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By Karina Ruiz

Throughout the progression of feminist waves, women have both united in solidarity and fractured in ideologies. A primary problem in today's feminist movement is the negative connotation that was left by the second wave which has alienated both women and men. The result is a feminism that is associated with extremism, negating the original intention of promoting equality. In this qualitative case study, I work with feminist and post-feminist theory to note how women perceive feminist in present day. Through survey questions and responses, I document the complexities of today's women who identify controversies on policing within the community and their own processes on understanding where feminism comes from and where they stand within the movement.

Introduction

The feminist movement, a series of "waves", has been primarily created by women; However, a majority of today's women disagree with the way it has been framed in the past, and feel hesitant to align themselves with the movement due to negative connotations the term carries with it. This is in part due to the fact that the conversations happening around what feminism is, are coming from historically unrepresented women and being shared with men. This setting has created a climate in which women fighting for equality have been misinterpreted and labeled without the consent of women. The purpose of this project is to document how women are seeing and talking about feminism. Through a qualitative case study, I allow women to voice their opinions on feminism and feminists as a way of providing a snapshot of their interactions

and opinions as they contribute to the larger narrative of what feminism is, in order to create a more complete concept of feminism.

Literature Review

Women first established feminism in the 19th and 20th century with an agenda for equality amongst genders. It is often envisioned as parades of housewives with sashes slung across their chests, with banners in hand. Second wave came as a response to the new needs of women, and with a newly found voice, was often framed as a radical movement. It should be noted that this radical response was also the result of oppression for centuries prior
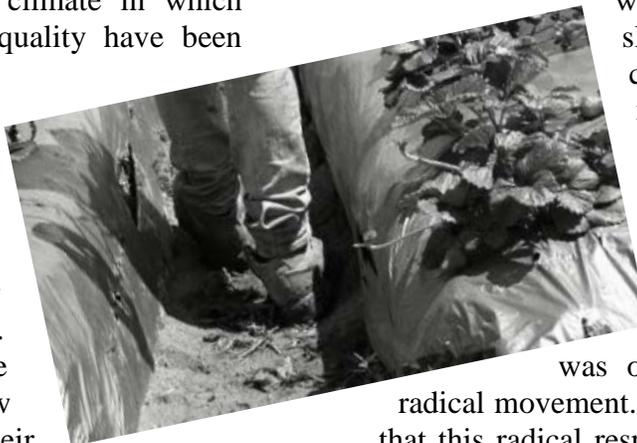
(Ivy & Backlund, 2008). After a heightened awareness and hypersensitivity to feminism, the "post feminist" ideology was born. As a way to distance themselves from the bra-burning, man-hating, women of the past, the new woman was seen as independent, strong willed, and level headed (Dow, 1996). Third wave feminism was created as a response to second wave feminism and has been deemed "a profound new development: the rise of a new discourse or paradigm for framing and understanding gender relations that grew out of a critique of the inadequacies of second wave." (Mann & Huffman, 2005) However, as we linger at the end of the third wave of feminism, some women still distance themselves from the ideology that comes with the movement. A fourth wave has been considered, as a result of the internet and technology being used as a tool for discussing intersectionality as well as a platform for "call out culture" where sexism and misogyny can be identified (Munro, 2013). In this way, it is also being used as a platform for representation of what feminists and feminism "should be." The idea being that women are criticizing other women for acting in ways that are feminine, under the misconception that femininity places one against feminism (Patai, 2001). In such a way, we see the remnants of second wave feminism in our present, as we remember the manly, bare faced, bra-less feminist. Representation of feminists in media is "demonized", but they are still represented in media more frequently than "regular" women are. This shows that while feminist are depicted as negative, they carry more power and agency than their less vocal counterpart (Lind & Salo, 2002). Yet because men and a majority of women criticize them, we see another wave of post-feminist ideology. Fearful of being demonized, post feminism in its newest form is most dangerous because of its argument that we have achieved equality and no longer need feminism (McRobbie, 2004).

Methods

Participants in this study were self selected and contributed through an online form of seven sections.

Participants

Participants for this case study were self-selected from a pool of diverse women. While the individual responses are anonymous, the pool of 15 women initially contacted included six Hispanic women, three African American women, and six Caucasian women. Their ages ranged from 20 to 35 years old, and their economic backgrounds varied as well. One thing that should be noted is that all 15 of the women were either in the process of receiving a Bachelor's degree, or had already received it and were in the process or had already received a graduate degree.

Questions

To add to the conversation on what a feminist/being feminist means to women, I conducted a case study with five women who self-selected participation by responding to a seven part electronic form. The seven parts were as follows:

Part 1: Describe yourself

This question was meant to allow participants to describe themselves through self-disclosure. In this case, self-disclosure is used as a tool to encourage participants to reveal parts of their identity the felt most closely aligned with. For example, if a participant was Hispanic, but didn't feel it was relevant, they did likely would not disclose it. However, if they did feel it was important or relevant, a person would include it. This is an assumption made by the researcher and is noted in the parameters section.

Part 2: Write about your family and upbringing.

This piece uses self-disclosure to allow participants to explain their background to the extent they feel is relevant. An emphasis is placed on family to encourage comments on ethnicity, income, religion, and other aspects that may have been passed down to or rejected by participants.

Part 3: Do you consider yourself a feminist? If so, have you always? If not, why not?

This question was a way to address the individual's alignment or misalignment with the feminist movement as they view it. The follow up questions are meant to allow for contextualization and qualifying statements.

Part 4: What words come to mind when you think of a feminist?

This question serves as another tool in which participants could share how they understand the popular views of feminism as well as insert their own thoughts.

Part 5: What do you think of feminism in media?

The purpose of this question is to leave a broad sense of "media" with the participant, allowing them to identify and share what form of media they have encountered in conjunction with feminism.

Part 6: Have you heard of the "Fourth wave" of feminism?

This closed-ended question was used to gage the awareness of the fourth wave, as it is still undecided whether or not we are currently in it or not.

Part 7: Write about an experience you have had with feminists/feminism.

This request was meant to allow for an intimate experience to be shared from a participant about their history with feminism and feminists.

Parameters & Restrictions

Due to the time constrictions of this project, the question form was only sent to 15 women. All women are in California and have had or

are in their university education. Of those women, only 5 completed the form. This is a small amount of women. Thus, the results should only be considered a snapshot of what some perspectives of the matter are; this may not be an accurate representation of what a majority thinks. The responses were anonymous to allow for self-disclosure to be sued as a tool to weed out details about participants they felt were irrelevant. This may have resulted in limited discussion as privilege in relation to race and economic status is underdeveloped as a topic of reasoning for participant's responses.

Analysis

Responses were analyzed using conceptual ordering to identify positive or negative responses, interactions, and opinions. Recurring themes, as identified by being mentioned two times or more, include that of education, perception and growth, celebrity advocacy, and social media.

Results

Part 1: When asked to describe themselves, four out of the five participants included larger attributes that function similar to categories they fall into, rather than smaller attributes such as traits. The difference here is the disclosure of factors, rather than results. Factors that were disclosed touched on ethnicity, personal background, and interests. Only one of the participants shared traits revealing self-perception. That individual disclosed positive sentiments toward herself.

Part 2: Four of five participants included terminology that related to a diverse background. One woman used the

term diverse, another included her parent's immigrant status, and another mentioned low economic status. In these cases, the concept of "diverse" is used as a way to connote anything outside of assumed agency whether economically, racially, or other. In addition to that, these four women also all mentioned traditional family values and conservative family members. The other one woman did not mention her family's background, race, or economic standing at all. She instead focused on their relationships with each other.

Part 3: All women responded that they do identify with feminism. Although only four of the women initiated with the word "Yes", and one with "I somewhat consider myself a feminist". Additionally, all of the women included qualifying statements like "but not in the popular sense" or "but I didn't always".

Part 4: The total amount of words listed by the women was 30. Of those words, 26 held positive connotations while only 4 were that of the negative.

Part 5: Two of five women said yes, the other three said no.

Part 6: In this section, two types of media were talked about: celebrities in media and social media. Of three women who wrote about celebrities in media and feminism, two said they thought of it as a positive thing, where people of agency used their power to spread awareness. One celebrity mentioned was Emma Stone and her She for He speech of 2015. One participant said celebrity use of feminism in media is often misrepresented due to lack of knowledge on the matter. Two women mentioned social media, one mentioning the value of the personal level of interaction it provides, making viewers more receptive to the content they see. Another woman mentioned it was a platform in which feminists are often seen policing other women. They commented on social media as a platform for displaying "good feminism" and "bad feminism". Furthermore, all five women

commented on media as being a platform for the negatives of what feminism currently is.

Part 7: Of the five experiences shared, four of five women said they have had positive interactions with feminism and feminists. Additionally, all four of these women wrote about interactions that happened in university or education settings. One woman shared an experience of online policing of women by other women. This related to part 6 on what a "good feminist" is.

Discussion

The sentiments and themes shared in this short survey resemble those of the larger conversations in research. Women are still hesitant of identifying and vocalizing their position as feminists. The positive experiences that were had in university and education settings show that education of feminist theory and the understanding of the entire movement is key in the way that women experience and understand feminism. However feminism is still being portrayed as that of the second wave. As participants touch on different ways that media is being used to positively influence the way that feminism is being perceived, all of them believe that the "militant" feminist of the second wave is still the face of feminism.

With this false ideology running through prevalent conversation, it's important to note that education on the way that we talk about feminism is directly correlated with what we know about it. In order to increase the bandwidth of communication of the full and complete concept of feminism, we must educate prior to universities and colleges. Not all women take the courses to educate themselves, and often

women will continue their lives after college without any further consideration on what they've been told and what they know about feminism, only to further perpetuate the problem of misinformed communication on the matter.

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