of community, connectedness, and acceptance that will ultimately

attract others to feminism.

My research reveals that feminists' personal experiences correlate with self-

identification. Specifically, events that each feminist believed to be important, in regards

to the movement, connect in some way to their own personal experience. This finding

demonstrates the importance of personal experiences in claiming the label.

The same negative stereotypes associated with feminism, and the women's

movement, were identified across generational lines. Research conducted by Zucker and

Bay-Cheng (2010) reveal the negative stereotypes associated with feminism are

contributing factors in why individuals are hesitant to claim the label. Since these

stereotypes are still prominent, feminists and the women's movement must try to counter

---

[1] Although feminism and the women's movement are becoming more diverse, this has not been the case historically. The movement has been criticized for being elitist and discriminating against particular groups of people. When using the term inclusive or inclusivity in this research, I suggest that the movement is welcoming of all types of individuals with broad experiences.

these negative associations. These common themes form the basis of my research and allow or a discussion of the important components in the process of identifying with feminism.

In chapter two, I give an in-depth discussion of the methodology used for this research. I explain how semi-structured interviews with open-ended questions were most appropriate for my research; this approach is also considered oral history. I defend the use of my methods and use scholarly literature to strengthen my argument. Additionally, I elaborate on the interview process, how participants were recruited, and the limitations associated with this research.

Chapter three consists of a review of the literature on feminism and the women's movement. Within this chapter, I discuss the historical context of feminism and the women's movement. I discuss feminism as a social movement, the various ways individuals identify with feminism, and the history of feminism in the United States. I conclude this chapter with a discussion of major contributions from each of these works.

In chapter four, I discuss the cross-generational analysis of self-identified feminists. This research found common themes and patterns within each feminist's story. I provide an evaluation of the interviewees' personal experiences with self-identification and present data that support the major themes.

Last, in chapter five, I conclude with an overview of my results and suggestions for future research. The appendix consists of the open-ended interview questions that were utilized for this research, a copy of the consent form, an IRB approval letter, and the optional demographics chart.

Chapter 2: Methodology

From time to time the media questions the relevance or even existence of feminism and the women's movement. Vavrus (2007) asserts feminism has had a controversial relationship with media outlets, specifically conservative media, for constantly blaming feminists for ruining women and portraying feminism as unnecessary (p. 12). Baumgardner and Richards (2000) suggest that members of the women's movement not yell back but rather transform their reactions into action. Baumgardner and Richards (2000) state, "The media doesn't know how to deal with feminism and feminists haven't mastered the media" (p. 99). Many individuals believe feminism is a fight that has already been won and that it is no longer needed for equality. As a gender and women's studies graduate student, I hold a different perspective. I understand the significance of the feminist movement and my research reflects the relevancy and diverse identities associated with feminism and adopting the feminist label.

I interviewed self-identified feminists ranging from age 18 to 85. The interviews were analyzed for common themes and patterns. I demonstrate how feminism and the women's movement are still relevant in these participants' lives. By contrasting different generations of feminists, I demonstrate the diversity of experiences and identities of individuals who choose to adopt the feminist label. This study is concerned with understanding the multiple reasons individuals come to self-identify with feminism and the feminist label.

I conducted ten semi-structured interviews. The interview questions were open-ended to prevent the interviewee from feeling compelled to answer in a specific way. This approach is also considered an oral history because the interviewees tell their stories and I relay the information. The interview questions (or qualitative data) were analyzed and common themes noted.

Gluck and Patai (1991) discuss the feminist practice of oral history. They assert that oral history begins with conversation and feminists, like social historians, are initially attracted to oral history as a way of recovering the voices of suppressed groups (p. 9). Gluck and Patai (1991) discuss the importance of learning to listen. They state that in order to hear women's perspectives accurately, we must learn how to actively listen. Gluck and Patai (1991) also employ interviewing techniques and advocate for being flexible, letting the interview process unfold gradually. They discuss the significance in using a feminist framework while interviewing and advise the researcher to understand their own positionality.

Forbes (2003) states, "Oral history is another method of preserving women's accounts of their lives" (p. 173). She encourages other researchers to use oral history and believes this methodology is accessible on a global scale. As I conducted this research, I was conscious of these techniques and utilized them throughout the interview process.

The relevance and examination of oral history is best studied with face-to-face, semi-structured interviews, rather than other methods such as questionnaires or phone calls. The integrity of the results from the qualitative data will be highest with the proposed interview methods. Using oral history, I am able to retell stories while

providing agency and voice to individual stories, specifically people who self-identify as feminist. Ethnography would not work well for my research because I would only be able to observe, and it would take years to gather a substantial amount of data.

In *Feminist Research Practice*, the authors discuss the importance of being an active listener and provide strategies on how to accomplish that. Since these were semi-structured interviews, I asked questions and actively listened to what each participant said and let them control most of the interview. I utilized many different listening strategies so I was prepared to facilitate the interview.

The demographic characteristics of the sample included individuals across generational lines. Specifically, the sample consists of college aged and older individuals (from 18-85). By seeking individuals across generational lines, I add diversity to my research and show how different generations of feminists are still connected by ideology. I did not actively seek out particular characteristics of interviewees. I was open to anyone who self-identified as a feminist and was willing to participate in the interview sessions. For this research, it is important to be open to anyone who self-identifies as a feminist and wants to share their story. Optional demographic data was collected from participants. Prior to commencing the interview, participants were given a list of questions about race, age, gender, date of birth, sexual orientation, etc. Completing this demographic form was voluntary and participants had the option to skip any or all questions they preferred not to answer.

To gain participants, I used social media, phone calls, and e-mail communication. Once the interviews were complete, I asked the participants if they knew of others who would likely participate in this research (snow-ball sample).

At the beginning of each interview, I explained the purpose of my research and reviewed the consent form with the interviewee. Once the consent form was completed, I discussed the optional demographic form with each participant. I asked if they had any questions or concerns, then we both signed the consent form and began the interview.

The interviewee had the option to choose a location they preferred for the interview. If no location was preferred for the interviewee, I recommended a quiet location on campus or at a nearby coffee shop. Each interview lasted 45 to 60 minutes. As stated earlier, the questions were open-ended and recorded. Additionally, I took notes as the participants spoke. I tape-recorded the sessions and transcribed each interview. This method allowed me, as the interviewer, to stay present and focused on the process at hand. After the interviews, I assigned each interviewee an identification number (ID) that corresponded to a consent form. I used this coding system to protect the identities of participants. In addition, pseudonyms replaced participants' actual names to ensure confidentiality.

Semi-structured interviews are most appropriate for this study because they enable me to understand the individual's lived experiences. Open-ended questions allow the interviewee to have partial control of the interview and disclose the information they feel is most important. Although I had a set of interview questions, it was up to the interviewee to be in control. If these were structured interviews, I would have all control

of the interview progression and the authenticity of the participant's voice would be limited. Structured interviews would limit this research because they give the interviewer greater control and follow stricter guidelines regarding the length of time, depth, and direction of particular questions. My research explores personal experiences and how individuals come to self-identify as feminist. I cannot limit their stories or voice by having a controlled environment. Additionally, focus groups would not be ideal for this research because the dynamics of the group could silence certain individuals. Because I am seeking specific and detailed information regarding people's identification with feminism, a group dynamic would not be conducive to my research.

In *Feminist Research Practice*, Sharlene Nagy Hesse-Biber discusses the feminist practice of in-depth interviewing. She encourages the interviewer to "Think of the interview method running along a 'continuum' from 'informal' to 'formal'" (p. 115). As I conducted the semi-structured interviews, it was helpful for me to remember this statement because the control of the interview would shift, and I had to be conscious and ready for that to occur.

Hesse-Biber discusses that feminists are particularly concerned with identifying experiences that are often hidden. In-depth interviewing allows the feminist researcher to access the voices of those who are marginalized in a society (p. 118). My research seeks to provide voice and agency to self-identified feminists. Through these stories, I heighten awareness about feminism and the women's movement.

Semi-structured interviews are most appropriate, because I seek to examine individuals' lived experiences. I acknowledge that everyone comes to feminism and the

women's movement for different reasons, and I want to share their individual stories. Conservative media outlets often portray feminists in a negative light, but by highlighting individuals' stories, this research provides agency and authenticity to their stories and to the movement.

As a self-identified feminist, I understand the unique journey to find feminism and that there is value in hearing other individuals' stories. There are many negative stereotypes associated with feminists and feminism. Through my research, I counter those negative ideologies by allowing individuals the opportunity to freely express their stories because those experiences are often forgotten once self-identification occurs. Although there are diverse voices within the movement, there are common reasons why individuals have decided to adopt the feminist label. Even though their stories are different, common themes or bonds have united them.

There are some limitations associated with my research, the first being the location and demographics. All the interviewees had a college education or were currently pursuing a degree. As a result, those who participated in my study were not representative of all feminists. Furthermore, my research was conducted in Minnesota and Wisconsin and my sample was from two localized areas. Thus, this research has generalizability limitations and my research is not highly representative of all feminist voices. The sample size was relatively small; I interviewed ten participants. Although my research is not inclusive of all feminists, it is a convenience sample. Also, it is necessary to be conscious of my privilege associated with this research. I was raised by a single mother who took care of four children. Although she did not claim the feminist label, she

exhibited independent feminist characteristics. Growing up in a lower to working class environment has affected my interest in feminism and self-identification. As a college-educated white heterosexual female, I have a wide selection of friends, but they mainly consist of the same race. This limited my research because only two women of color and one white male participated in the interview process. Being a self-identified feminist may have also influenced particular aspects of this research.

Chapter 3: Literature Review

A review of the literature on feminism and the women's movement is often diverse but frequently negative and misleading. The negative stereotypes and misconceptions associated with feminism and the women's movement contribute to individual's hesitation to claim the feminist label. It is important to understand the history of feminism and gain an accurate outlook on the movement if we want to progress and achieve equality within the United States.

The following chapter presents a review of the literature on the historical context of feminism and the women's movement. It provides a discussion of feminism as a social movement, the various ways individuals identify with feminism, and the history of feminism in the United States. This literature review concludes with a summary of the major contributions from these works and examines some actions that must be taken in order to advance the movement.

Feminism is important for understanding and gauging insight on society's progression toward, or regression from, gender equality. History plays a critical role in understanding the women's movement and those who identify with feminism. A historical analysis helps provide a foundation for future research. Additionally, a historical perspective allows for a comprehensive understanding of the movement, its accomplishments, and shortcomings.

Feminism as an identity

Vavrus (2007) asserts conservative media outlets would like the general population to believe that feminism is dead (p. 12). Our society views feminism as a fight

that has already been won and that we no longer need a social movement for equality.

Although the history of feminism is complicated, it is important to understand the

workings of adopting the feminist identity. Feminism itself cannot be singularly defined.

That is, it is not a linear construct that can be summed up with one definition or

characteristic. However, conservative media often distorts the reality and portrays the

movement in a biased fashion, and the general public lacks the background to assess fully

these negative descriptions. Negative stereotypes are used to devalue the movement. In

order to break these negative stereotypes and connotations, we must discuss the value in

claiming the feminist identity.

In a recent publication, Jessica Valenti (2010) discusses how the media has

influenced society's view on women, particularly focusing on the 2008 election. Valenti

(2010) states that the media portrayed Sarah Palin and Christine O'Donnell as the new

conservative feminism. However, these female Republican candidates are more anti-

woman than pro-woman. These candidates have been fighting against women's

reproductive rights, such as access to abortions, birth control, and equal pay legislation.

Valenti (2010) raises an important point: does gender or identification as a female

automatically make you a feminist? She advocates for feminists to stop insisting that

gender matters above everything else and believes the movement can and needs to

progress. Valenti (2010) writes, "Ensuring feminism's future doesn't stop at embracing

intersectionality—we must also shine a spotlight on the real feminists" (p. 19). This is

what I hope to achieve through my research. I want to share real feminists' stories of

coming to identify with feminism and provide voice and agency to the women's movement.

A review of the literature reveals that there is an extensive body of research on why individuals choose not to identify as feminists. In a study by Zucker and Bay-Cheng (2010) the authors sought to clarify the distinction between being feminist-minded, e.g., holding feminist values but not a feminist identity, and being feminist-identified. Recent research suggests a qualitative difference between women who identify as feminist and those who support gender equality but do not claim a feminist identity (p. 1896). Zucker and Bay-Cheng (2010), state that most research indicates that the stigmatization of feminism plays a significant role in individuals, specifically women, not taking the feminist label.

If stigma is indeed a factor in women's reluctance to identify as feminist, it would explain findings that exposure to settings in which feminism is normalized results in increased identification as feminist. Zucker and Bay-Cheng (2010) have found that exposure to positive information about feminism, whether through formal education or personal relationships, is predictive of explicit self-identification (p. 1905).

Zucker and Bay-Cheng (2010) surveyed 276 college students and concluded, "There appears to be more common ground among women who are not feminist identified than there is among women who claim to be feminist minded (non-labelers and feminists)" (p. 1915). Zucker and Bay-Cheng (2010) suggest that the non-labelers may not identify with the feminist label right now but might eventually become allies through increased exposure to feminism.

In a recent study about college women and the feminist identity, Leaper and Arias (2011) say that, feminism refers to a belief in gender equality and an awareness of contemporary gender discrimination at interpersonal and societal levels. Ironically, many women who endorse gender equality do not identify as feminists (p. 476). Leaper and Arias (2011) argue there are multiple components that contribute to women's self-identification as a feminist. Leaper and Arias' (2011) research explored these different components. The categories consisted of socioeconomic background, ethnic background, sexist event, exposure to feminism, social gender identity, gender-egalitarian attitudes, awareness of sexism, and stereotyped evaluations of feminists. For instance, within the category of exposure to feminism, they hypothesized that exposure to feminism would be positively correlated with feminist self-identification. Leaper and Arias (2011) found that experiences with sexism and exposure to feminism each significantly predicted self-identification as a feminist when entered into a regression model (p. 485). Leaper and Arias (2011) also found that holding stereotyped views of feminists may be a key factor that accounts for the "I'm not a feminist but" phenomenon. That is, holding negative stereotypes about a group, such as feminists, will lead women to avoid embracing it in their identity (p. 486).

Both of the aforementioned studies have demonstrated that exposure to feminism is a key indicator for individuals to identify with feminism. These studies also show that breaking negative stereotypes is important for promoting the identification of feminism and moving the women's movement forward.

Baumgardner and Richards (2000) discuss the ways feminism has changed

women's lives while addressing the necessity for more to be done. The authors address

the "click" moment women often experience before identifying as feminists along with

the powerful experience that transpires when women come together. Baumgardner and

Richards (2000) say, "Whether it's volunteering at a women's shelter, attending an all-

women's college or a speak-out for Take Back the Night, or dancing at a strip club,

whenever women are gathered together there is a great potential for the individual

women, and the even location itself, to become radicalized" (p. 15). My research gives

self-identified feminists the opportunity to retell their stories and demonstrate the impact

diverse voices can have in society.

In *S/He Brain*, Robert Nadeau discusses the history of gender in America. Nadeau

(1996) reiterates a study conducted by sociologist Beth Schneider. For her research,

Schneider wanted to understand why so many American women who support feminist

goals do not wish to be labeled feminists. Schneider collected impressions of feminism

from a diverse group of women whose ages ranged from nineteen to sixty-six.

Ultimately, Schneider concluded that the hostility was directed at the feminist definition

of attitudes toward normal womanhood, sexuality, maternity, and personality traits like

nurturance, warmth, and non-aggressiveness. While most of those surveyed felt that the

feminist movement had done much to improve the status of women, there was a general

agreement that feminists are tough, aggressive, unattractive, hostile, and afraid of being a

woman (p. 6). Again, it appears that a positive exposure to feminism will aid individuals

in adopting the feminist label. However, in order to do that, we must remove the stigma

and negative stereotypes associated with the word.

   Scholars have raised the issue of whether men can identify with the feminist label,

or whether they should. Crowe (2011) argues that supporting the feminist movement has

many benefits for men. Crowe (2011) acknowledges the challenges that men will face in

supporting feminism and the women's movement. However, Crowe believes that support

of the movement from men will facilitate its advancement. Crowe (2011) states,

"Feminism affords men the promise of social relationships with women premised on

mutual respect and equality. By challenging traditional conceptions of masculinity, it

provides an opportunity for men to adopt alternative social roles" (p. 51). Crowe

advocates that men can, and should, claim the feminist identity. I too assert that men's

identification with feminism is a valuable step towards the advancement of the women's

movement.

   Michael Kimmel (1996) traces the origins of masculinity in American culture and

acknowledges how the backlash and opposition toward feminism has always existed;

historically and presently, men have been torn on issue of feminism. Kimmel asserts if

more pro-feminist men existed this would enable men to break from their socially

constructed masculine roles. Kimmel addresses the benefits of men in the feminist

movement and advocates for a democratic manhood. Kimmel (1996) states "The

American manhood of the future cannot be based on obsessive self-control, defensive

exclusion, or frightened escape. We need a new definition of masculinity for a new

century." (p. 333) He advocates for a new definition of masculinity, one that enables men

to feel secure and confident. "A definition that centers around standing up for justice and equality instead of running away from commitment and engagement." (p. 333) Kimmel concludes by saying, "Profeminist men believe, as Floyd Dell wrote at the turn of the century, that 'feminism will make it possible for the first time for men to be free'." (p. 333). The research participants supported the idea that the women's movement would benefit from having more men involved.

In Sullivan and Martin's (2010) research they pose the same question of "when did you know you were a feminist?" Then, chapter by chapter, they tell various and relatively famous women's stories about how they knew they were feminists. My research differs and adds to the literature because, although I find value in the "click" moment, I am searching to find commonalities in people's stories. Furthermore, I will be interviewing average (or non-famous) individuals who identify with feminism. I will share the lived experiences of everyday self-identified feminists.

Feminism as a social movement

The history of American women is often left out of textbooks; therefore, the history of feminism is seldom discussed. When taught or lectured about in academic settings, it is regularly told through the waves of feminism. The effectiveness of using the wave analogy is debated by feminists themselves; because of this, I avoid using the waves in the present study.

Banks (1981) traces the history of feminism and the women's movement. By not using the waves metaphor, Banks is able to be more inclusive of all the different goals during time period. Banks (1981) starts with the early years (1840-1870), which she

considers to be the evangelical contributions to feminism, the campaign for equal rights, and feminism and the socialist tradition. Next are the Golden Years (1870-1920); in this timeframe, feminists are in pursuit of moral reform, the ideal of female superiority, the protection of the weak, and votes for women. Banks (1981) then describes the next era as the Intermission (1920-1960), which consists of women and welfare and the new woman. Finally, she categorizes the modern movement, which is the re-birth of the equal rights tradition, radical feminism, and reproductive health.

Throughout Banks' (1981) historical timeline she reiterates that throughout history, not all women have considered themselves feminists. Paradoxically, the most prominent voices against feminism are often women themselves. Along with providing a historical context of the women's movement, Banks (1981) explains the importance of understanding that being a female does not automatically make you a feminist. People are often surprised when they learn that most of the opposition actually comes from other women.

Ryan (1992) also provides a detailed outline of feminism and the women's movement. With greater detail, Ryan (1992) discusses the divisions and splits between first, second, and third generation feminists that have occurred through the women's movement. Just because women are fighting for equality does not mean they all agree ideologically on every issue. These ideological divisions that have occurred throughout the movement are important to acknowledge. It shows the diversity within the movement and how not all feminists are the same.

Davis (1999) discusses the importance of social movements gaining press coverage. The media is a vital component in getting a movement's message to the general public. Davis (1999) discusses the complex relationship the media has had toward feminism. She claims that the mass media has been, for the most part, hostile to feminism. Davis (1999) states, "Starting in 1969, they lavished attention on women's liberation groups until there was hardly an American who hadn't heard of the movement. As a result, thousands of women joined feminist groups, tried consciousness-raising, and turned out for rallies and demonstrations" (p. 106). Essentially, there was both positive and negative press that affected the movement in multiple ways. First, media coverage spread awareness about the movement and served as a catalyst to gaining support from women who might not have otherwise provided support. Second, it put women's issues on the forefront of people's minds. They finally saw significant amounts of women banding together for a common cause. Finally, negative press created many stereotypes that the current movement is still trying to reverse. Although there is value in having media coverage on movements, there are some negative outcomes that may arise. It is important for the women's movement to be cognizant of this complex relationship with media outlets.

Rodgers and Knight (2011) discuss the burnout and struggles associated with feminism and women's movements. In their research, Rodgers and Knight (2011) examined how feminist organizations struggle to negotiate the pressures of diminished and inadequate funding and changing relations with the state. Rodgers and Knight (2011) argue that while the erosion of the organizational infrastructure will have an impact on

the ability of feminists to launch campaigns and gain attention, the authors advocate for

the need for feminists to develop new activist strategies.

Rodgers and Knight (2011) discovered that two interconnected movements, the

pro-family and anti-abortion movements, have made ongoing attempts to undermine

feminist concerns (p. 572). If the women's movement is to advance, new strategies

should be incorporated to get the message across. If exposure is critical, my research

provides a means to an end.

Clack (2012) asserts that the future is female and advocates for a revision of

feminism. Clack's article begins with a personal narrative of how she came to identify as

a feminist. She discusses how feminism has shaped her on an individual and societal

level, especially her career as a professor. Clack (2012) mentions, "Feminism formed a

significant part of my life. It shaped my teaching and also through exploring ideas of the

Goddess, it shaped my experience of the divine" (p. 259). Clack became inspired to

research her female students who identified with feminism and asked them to describe

how feminism was relevant to their lives.

The results of Clack's (2012) research provides consensus with my own research

on the themes of harassment, sexual abuse, and unequal treatment in the workplace.

There were stories of rape and attempted rapes. Some women remained resistant to taking

the feminist label. Like many feminists, Clack did not identify with feminism until she

was an undergraduate in college. This is yet another example of the importance of

exposure to feminism in growing the women's movement. Clack (2012) states, "It is only

through reflecting on our experiences that women have been able to challenge dominant

discourse developed by patriarchy over a millennium and perhaps it is only by maintaining the importance of the personal that we will be able to affect the political" (p. 256). My research supports these findings. Specifically, I found that exposure to feminism facilitates the process of claiming the feminist label.

History of feminism in the United States

In order to facilitate a broader perspective on feminism and the women's movement, it is imperative to understand the diverse history, evolution, and theory behind the movement. By discussing the history of feminism in the United Sates it allows individuals to see feminism from a social and political standpoint.

Susan Faludi (1991) addresses the history of backlash associated with feminism and the women's movement. Faludi (1991) begs the question, if women have been liberated and feminism is not needed, why are there so many reports about women's unhappiness? How can women be liberated and not liberated at the same time? Faludi (1991) acknowledges conservative media's attempt to discredit feminism, but then reiterates statistics of the wage gap, rape, poverty, and reproductive health. If women have it all, then why are there disproportionate disparities amongst women?

Faludi (1991) discusses historical gains women have made throughout history but notes there has always been backlash. Faludi (1991) asserts, "In other words, the antifeminist backlash has been set off not by women's achievement of full equality but by increased possibility that they might win it" (p. xx). The fear of feminism and feminists are a driving force for individual's hesitation to claim the label. Hopefully my research aids in breaking some of the stigma associated with the word.

Along with the backlash, there are many myths associated with feminism. These myths and stereotypes have persisted and remain prevalent today. Faludi (1991) states, "A backlash against women's rights is nothing new in American history. Indeed, it is a recurring phenomenon: it returns every time women begin to make some headway toward equality" (p. 46). It is important to have an understanding of women's history as well as the backlash associated with it in order for the women's movement to progress. By having this knowledge, the movement will perhaps, be more prepared and able to anticipate the backlash.

In the collection, *How Social Movement's Matter*, an overview and analysis of the history of social movements in the U.S and other European regions is given. A variety of topics are discussed such as, how social movements matter, public policy, the impact of social movements, and public discourse. Gelb and Hart (1999) discuss feminist politics and the women's movement. They analyze the change and impact the women's movement has had on society and public policy. Gelb and Hart (1999) state "The strength of the American women's movement is in its broad, varied, and continually expanding network structure, ranging from informal women's collectives, to women's studies programs in universities, to more structured professional organizations such as NOW and NWPC" (p. 177). The authors end the chapter by discussing advancements made by the women's movement throughout history. Having a broader understanding of the women's movement in the United States provides others the opportunity to recognize achievements made by women throughout history.

Belzer (2004) gives a historical overview of the ways in which women throughout history have used their voice as resistance. She discusses the historical prejudices that women encountered, such as being referred to as "Jezebel" or "The whore of Babylon" and how they overcame such resistance. This rhetoric, or negative language, is still seen in contemporary society today.

Belzer's (2004) research focuses on the first phase of the American women's movement from 1835 to 1860. This research examined the women who raised their voices during this era, how and why they started speaking out, why they continued to do so, and how they fought for their right to speak. Specifically, Belzer's (2004) research focused on speeches delivered to public audiences. During this time in American history, the public and private spheres were readily enforced. Women were conditioned to stay in the private sphere and any challenge of that cultural practice was considered rebellious.

 Belzer (2004) argues that, "Denial of the right to speak-or even be recognized-is what turned many reformist women into feminists" (p. 321). Belzer asserts that by speaking out women were rejecting their "natural" role (Belzer, 2004). Belzer (2004) also says, "By defying societal stereotypes, showing courage in the face of resistance, and publicly proclaiming their new ideas, feminists not only made strides in pre-Civil War years, but they also served as role models to the generations that followed" (p. 341). My research aims to speak out on the behalf of feminists in hopes that they can serve as role models for future generations.

Sara Evans (2003) starts by emphasizing the importance of understanding and being cognizant of women's history. Evans (2003) then summarizes the origins of the

second wave and their vision for equality and the process of consciousness-raising.

Evans (2003) categorizes second wave innovations as the ''golden years'' when the

movement generated massive changes in laws, revived the battle for the ERA, and

founded a vast array of new organizations and institutions. Evans (2003) emphasizes the

internal conflict that persisted in the women's movement and argues that there are

historically specific reasons that conflict intensified in the middle 1970s. In the end,

Evans advises that although the backlash to feminism is inevitable, feminism must

continue to appear in new forms of social institutions. My research emphasizes the

different generational voices associated with the women's movement. Through my

research, I provide a broader perspective and invite a larger audience to identify as

feminists.

Catherine Eschle (2002) argues that feminist movement debates have generated

important reworkings of the concepts of power, politics, agency, and change. They

point to ways in which the most vulnerable women in the world could gain some

control over the globalizing processes shaping their lives. Throughout her book, Eschle

(2002) discusses modernity, social movements, democracy, and culture. She claims that

social movements are a product of modernity and that all of these concepts are

intertwined. Eschle (2002) advocates for reconstructing the feminist movement by

having a more inclusive movement, which includes more local and global action. My

research gives voice to self-identified feminists' and aids in facilitating a more diverse

movement.

Jane Masbridge (1986) discusses the controversial history of The Equal Rights Amendment (ERA) in the United States. The Equal Rights Amendment was originally written by Alice Paul in 1923. Since its introduction, the ERA in multiple states has been ratified, reintroduced, rejected, as well as accepted. Currently, the ERA is not an official amendment.

Masbridge (1986) offers multiple reasons as to why she believes the ERA has not been enacted. For instance, it is stated that public opinion on the amendment has always seemed to have substantial approval, but when the time came for voting to approve of the amendment, the ERA always fell short. Another argument made throughout Masbridge's book is that the amendment did not reach or apply to all women. In order to pass this amendment, the women's movement must take a more inclusive approach, and identify ways to make all women feel this amendment applies to them and affects them in important ways. Masbridge (1986) ends by describing the future of the amendment and what needs to happen in order to ratify the amendment. The history of the feminist movement has been filled with achievements and failures. Having a better understanding of the ERA enables the movement to reflect and learn from these mistakes.

Kimberly Springer (2005) asserts that black feminist history is often understudied and underappreciated when discussing the women's movement. Springer (2005) chronicles five black feminist organizations in the 1970s, which included: the Third World Women's Alliance, the National Black Feminist Organization, the

National Alliance of Black Feminists, the Combahee River Collective, and Black

Women Organized for Action.

Springer (2005) argues that black feminists are historically the first activists in

the United States to theorize and act upon the intersections of race, gender, and class (p.

2). The goal of her book is to explore the life cycle of black feminist organizations in

the 1970s (p. 15). Springer (2005) gives a historical analysis of each group's

contributions, achievements, and failures.

There were internal struggles for these black feminist organizations, struggles

similar to white feminist organizations. Many of the organizing groups mirrored the civil

rights movement and women's movement. Some organizations chose a hierarchal

structure while others opposed it. Finances were also a major issue. The primary source

of income came from member dues. Most of the organizations refused to accept grants

from other organizations that ultimately resulted in limited resources.

Springer (2005) states, "Black feminists' collective identity formation process

involved not only seeing the larger structural aspects of racism, sexism, classism, and

heterosexism, but also recognizing pluralism in their organization" (p. 137). Black

feminists were at the forefront in identifying intersectionality, and the women's

movement has benefited from this acknowledgement. Springer (2005) finishes the book

by highlighting how limited funding, activist burnout, ideological disputes, coalition with

white feminists, and leadership disputes played a crucial role in black feminist

organizations' demise. Unfortunately, these issues remain prevalent in today's women's

movement and are a concern that needs to be addressed. This research attempted to have

diversity within the participants', but only two women of color were interviewed.

Rory Dicker (2008) discusses the history of feminism and uses her personal

experience while teaching women's studies courses. Dicker starts the semester by asking

students what a feminist is. They typically answer with stereotypes associated with

feminism, such as hairy legs, ugly, no make-up, man-hating, and lesbian. Similar to my

research and classroom experience, individuals mention the same stereotypes. Through

my research, I hope to counter some of the negative stereotypes associated with feminism

and the women's movement.

Dicker (2008) uses the wave metaphor and goes through each wave discussing

their contributions to the U.S. women's movement. Dicker (2008) acknowledges that it is

easier to identify or solidify first and second wave contributions because they are over.

Since we are still in third wave, it can be more difficult to identify. Dicker (2008) states

that understanding our history will aid in changing our future. Dicker (2008) states,

"Only by making our voices heard-through voting and getting involved in activist work

that moves us, either locally, nationally, or globally- can we try to make changes to the

polices that affect our personal and collective happiness" (p. 150). This research offers a

voice to self-identified feminists' through the use of oral history.

In the collection, *Social Movements and American Political Institutions*, the

authors attempt to bridge the study of social movements with American political

institutions. They start with a theoretical understanding of American institutions, then

discuss the origins of American social movements, followed by American politics, and

conclude with a summary of the works and the implications that can be drawn. Andrew

McFarland (1998) discusses the theory of social movements and American politics.

McFarland (1998) asserts "American political institutions must consider how a

movement enters the political, legal, and public policy processes" (p. 11). My research

aims to help others in understanding feminism and the women's movement.

      A review of the literature examines the historical time frame of feminism and the

women's movement. Feminism, as a social movement, is discussed, along with the

various ways individuals identify with feminism. The history of feminism in the United

States aids in facilitating a broader understanding of the movement. By discussing and

sharing feminist history, this research informs others about feminism and facilitates the

adoption of a broader perspective on the movement.

Chapter 4: Discussion and Analysis

This research examines common themes and patterns within the identification process of self-identified feminists. By analyzing these trends, I was able to uncover the multifaceted components associated with claiming the feminist label. Each participant had his or her own personal reason for identification; however, their identification processes and personal experiences often mirrored one another's. The evolution of self-identification is an important component in claiming the feminist label. My research attempts to analyze the process of identification.

The qualitative data, gathered through interviews, were analyzed using a content analysis approach. This content analysis revealed common themes that contribute to identifying with feminism. The sections that follow discuss the results of a cross-generational study of self-identified feminists. Specifically, I provide an evaluation of interviewees' personal experiences with self-identification and present data that support the major themes.

Identification

Claiming the feminist label is a choice that comes with many consequences, both seen and unforeseen. My research reflects this complexity and highlights the diversity associated with claiming the label and identity. This research revealed that the age of identification varied from late high school (18 years old) to adult (30 years old). Common themes for claiming the feminist label are trauma, injustices, and college education. It is important to note these themes are not mutually exclusive; that is, they overlap with one another and are often present for each individual.

Three out of ten participants identified a traumatic moment or event that triggered self-identification. One participant had an abortion in high school, another was raped, and one got divorced from an alcoholic partner. The interviewees explained that trauma triggered the realization that it was necessary to claim the feminist label. Feminisms' inclusivity can provide a safe place for individuals to identify and create a community with others who share similar traumatic experiences.

Nine out of ten participants identified college as a key moment for claiming the feminist label. Some interviewees indicated that during college, they joined gender and women's studies programs, women's centers, or took gender and women's studies classes. Four out of the ten participants identified graduate school as the moment when identification occurred, which was often through feminist research or self-exploration of feminist studies. The interviewees said college exposed them to feminist thought and put a name and label on the identification process. Almost all the interviewees grew up in a conservative household where family members perhaps identified with the ideology of feminism, but not the label.

Seven out of the ten interviewees identified personal experiences and injustices as important aspects of self-identification. These experiences mainly consisted of injustices due to gender. Kate, a 23-year-old participant, who identifies as a white, heterosexual female, discussed two sexist moments in high school that triggered self-identification. One sexist moment was in science class where the male teacher made misogynistic comments about this individual's gender. The other was in debate class, which consisted predominantly of males. This participant explained that the injustices she faced, based

upon her gender, ultimately initiated her self-identification. The interviewee stated,

"Although I had always exhibited feminist behavior, these two moments opened my

eyes." This participant's experience is similar to many feminists' self-identification

processes. Some feminists refer to this moment has the "click" moment; either way, the

process of claiming the feminist label correlates with personal experiences and injustices.

This moment of self-identification varies from person to person and can happen at any

time.

It appears that some individuals come to identify with feminism as a result of a

critical incident or through the awareness of the feminist movement. Many identify with

feminism once they gain insight and exposure to feminist thought or research. Often it is

a combination of these factors that lead an individual to self-identify with feminism.

Most interviewees discussed identification as a continual process, or an evolution

that continues to develop today. Jessica, a 32-year-old participant, who identifies as a

white, heterosexual female, stated, "My feminism is still evolving, I had many small

'clicks' but I had to learn it on my own. I hope it continues to evolve and I am a better

feminist than I was yesterday." A better understanding of the self-identification process

will promote identification with feminism and enable others to relate to the women's

movement.

Research conducted by Leaper and Arias (2011) indicates that multiple

components contribute to self-identification with feminism. Zucker and Bay-Cheng

(2010) found that exposure to positive information about feminism, whether through

formal education or personal relationships, is predictive of explicit self-identification (p.

1905). In support of these previous findings, my research reveals that many factors contribute to self-identification with feminism. For instance, my research correlates with these studies by showing that exposure to feminism is a key indicator for claiming the feminist label. Also, this research has revealed common themes and patterns why individuals claim the feminist label.

Definitions

Because this research is concerned with feminists' lived experiences, it is important to discover what feminism means to each participant and how he or she personally defines it. Feminism allows individuals to identify with, and become part of, a larger social movement. It allows individuals the opportunity to connect personal experiences with similar experiences of others, while fostering a sense of acceptance and community. This inclusivity is one of the powerful dimensions and attributes of feminism.

Each participant has a different definition for what he or she believes it means to be a feminist. Again, this inclusivity of feminism allows individuals to be part of something on a personal level, as well as the larger social level. Due to the fact it is not singularly defined, feminism (once it is understood) becomes relevant and seen in everyday life. If one were to ask a handful of feminists to define feminism, it is likely they would receive a variety of different definitions. This research found that to be true. Although the definition of feminism differs among feminists, these individuals remain ideologically connected by the common goal of social justice and equality.

A common theme throughout the interviewees' definitions of feminism was equality. John, a 63-year-old participant, who identifies as a white, heterosexual male, defined feminism as, "The obvious…equality and spiritually to treat people the way you want to be treated." Mary, a 26-year-old, white female participant, who indicated no sexual orientation stated, "You think all people should be treated equally. Feminists take note of all oppressions: race, class, and gender." The fight for equality and social justice has always been at the core of what feminists stand for and this research reflects the feminist ideology.

Another pattern is the notion that the definition of feminism has evolved. Holly, a white, 23-year-old female participant, who identified no sexual orientation, stated, "Feminism is the radical notion that women are people. The definition changes and evolves over time." Kate declared, "Originally it was someone who advocated for equal treatment. Now it goes beyond that to include race, class, and gender…intersectionality." These interviewees express an understanding of changes in feminist thought over time and this is reflected in their definitions of feminism.

The theme of personal empowerment was also evident within the participants' definitions. Lucy, a 22-year-old female interviewee, who identifies as an Asian, lesbian, stated, "Staying true to what I know is right. A whole new world opened up to me from feminism. You have to be open and willing to pursue a new and open way of thinking." Janis, a 61-year-old participant, who identifies as white, heterosexual female, said, "It means that I drive my own destiny." As the interviewees stated above, personal empowerment can be a life changing emotion; it can positively alter an individual's life.

Although the definitions of feminism varied, many common themes emerged. Most importantly, the definition of feminism included a factor of autonomy and justice. Many individuals indicated that equality, inclusion, and empowerment are important to define what being a feminist means. This inclusive nature is one of the many feminist attributes and is part of the reason feminism has not ceased.

Identification among friends and family

Across generational lines, participants had fewer family members than friends who identified with the feminist label. Although the family members may have identified with the ideology or displayed independent behaviors associated with feminism, they did not claim the feminist label. Eight out of ten participants indicated they grew up in a conservative or rural neighborhood. Perhaps these individuals chose to identify with feminism as a way to reject the conservative ideology. Additionally, the demographics of this research were located in the Midwest (Wisconsin and Minnesota).

It was common for participants to say they were more selective with choosing friends and that they wanted to surround themselves with other self-identified feminists. Lucy stated, "I am not friends with people who don't identify." Pam, a 25-year-old female participant, who identifies as Asian, no sexual orientation, said, "Sometimes, I feel out of place with people that don't identify." These sentiments of isolation and selective friendships were common among all interviewees, and it is not uncommon to surround yourself with like-minded individuals. Since the process of self-identification is complex, it is important to create a community where individuals feel comfortable, safe and supported.

It appears there is a relationship between self-identification and the environment in which an individual is reared. This research found that the majority of the participants who self-identify as feminist were raised in a rural or conservative environment. Although my research cannot make causal inferences, it is interesting to note this phenomenon. Perhaps feminism provides an alternative ideology from what they have been exposed to their whole lives and serves as an outlet for safe self-exploration. Additionally, it appears that once self-identification occurs, feminists are choosing to surround themselves with other self-identified feminists. As a result, they create a community and safe space for one another.

Experiences identifying with the feminist label

Across generational lines, participants identified conflicting emotions associated with personal experiences since claiming the feminist label. With these diverse experiences, this research shows that claiming the feminist label has multiple, as well as conflicting, consequences. The participants described feminism as liberating and empowering, but also challenging and complex. This dichotomy persisted across generational lines; eight out of ten interviewees described the process of claiming the feminist label as challenging and conflicting. Conversely, two out of ten interviewees described identification as empowering and liberating.

Several participants described the experience of self-identification as challenging or full of conflicting emotions. Holly stated, "Challenging…you are the feminist, so tell me this about all women. You can't be just a regular person because there is no room to be wrong. But even with all that, it can be very rewarding in certain spaces." Lucy said,

"The overall mood can be best described as friction. I am selective with who I surround myself with. At the same time, it has been fun. I have unique freedoms such as, I am liberated from labels. I am liberated by having choices and options." The interviewees all defined various emotions experienced since claiming the feminist label, but even with these contradictory emotions, participants' did not report regret. The benefits of claiming the feminist label took precedent over the obstacles.

Many interviewees identified conflicting emotions surrounding their experiences since claiming the feminist label, but overall they described the experience as empowering or liberating. Mary declared, "Feminism is a good thing, but people think the word is limiting. I feel more empowered and I know where I stand." Kate said, "The experience has been pretty pleasant and good. I thought I would have more backlash. Since identifying, it has made me 100% more comfortable with myself and my body. I don't feel like I have to fit other people's ideal standards." Furthermore, Janis defined her experience as evolving: "It has evolved. In high school I felt misunderstood, in college I felt liberated. Overall, I am glad I became a feminist; it has been enriching and empowering." These interviewees acknowledged the liberating aspect of claiming the feminist label. Since self-identification, these participants felt empowered on a personal level, as well as in their daily lives. Feminism created a new way of life for them that they may not have experienced without claiming the label.

Feminism and the women's movement are made up of diverse people and this dynamic creates a multitude of unforeseen challenges. By having an inclusive social movement such as feminism, conflicting emotions and reactions arise. Many indicated

feelings of liberation but also hesitation. John stated, "As a male, I struggle with the feminist label; however, it is getting better and it is frustrating to see injustices." Other conflicting emotions discussed were feelings of isolation and stigmatization, but also empowerment and independence. The emotional challenges associated with claiming the label are not typically discussed in the media, or among feminists'. Other common words interviewees used to describe their experiences were: friction, pleasant, misunderstood and fun. Kate stated, "I have unique freedoms that I would not have had without feminism." This research demonstrates that conflicting emotions are common and highlights the positive aspects of feminism, such as empowerment and liberation.

Along with acknowledging the diverse challenges and emotions associated with claiming the feminist label, one must realize the impact that claiming the label has had on the lives of self-identified feminists. If claiming the label were an easy task, more individuals would embrace the label; however, the challenges associated with identification are significant and important to research. Seven out of ten interviewees stated yes, their lives had changed as a result of identifying with feminism. These findings are significant and they demonstrate that claiming the feminist label may completely change one's life choices.

One participant described her experience after claiming the feminist label as "life changing." Holly stated, "Yes, my whole career path changed! It is still changing; feminism fits into everything we do." Similarly Janis said, "Yes, people always know where I stand. It has made me more transparent." Since claiming the feminist label has the ability to completely transform an individual's life, this component of self-

identification should be emphasized. Feminism has the ability to transform individuals' lives and empower them.

The themes of social justice, empowerment, and awareness were evident throughout the research. Participants agreed their life changed since claiming the feminist label. Kate stated, "Yes I am happier, especially with my body. Once I learned everything was socially constructed, this opened my mind. I made good friends and lifelong connections. I am able to identify and see issues, injustices. Also, I can think about things more critically." Lucy said, "Yes absolutely, it allowed me freedom, choice, and agency. It has made me aware of my body and personal safety." Being a feminist allows individuals to feel empowered and have agency over their bodies, thus creating independent and strong people.

It is important to note that three of the ten interviewees indicated their lives had not changed since claiming the feminist label. Mary stated, "Not really, besides always having to explain myself, it didn't change who I am." Pam said, "Not very much, I am more selective with the friends I choose to surround myself with." Other than having to defend their label and who they associate with outside of family, these self-identified feminists state that claiming the label has not changed them on a personal level.

This research shows that seven out of the ten interviewees believed that claiming the feminist label had changed their lives. Feminism influenced career choices, provided personal empowerments and offered freedom of choice to the interviewees. The majority of participants felt that identifying with feminism had altered their lives. These research findings are significant because they reveal the impact that self-identification has on an

individual's life. Feminism has the power to impact all aspects of a person's life and is an important part of self-identification.

Identifying with the feminist label

This research has revealed a generational divide when describing oneself as a feminist to others. The younger generation, which consisted of interviewees belonging to generation Y, either said yes, they do describe themselves as feminists to others, or they indicated they are selective on whom they disclose their feminist label to. Interviewees from the older generation, or those older than generation Y, declared their actions and ideology spoke for their label. In other words, the older generation did not feel a need to disclose their label to others. They stated that the actions they took in their daily lives spoke for their feminist label.

This finding reveals a generational divide on the importance of claiming the feminist label to others. Also, it shows that a trend toward selective or situational disclosure of the label is increasing among the younger generation. These findings also show that even among self-identified feminists, there is hesitation to declare the label.

The younger generation, stated they were selective when it came to self-identifying. Holly stated, "I am selective; it depends on my audience and situation. In academia, I always do. Other times, I ease into it. You have to choose your battles." Jessica said, "Yes, I do because people need to know they exist. I think it is good to identify to promote the label." These self-identified feminists discuss the dichotomy existing among feminists, the realization that promoting the label is important element of

feminism, but also acknowledging the situational disclosure feminists face every day. It is

a constant balance that self-identified feminists face.

The older generation of participants consisted of individuals from the silent

generation, baby boom, and generation X. These participants all declared that their

ideologies and actions made it clear that they were feminists, without the need to verbally

identify as such. Janis declared, "I rarely have to; it comes up when feminist issues arise.

My actions speak for themselves." Hillary, a 57-year-old participant, who identifies as a

white, heterosexual female, stated, "I feel comfortable if someone identifies me as a

feminist, but I rarely have to identify. My actions and ideology speak for my feminism."

Feminists' actions should speak for their identity, but claiming the label is also an

important component in feminists' lives. By sharing one's feminist identity to others,

they are exposing and normalizing the word. Since exposure and normalization are two

important factors for self-identification, it is important that feminists claim the label and

frequently disclose this information.

This research shows an ideological divide between generations on the significance

of declaring the feminist label. The older generation indicated their actions and ideology

speak for their feminism, while the younger generation selectively identified in certain

circumstances. Self-identification among the younger generation is increasing, but a lack

of identification is seen in the older generation. Although actions and ideology are a

significant part of being a feminist, declaring the label is a key component.

Can anyone be a feminist?

The question of who can and cannot be a feminist has been debated for years within the feminist movement. This research shows there is a minor generational divide in regards to whether or not anyone can be considered a feminist. The younger generation declared yes, anyone can be a feminist. Two out of the four older generation participants agreed yes, anyone could be a feminist. Historically, feminism has been criticized for being elitist and discriminating against particular groups of people. However, this research demonstrates a trend among the younger generation to be more inclusive to who can and cannot be a feminist. This finding reveals that the feminist movement is evolving and an increased acceptance that anyone including men, transgender, and the LGBT community can be a feminist.

Contributions by experience

One significant finding of this research is that each self-identified feminist has different ideas of what the women's movement and feminism have contributed to American society. In other words, each interviewee believed the most significant contributions of feminism are those closely related to their own personal experiences.

For instance, one interviewee spent her life as an activist, fighting for reproductive justice. This correlated with her personal experience of having an abortion and opening one of the first abortion clinics in Wisconsin in the 1970s. Another interviewee believed that major contributions of feminism were women's history, feminist theory, and maternity leave. Those specific contributions were related to her personal self-identification, which occurred in graduate school while the interviewee was conducting research. Another interviewee, who was concerned with domestic violence

and sexual assault, had personal experiences with the issues. Common themes identified by the college-educated participants were, the Equal Rights Amendment, voting, and reproductive choice. They were also concerned with the wage gap, women's history, and the gay rights movement. Those contributions correlated with their own personal experiences and education. Whether it was through their career choices or personal lives, those themes were present. These findings show that personal experiences correlate with self-identification across generational lines. It appears the process of self-identification is supported through the connection of historical events in women's history and individuals' life events.

Hesitation for others to claim the label

The interviewees agreed that individuals are hesitant to claim the feminist label. They identified common reasons for this hesitation, which consisted of negative stereotypes associated with feminism; the word itself is intimidating. The interviewees all addressed a concern for something to be done in order for more people to claim the label.

The interviewees were asked if they believed other people are hesitant to claim the feminist label, and Kate stated, "Yes, especially the older generation. As of right now the women's movement feels fractured and that it makes it hard for others to feel welcome or identify. The movement doesn't feel unified, and the negative stereotypes play a major part in people's hesitation to claim the label." Lucy said, "Yes absolutely, people think that feminism is over. Also, identification requires you to better yourself and it is difficult to change people for the better." Jessica similarly stated, "Absolutely,

research has proven this. It is a scary label and intimidating word. Also, the negative

stereotypes associated with feminism don't help." Janis stated, "Yes, I believe the right

wing media has done a good job vilifying feminism." Across generational lines, the

participants identified common hesitations people have toward feminism. Themes

consisted of individuals believing feminism is dead, the movement is fractured, and the

word itself is intimidating.

These participants identified reasons why others are hesitant to claim the label,

but this research also revealed that hesitation to claim the feminist label occurs among

feminists themselves. If feminists are struggling to claim the label, then other people's

hesitation and resistance toward self-identification becomes relatable. Perhaps, as a

collective movement, feminists must first be comfortable with claiming the label and then

others' hesitation will ultimately become less prominent. Research suggests that the

negative stereotypes associated with feminism are key factors in why individuals do not

claim the feminist label. Additional research must examine how feminists and the

women's movement can successfully break these hesitations and stereotypes.

The perception of feminism

This research shows a significant generational divide among feminists when

asked whether they thought feminism was positively or negatively viewed by society.

Among the younger generation, all interviewees believe society negatively views

feminism. Participants from generation Y exclusively agreed that the mainstream

perception of feminism is negative. Jessica stated, "There are a lot of good things that

feminism is doing from the grass roots level, and the public doesn't get to see that." Lucy

declared, "The media has tarnished and made a mockery of feminism; they only show the

radical side and the average person would rather see the negative." These interviewees

identified the negative role media has played in how the general public perceives

feminism. Sensationalism sells papers, but as previous research has proven, negative

stereotypes play a major role in individuals' hesitation to claim the feminist label. Unless

feminists counter these negative stereotypes, these hesitations will persist.

     All participants from the older generation concluded that society positively views

feminism. Alice, an 81-year-old participant, who identifies as a white, heterosexual

female, stated, "It is progressing because years ago you would never even say the word. It

was never discussed or accepted." Janis said, "It is the 21st century and men keep doing

the same thing, while women are advancing." This generation of interviewees has had the

opportunity to see the advancement of the movement, while the younger generation is in

the process of the movement. Having this contrast in generations is beneficial for the

advancement of the feminist movement because it aids in calculating the growth of the

movement.

     One possible explanation for the generational discrepancy is that older

generations have seen the evolution of feminism over time and they have witnessed a

positive change. Another explanation could be that younger generations' constant access

and exposure to media has made it difficult for them to see the growth or change within

the movement. Although this research reveals a generational divide on this particular

issue, feminism is constantly growing and the negative press has not steered all

individuals away from the movement.

Stereotypes associated with feminism

All interviewees identified similar stereotypes associated with feminism. Seven out of ten said, "man-haters" while eight out of ten said, "lesbians" and five out of ten said, "bra-burners." Other common stereotypes the interviewees mentioned were "ugly, angry, aggressive, femi-nazi, and reject motherhood." This research demonstrates that the same stereotypes are still prominent across generational lines. According to Zucker and Bay-Cheng (2010), most research indicates the stigmatization of feminism plays a significant role in individuals, specifically women, not taking the feminist label. Because the same stereotypes were identified across generational lines, they may be effectively preventing individuals from claiming the label. The women's movement needs to find a way to counter these stereotypes if more individuals are to claim the feminist label.

Last words by interviewees

This research utilized a semi-structured interview approach. All questions were presented in an open-ended fashion to provide participants with partial control over the interview process. Eight of the ten participants provided additional remarks that were important to include in the analysis. Rather than providing additional comments, most interviewees offered advice for the movement. Holly stated, "One of the biggest challenges facing feminists today is the 'bad feminist' idea and the fighting between generations." Kate said, "Feminism needs to be accessible in high school, if I would have found it then, I would have identified earlier." This phenomenon of being a "bad feminist" is a common challenge identified among younger feminists and it plays a part in the generational divide between feminists. Although generational divides and fighting

among feminists exist, this research demonstrated common connections between each generation. Most feminists agree the issue of accessibility to feminism at an earlier age would be beneficial to the movement.

In addition to these suggestions, a few participants shared more about their personal experience since claiming the feminist label. Jessica stated, "I hope I am a different feminist. I hope that it keeps evolving." Kate said, "I like the feeling of being a feminist, it is liberating." Personal experiences and empowerment are positive elements in claiming the feminist label. These emotions deserve recognition and are significant components in a feminist's life.

Participants from the older generation provided more comments about their perspective on the evolution of feminism. Hillary asked, "Where is your generation? I don't see a lot of younger voices. Where is the crossover book or the theory? As of today, I cannot identify a young leader. We fought this battle." Janis said, "As a young adult in my social group, more men were feminist than today. It was a good balance." These interviewees were concerned with where feminism is going and focused on their personal beliefs of the movement. The younger generation was concerned with the accessibility of feminism, the liberatory aspects of feminism, and the conflict between different generations of feminists. The older generation questioned the impact the younger generation is having and the changes they have seen within the movement.

Each individual had something different to add. Some addressed feminism's accessibility, others discussed the future of feminism, and a few elaborated on personal

experiences as a feminist. This research shows the diversity among feminist voices, and

exposes some concerns within feminism and aids in understanding the movement.

Conclusion

This cross-generational analysis of self-identified feminists has shown common

themes and patterns within each feminist's story, and has demonstrated generational

divides on certain issues. As discussed earlier, the evolution of coming to feminism is an

important component in self-identification. As feminists, perhaps emphasizing the

evolutionary process would assist in others claiming the feminist label.

Although the definitions of feminism varied across generational lines, common

themes of equality and empowerment were evident. Feminism allows individuals to

connect personal experiences with others and identify with being part of a larger social

movement. Due to diversity within the movement, feminists are able to connect to their

beliefs on a personal level, as well as a social level.

My research shows the conflicts and challenges associated with claiming the

feminist label. Feminists identified feeling empowered and liberated, but also feeling

conflicted and isolated. This contrast is not often discussed, but is a powerful dimension

of claiming the feminist label. Perhaps further research on this dichotomy would unite

more feminists and alleviate the feelings of isolation.

Although this research shows that younger generations tend to disclose their

feminist label to others, hesitation or selective self-identification was also common.

Hopefully feminism will continue to grow and the hesitation and situational identification

will cease.

My research demonstrates differences between feminists on particular issues; however, self-identified feminists remain ideologically connected on issues of social justice and equality. This research shares multigenerational stories from self-identified feminists and shows how diverse stories are connected to a larger social movement.

Chapter 5: Conclusion

The results of my research reveal generational divides on certain issues. However, the participants and feminists in general are united by an ideological belief in equality and social justice. My research shows that claiming the feminist label is often a process that continues to evolve. Similarly to how the word, or movement, cannot be singularly defined, neither can the process of self-identification. Some participants identified a "click" moment, but most identified the process of claiming the label as continuous and one they hope to further develop.

Participants were asked to provide their own definition of feminism, and the definitions varied across generational lines. The common themes of equality, inclusion, and empowerment are recognized throughout. These themes along with the inclusive nature of feminism, allow individuals to be part of a larger social movement, while also correlating to personal experiences. Feminism allows for each individual to personalize the meaning of feminism, while also staying connected to other feminists.

This research found that most self-identified feminists grew up in a conservative or rural environment. Participants indicated they have more friends who claim the feminist label than family members. Conservative or rural upbringings correlate with self-identification and may also be predictive of the process, but the demographics of the sample may constitute this finding. Additionally, once self-identification occurs, feminists increasingly choose to surround themselves with other self-identified feminists. Surrounding oneself with like-minded individuals is not unusual, but all interviewees stated finding other feminist friends after self-identification occurred. Therefore, I

question if these friends were evident before, would feminist identification have occurred

earlier, or is the process of finding others who identify necessary after claiming the

feminist label.

My research reveals feminists have conflicting emotions about the feminist

label. This dissonance appears to be a common experience across generational lines.

Baumgardner and Richards (2000) assert, "Most women come to feminism through

personal experience, which is one of the reasons the core identity of feminism has to be

so elastic" (p. 58). These various emotions come from feminists' personal experiences

and the self-identification process; they are an important component associated with

claiming the feminist label and deserve further research.

A major finding of my research reveals that feminists' personal experiences

correlate with self-identification. In other words, whatever each feminist believed to be

important in regards to the movement also correlated in some way to their own personal

experience. This finding reveals there are multiple ways, and reasons that individuals

come to feminism. It also highlights the diversity within the movement and shows that

feminism has a space for anyone who wants to be associated with the movement.

A generational divide exists on the relevance of declaring the feminist label to

others. Older participants indicate their actions and ideology spoke for their feminism,

while the younger participants selectively disclosed their feminist identity. Although this

research shows there is a trend among younger individuals to publicly declare the label, it

exposes the hesitation among current feminists to identify. If feminists selectively

identify and struggle to claim the label, others will essentially be afraid to identify. Until

a shift toward full disclosure of the label happens, this hesitation among feminists and non-feminists will continue. This is one struggle the women's movement must overcome. Additional research should examine the dynamics behind self-disclosure among feminists. Previous research reveals that much of this hesitation stems from negative stereotypes, social norms, and the media.

My research demonstrates that hesitation to claim the feminist label occurs among feminists themselves. Zucker and Bay-Cheng (2010) have found that exposure to positive information about feminism, whether through formal education or personal relationships, is predictive of explicit self-identification (p. 1905). Perhaps, as a collective movement, we must first become comfortable with claiming the label and others' hesitation will ultimately become less prominent. Also, the question of how to counter these negative stereotypes is still up for debate. Further research should consider examining effective countermeasures.

There are some limitations associated with my research, the first being the location and demographics. The sample size was relatively small. I interviewed ten participants; two women of color, one white male, and seven white females. All the interviewees had a college education or were currently pursuing a degree. As a result, those who participated in my study were not representative of all feminists. Furthermore, my research was conducted in Minnesota and Wisconsin and my sample was from two localized areas. Thus, this research has limitations and is not highly representative of all feminist voices.

From this research, I suggest that having more men involved would advance the women's movement. Including more men in the movement will aid in breaking some of the stereotypes associated with feminism. I recommend exposing individuals to feminism at an earlier age. This research, along with previous research, shows that positive exposure to feminism is an important factor in claiming the feminist label. Additional research on the emotional experiences and challenges self-identified feminists encounter before and after identification is also suggested. Discussing the emotional challenges fosters a sense of connectedness between all types of feminists. The participants in this research discussed self-identification as a continual process. They indicated that their feminism continues to evolve. I believe more research on that evolutionary process would be beneficial to the women's movement.

For future research it would be beneficial to interview participants who do not claim the feminist label, and uncover the reasons associated with choosing not to identify. Also, using a different methodology such as surveys, structured interviews, or ethnography would elicit different outcomes that would be beneficial to feminism and the women's movement. A larger sample size with more diversity would be more representative of feminist voices. Future research could also include more than one interviewer; this would add more depth in finding common themes and patterns within the self-identified feminists' stories.

References

Banks, O. (1981). *Faces of feminism: A study of feminism as a social movement.* New York, NY: St Martin's Press.

Baumgardner, J., & Richards, A. (2000). *Manifesta: Young women, feminism, and the future.* New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux.

Belzer, L. M. (2004). Raising her voice: Early feminist efforts at obtaining the right to speak, 1835-1860. *Texas Journal of Women & The Law, 13(2),* 313-341.

Clack, B. (2012). The Future is female: Revisioning feminism for/with the next generation. *Feminist Theology: The Journal of the Britain & Ireland school of Feminist Theology, 20(3), 256-261*. doi:10.1177/0966735012436916

Constain, A., & McFarland, A. (1998). *Social movements and American political institutions.* Lanham, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers.

Crowe, J. (2011). Men and Feminism: Some challenges and a partial response. *Social Alternatives, 30(1), 49-53.*

Davis, F. (1991). *Moving the mountain: The women's movement in America since 1960.* New York, NY: Simon & Schuster.

Dicker, R. (2008). *A history of U.S. feminisms.* Berkeley, CA: Seal Press.

Eschle, C. (2001). *Global democracy, social movements, and feminism.* Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press.

Evans, S. (2003). *Tidal wave: How women changed American at century's end.* New York: NY: Free Press.

Faludi, S. (1991). *Backlash: The undeclared war against American women.* New York,

    NY: Anchor Books.

Forbes, G. (2003). Locating and preserving documents: The first step in writing women's

    history. *Journal of Women's History, 14(4),* 169.

Giugni, M., McAdam,D., & Tilly, C. (1999) *How social movements matter.* Minneapolis,

    MN: Minnesota Press.

Gluck, S.B., & Patai, D. (1991). *Women's words, women's words, women's words: The*

    feminist practice of oral history. New York, NY: Routledge.

Hesse-Biber, S., & Leavy, P. (2007). *Feminist research practice.* Thousand Oaks, CA:

    Sage Publications.

Kimmel, M. (1996). *Manhood in America: A cultural history.* New York, NY: The Free

    Press.

Leaper, C., & Arias, D. (2011). College women's feminist identity: A multidimensional

    analysis with implications for coping with sexism. *Sex Roles, 64(7/8), 475-490.*

    doi:10.1007/s11199-011-9936-1

Martin, C., & Sullivan, C. (2010). *Click.* Berkeley, CA: Seal Press.

Mansbridge, J. (1986). *Why we lost the ERA.* Chicago and London: University of

    Chicago Press.

Nadeau, R. (1996). *S/He brain: Science, sexual politics, and the myths of feminism.*

    Westport, CT: Praeger.

Rodgers, K., & Knight, M. (2011). "You just felt the collective wind being knocked out

    of us": The deinstitutionalization of feminism and the survival of women's

organizing in Canada. *Women's Studies International Forum, 34(6), 570-581.*

doi:10.1016/j.wsif.2011.08.004

Ryan, B. (1992). *Feminism and the women's movement: Dynamics of change in social movement, ideology and activism.* New York, NY: Routledge.

Springer, K. (2005). *Living for the revolution: Black feminist organizations, 1968-1980.* Durham and London: Duke University Press.

Valenti, J. (2010). Who stole feminism?. *Nation, 291(16),* 18-20.

Vavrus, M. (2007). Opting Out Moms in the News. *Feminist Media Studies*, *7*(1), 47-63. doi:10.1080/14680770601103704

Zucker, A. N., & Bay-Cheng, L. Y. (2010). Minding the gap between feminist identity and attitudes: The behavioral and ideological divide between feminists and non-labelers Zucker & Bay-Cheng Feminist identity versus attitudes. *Journal of Personality, 78(6), 1895-1924*. doi:10.1111/j.1467-6494.2010.00673

Appendix

IRB Approval Letter

MINNESOTA STATE
UNIVERSITY
M A N K A T O

November 21, 2012

Dear Maria Bevacqua:

Re: IRB Proposal entitled "[391543-2] I call myself a Feminist"
Review Level: Level [I]

Your IRB Proposal has been approved as of November 21, 2012. On behalf of the Minnesota State University, I wish you success with your study. Remember that you must seek approval for any changes in your study, its design, funding source, consent process, or any part of the study that may affect participants in the study. Should any of the participants in your study suffer a research-related injury or other harmful outcome, you are required to report them to the IRB as soon as possible.

The approval of your study is for one calendar year less a day from the approval date. When you complete your data collection or should you discontinue your study, you must notify the IRB. Please include your log number with any correspondence with the IRB.

This approval is considered final when the full IRB approves the monthly decisions and active log. The IRB reserves the right to review each study as part of its continuing review process. Continuing reviews are usually scheduled. However, under some conditions the IRB may choose not to announce a continuing review. If you have any questions, feel free to contact me at irb@mnsu.edu or 507-389-5102.

The Principal Investigator (PI) is responsible for maintaining consents in a secure location at MSU for 3 years. If the PI leaves MSU before the end of the 3-year timeline, he/she is responsible for following "Consent Form Maintenance" procedures posted online.

Cordially,

Mary Hadley, Ph.D.
IRB Coordinator

Sarah Sifers, Ph.D.
IRB Co-Chair

Richard Auger, Ph.D.
IRB Co-Chair

This letter has been electronically signed in accordance with all applicable regulations, and a copy is retained within Minnesota State University's records.

Interview Questions

1. Approximately what age/time of your life did you decide to call yourself a feminist?

2. In your own words, can you describe what it means to be a "feminist"?

3. In more detail, can you describe the event/moment when you knew that you were a feminist?

4. Do any of your friends or family members identify with the feminist label?

5. What has been your experience with identifying as a feminist?

    a. Has your life changed in any way since taking the feminist label?

6. Do you describe yourself as a feminist to others? Why or why not?

7. Can anyone be a feminist? Why or why not?

8. What are some of the contributions of the feminist/women's movement?

9. Do you think individuals are hesitant to identify with feminism? Why or why not?

10. Do you believe society views feminists/feminism negatively or positively?

11. What are some stereotypes associated with being a feminist/feminism?

12. Is there anything else you would like to add about being a feminist that we didn't cover?

Consent for Participation in Interview Research

You are invited to participate in a research study about self-identified feminists and how they came to claim the feminist identity. If you agree to participate you will be asked questions about how you came to identify as a feminist and how feminism has affected your life. All of your information will be kept private, and can be viewed only by authorized research staff members. The interview process will be 60-90 minutes in length.

Minimal risk will be involved with this research. Participants have the right to stop the interview at any time, if you feel uncomfortable. I will provide counseling information for anyone who requests it. Also, there are no direct benefits to participants in this study. Society may benefit by having a better understanding of feminists, feminism, and the women's movement.

The interview will be tape recorded and transcribed. A coding system will be used in order to protect the participants' identity. ID numbers will be assigned to each participant. No one besides the investigators will have access to the interviews or consent forms. All transcriptions, documents, and recordings will be stored in the PI advisor's office for 3 years. After those 3 years, she will destroy the documents.

This research project is being directed by Dr. Maria Bevacqua. You can contact Dr. Bevacqua at 507-389-5025 or bevacqua@mnsu.edu about any concerns you have about this project. You also may contact the Minnesota State University, Mankato Institutional Review Board Administrator, Dr. Barry Ries, at 389-2321 or barry.ries@mnsu.edu with any questions about research with human participants at Minnesota State University, Mankato.

Participation in this project is voluntary and you have the right to stop at any time. Your decision whether to participate will not affect your relationship with Minnesota State University, Mankato. There are no direct benefits to you as a result of participation in this research.

I understand that the researcher will not identify me by name in any reports using information obtained from this interview, and that my confidentiality as a participant in this study will remain secure.

I have read and understand the explanation provided to me. I have had all my questions answered to my satisfaction, and I voluntarily agree to participate in this study. I am at least 18 years of age and agree that this interview may be tape recorded.

I have been given a copy of this consent form.

_____   _____
Your Printed Name   Date

_____   _____
Your Signature   Signature of the Investigator

For further information, please contact:
Dr. Maria Bevacqua
Professor and Chair
109 Morris Hall
507-389-5025
bevacqua@mnsu.edu

MSU IRBNet ID#

Date of MSU IRB approval:

Optional Demographics

Please provide the following demographic information about yourself. Providing this information is completely voluntary. If you prefer not to answer any question, please leave the space blank and move on.

1. Date of birth
   a. _____

2. Age
   a. _____

3. Gender
   a. _____

4. Racial/Ethnic Background
   a. _____

5. Sexual Orientation
   a. _____

6. In what city/state were you born?
   a. _____

7. Do any of your family members identify with feminism? If yes, how many?
   a. No _____
   b. Yes
        i. 1-5 _____
       ii. 6-10 _____
      iii. 11-15 _____
       iv. 16-20 _____
        v. 20+ _____

8. Do your friends identify with the feminists label? If yes, how many?
   a. No _____
   b. Yes
        i. 1-5 _____
       ii. 6-10 _____
      iii. 11-15 _____
       iv. 16-20 _____
        v. 20+ _____

Demographics Chart

Sample Demographic Characteristics

Participant*	Age	Gender	Race	Sexual Orientation	Birth Location	Feminist Family Members	Feminist Friends
1. Holly	23	F	White	N/A	MA	0, none	20+
2. Kate	23	F	White	Straight	GA	1-5	11-15
3. Lucy	22	F	Asian	Lesbian	WI	0, none	11-15 (all)
4. Mary	26	F	White	N/A	MN	1-5 (3-6)	11-15
5. Jessica	32	F	White	Straight	MT	1-5	11-15
6. Alice	81	F	White	Straight	MN	6-10	1-5
7. Hillary	57	F	White	Straight	New York	0, none	6-10
8. Janis	61	F	White	Straight	MT	1-5 (3)	20+
9. John	63	M	White	Straight	WI	1-5 (1)	1-5 (5)
10. Pam	25	F	Asian	N/A	Nepal	1-5	6-10

* Pseudonyms replaced actual participants' names to ensure confidentiality