Third Wave Feminist Identity

Brightman

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THIRD WAVE FEMINIST IDENTITY

by

Sarah Brightman

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I would like to thank my partner Dave, my parents Don and Nancy, my sister Emily, my Nana and Poppa, Grandma and Grandpa for all of their love and support during my journey. I could never have done it without all of them.

Sarah Brightman
THIRD WAVE FEMINIST IDENTITY

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Western Michigan University, 2005

The research I am proposing is to gain a better understanding of current, individual feminist identity and the impact of that identity, more broadly, on current feminism. There is controversy in the current literature about the existence of a third wave of feminism and I believe this research will contribute to this discussion by exploring various individual experiences with feminism and how feminist identity fits into individuals lives. Gaining an understanding of young feminist identity and the individual meaning of feminism might help define the characteristics of this whole new generation of feminists in their own terms. Much progress and many changes have come from the previous feminist movements, so much so that a whole generation has grown up with the fruits of early feminist labor integrated into newer generations lives. This newer generation of women’s experiences is radically different than that of the earlier generations. Therefore, further research is needed to understand the current environment in which feminist identities are formed.
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INTRODUCTION

I am a woman, a daughter, a sister, a granddaughter, a cousin, a friend, a girlfriend, a student, an employee, a consumer, and I am a feminist. These are the components of who I am; they make up my identity and how I define myself. They are related to each other, they work together and independently. Some parts of my identity, such as daughter, and sister, are a result of birth. Others developed under my control and by my choice, such as girlfriend, student and feminist. The interaction of the parts of my identity, my relationships with others, the environment in which I was raised, my personal experiences and the current social context all impact my identity as a feminist. This identity is the result of the environment into which I was born and socialized. My feminist identity is an example of how identity is developed in our society.

Both of my parents are feminists and it is the environment in which I was raised. My parents taught me that everyone is equal; that diversity is positive and a good thing; that we each have our own potential to explore; and that there are no limits to this except the ones we put on ourselves. I was encouraged to try anything that interested me. Both of my parents cook and clean up afterwards. I never perceived cooking and cleaning as a woman's job, because I saw them shared. Both my parents had careers that were of equal importance. They took turns staying home from work when my sister and I were home sick from school. They emphasized the importance of careers for my sister and me, to be successful and independent. These lessons from my family were reinforced by my observations of the world. As I grew
older I experienced parents of my friends getting divorced with the resulting difficulties these women had financially after being housewives during their marriages. I learned that independence is important in a relationship, that nothing is certain except what you can control.

As I got older and went through high school these lessons became clearer. I began to experience them beyond individual and personal issues to larger social and political ones; such as reproductive rights, affirmative action and the glass ceiling. Feminism is a part of my life and the way I was raised. I don’t think there was a moment when I realized I was a feminist or a time when I chose to be one. I have been a feminist in my own life and in my relationships. I have done what I want regardless of stereotypes because I have been encouraged to do so by my parents. The most active component in the application of my feminist identity has been to study feminism and practice it in my educational career. I decided this would be the best way for me to contribute to feminism in society today; to work from within. I would like to contribute to research and the education of future feminists while continuing to practice feminism in my own life.

I am a part of a new generation of feminists, often referred to as the third wave, a generation of feminists that has yet to be defined. Some people don’t believe there is a movement to define, calling it dormant and non-existent. But I am a young feminist who knows other young feminists. While not all my friends would identify themselves as feminists, many of them have feminist values and practice them in their lives. There are some individuals in my generation who identify themselves as
feminists, but many do not identify themselves. However, there are many who, like my friends, embrace feminist values in their lives today, but do not identify themselves as feminists. In this research I will explore the complicated aspects of feminist identity in an emerging generation.

The research which follows is intended to gain a better understanding of current, individual feminist identity and the impact of that identity, more broadly, on current feminism. There is controversy in the current literature about the existence of a third wave of feminism and I believe this research will contribute to this discussion. It will explore various individual experiences with feminism and how feminist identity fits into individual lives. Gaining an understanding of young feminist identity and the individual meaning of feminism might help define the characteristics of this new generation of feminists in their own terms. Much progress and many changes have come from the previous feminist movements, so much so that a whole generation has grown up with the fruits of early feminist labor integrated into our lives. This newer generation of women’s experiences is radically different than that of the earlier generations. Therefore, further research is needed to understand the current environment in which feminist identities are formed.

Volunteers were interviewed about what meaning they attach to feminism, as well as the origins of their exposure to feminism. They were also asked to discuss what they perceive to be positive and negative about the feminist label, and if there are certain places or situations where a feminist identity has different positive or negative implications. Finally, they were asked to discuss how feminism personally
works in their identity, as well as to discuss what they see as the broader future of feminism.
LITERATURE REVIEW

In order to understand feminism today, there are several factors that need to be considered. There is the need to look at theories related to identity formation. This is important for a few reasons. First, we need to understand what factors contribute to the formation of a specific identity and second, we need to understand why certain aspects do not become central to identity. This is important to understanding feminism today because feminism has become so engrained in our society that many people live their lives according to feminist values, but feminism does not become a central component of their identity. Thus, understanding identity formation will give insight into this process. Second, there is the need to look at feminism, its past and current definitions. This intersection of identity, social movement and definitions of feminism will give insight into the current feminist movement and some of the reasons it has been described as non-existent or dormant.

IDENTITY

There are many theories about identity formation coming from various disciplines. For the purposes of this thesis, I will focus mainly on sociological theories and more specifically on the development of these theories in feminist literature. The intent is not to be a review of the full range of literature on identity theory, but a brief history and the theories related to feminist identity. This review of identity theories will help piece together how individuals form a central feminist identity and incorporate it into a partial identity or reject it entirely.
One of the earliest theorists who studied identity and the self was John Locke (1632-1704). Locke evolved his theory from a basic theory of “person, a thinking intelligent Being, that has reason and reflection, and can consider itself as itself, the same thinking thing in different times and places” (Zack, 1996: 70). These aspects of person are important to Locke’s formation of self because these various aspects of “person” are what constitute identity and self for Locke. For Locke, the self is located in a body of a thinking and reasoning person. The ability for people to think and reason is important to understanding the idea that people choose to incorporate or reject different forms and characteristics of identity. This person is one who can reflect on past events and experiences in their lives. This is a factor that leads to a greater tendency to acquire a specific identity. Locke also describes the formation of identity in a person who is living in a particular time and place. In terms of feminism, women’s experiences with sexism in their lives can lead to a greater need for a feminist identity. This can lead individuals living in a very active period of feminism to have a greater tendency to claim feminism as central to their identity. Furthermore, the individual can recognize itself as independent from others. The recognition of self as independent of others is important to understanding today’s feminism and feminists’ sense of individuality.

Over time other theorists worked to further explore identity and the self. This exploration led to theories that consider the impact of society in the formation of identity. George Herbert Mead (b.1863) “places great emphasis upon the social self; each of us, as individuals, fashions a sense of our own selfhood through engagement
with other selves. No clear dividing line can be drawn between our own sense of self and the selves of others, according to Mead, ‘since our own selves exist and enter as such into our experience only in so far as the selves of others exist and enter as such into our experience also” (Elliott, 2001: 25). Mead’s theory of self and identity in relation to other individuals is called the “generalized other.” “When we adopt this perspective [generalized other], we are seeing from the standpoint of relationship, taking account of the shared expectations members have of one another and our common understanding of what it means to identify as a member of a group” (Dean, 1996: 35). Mead’s theory of the self and the “generalized other” is important in today’s context because it demonstrates the internalization of the values of the group and society into our individual identity.

The previous feminist movements have had a large impact on today’s society, and many people in my generation have grown up taking these benefits for granted. They have subconsciously internalized these values. This subconscious internalization can make it hard in today’s environment for individuals to distinguish the values engrained in them from a separate, feminist identity. On the other hand, if society holds and conveys a negative attitude toward feminism, this would discourage an individual from identifying as a feminist. Negative attitudes toward feminists are also imbedded in subconscious messages in our society. These negative images are woven into our media and can be a factor in deterring individuals from actively identifying themselves as feminists. Individuals don’t want to be associated with the
butch, male bashing feminists portrayed in the media. Society’s views of feminists can have a great impact in either direction on individuals’ identity as feminists.

Another theorist working on the development of the social self during the same time as Mead was Charles Horton Cooley (b.1864). “The self is not something ‘given,’ present at the birth of the individual; it is essentially a growth that is social” (Jandy, 1942: 113). The social self is thought of “as any idea or system of ideas, drawn from the communicative life, that the mind cherishes as its own” (Jandy, 1942: 115). Cooley’s theory of the social self is important as we consider the decline of feminist identification and the rise of internalized values of feminism because he is discussing the importance of society on individual identity. So, if an individual is growing up at a point when feminism is a strong movement and is viewed by society as a positive identity, then that individual will be more likely to define themselves according to that identity. The opposite effect would be true for an individual raised in a society where feminism is not strong or seen as negative by the society as a whole.

Still other theorists built on old theories as well as developed new ones. “Erik Erikson (1968) speaks of identity and the sense of identity rather than that of the self” (Levin, 1992: 185). This expands the notion of the social self from previous theorists. His “central notion is that identity comes from identification. …we become an integrated composite of our identifications with people: parents, siblings, peers, public personages, historical and fictional figures, causes, movements and ideals” (Levin, 1992: 185). This composite of the self and identity reveals the true
complexity of identity as related to others. Erikson is clear in describing how numerous the influences on our identity are and how much of our lives become incorporated into our identity. He also points out how experiencing a variety of other roles helps us develop our own. Concerning feminism, this idea of experiencing from other roles can be crucial to the development of a feminist identity. If individuals interact with many feminists during their lives, they will be more likely to incorporate this role as a part of their identities.

At this point it is important to mention that the theorists covered so far have been male, and therefore we must recognize that there is a bias underlying these theories. Specifically it is a bias which assumes that female and male identities are formed in the same way. Mead’s generalized other, for example, assumes that both women and men internalize the same generalized other in the same way. Simone De Beauvoir criticizes this approach and recognizes the different experiences of women and men. De Beauvoir (1953: xxi) explains that:

"the terms masculine and feminine are used symmetrically only as a matter of form, as on legal papers. In actuality the relation of the two sexes is not quite like that of two electrical poles, for man represents both the positive and the neutral, as is indicated by the common use of man to designate human beings in general; where as woman represents only the negative, defined by limiting criteria, without reciprocity."

In this sense, women are not seen as being defined as equal to men; women are limitedly defined by what men are not. De Beauvoir (1953: xxii-xxiii) goes on to say that "the category of the Other is as primordial as consciousness itself" and that
"otherness is a fundamental category of human thought." Furthermore, DeBeauvoir states:

“She is defined and differentiated with reference to man and not he with reference to her; she is the incidental, the inessential as opposed to the essential. He is the Subject, he is the Absolute- she is the Other (1953: xxii).”

As we can see, DeBeauvoir’s concept of the other is very different than Mead’s. The way women experience themselves as the other in relation to men is not generic as the generalized other was for Mead. For DeBeauvoir (1953: 51) then:

“woman is shown to us as enticed by two modes of alienation. Evidently to play at being a man will be for her a source of frustration; but to play at being a woman is also a delusion: to be woman would mean to be the object, the Other.”

DeBeauvoir points out the male bias in Mead’s theory of the generalized other, as well as exposes the complexities and problems which arise when theories impose upon women concepts developed by and for men.

Finally, a feminist theory of identity developed by Morwenna Griffiths described identity using “a central metaphor as the web” (1995: 2). Individual identities “take their shape from the surrounding circumstances and from the spider herself... It is intricate, interlaced, with each part entangled with the rest and dependent on it” (Griffiths, 1995: 2). The key point in this theory is that identity is created and reinforced by multiple factors. There are the social influences and the social environment of the time, combined with the individual’s life situation and experiences that form individual identities. Thus, there are various factors that influence an individual identity and no two webs or identities will be the same.
In summary, an identity is formed in an individual who is able to think and reflect on his or her life. This can lead to an increase in feminist identity when people experience negative events in their lives and find that an engagement with feminism is the best way to rectify conflicts in their lives. They can see themselves as an individual person and as a member of a group whose values they internalize. This internalization of values is one of the factors that have led to a decrease in feminist identity. Identity is formed in relationships and identification with others. Their roles and individuality become a part of our identity as we accept or reject them. This is important because if an individual never interacts with individuals who have a feminist identity they will not have this identity to reflect on and incorporate as their own. There are many social factors that influence identity including the values, causes and movements of a society at a particular point in time.

WHAT IS FEMINISM? WHO IS A FEMINIST?

Defining both feminism and a feminist is not a simple task. The difficulty is related to problems with understanding what is being defined as well as who is doing the defining. One problem is the differences between individuals who identify themselves as feminist and those who have feminist values as defined by that individual. In a qualitative survey these factors could be indistinguishable and yield a very different result. A second problem is the second-generation feminists trying to define the third wave in its own terms. To further complicate the issue are the various branches of feminism; radical, liberal, Marxist, socialist, lesbian, African American - the list can go on. In order to associate with any of these branches, individuals must
first form the central identity of feminist. The focus of this thesis will be the formation of the central feminist identity.

In the past, women’s movements have existed in a specific and definable time and social climate. The first and second waves of feminism had clearly defined issues they were addressing. As time has progressed feminist ideology has seeped into our collective consciousness and the accomplishments of these first movements seem commonplace in today’s society. For example, there has been an increase in the number of women in the work force and at the same time there are more fathers taking on new responsibilities in the home. However, inequalities and discrimination still exist in the social structures and the fabric of our society, exemplified by the small numbers of women who reach the top of their fields or who become CEOs of top corporations. Both men and women are still working to achieve full equality, but can this be defined as a third wave of feminism?

Webster’s Dictionary defines feminism as “the movement to win political, economic and social equality for woman.” An introductory Sociology (101) textbook defines feminism as “the philosophy that men and women should be politically, economically, and socially equal, and organized activity on behalf of this principle” (Henslin, 2001: 662). Both of these definitions imply an active participation towards the goal of social equality.

Gerda Lerner provides a more clear and concise definition of feminism. It combines and enhances several definitions of feminism. Lerner (1986: 236) writes:

Some of the current definitions are: (a) a doctrine advocating social and political rights for women equal to those of men; (b) an organized movement
for the attainment of these rights; (c) the assertion of the claims of women as a
group and the body of theory women have created; (d) belief in the necessity
of large-scale social change in order to increase the power of women.

Feminism is a movement that is a reaction to inequalities seen in life and an action to
change those equalities. For the most part this has defined the past feminist
movements.

A BRIEF HISTORY

The first wave of feminism is said to have begun at the Seneca Falls
convention of 1848. This was the first organized meeting “to discuss the social, civil,
and religious rights of woman” (Langer, 1996: 6). The most noted accomplishment of
the first wave was a Constitutional amendment giving women the right to vote in
1920. Aside from the great political accomplishment, “these were women who broke
through the barriers of their day to speak in public, to demand property rights, and to
claim a political voice” (Harlan, 1998: 77). This was the beginning of feminism in
America and can be largely defined as a movement in the political sphere.

The second wave of feminism emerged in the sixties. This period began with
feminists who “founded feminist organizations and raised consciousness of the
women and men of the country” (Harlan, 1998: 77). “In the 1970’s, feminism opened
the doors for dealing with the body, sexuality, relationships, the marriage contract, the
family and the work place-the realms of both public and private life” (Langer, 1996:
149). The issues addressed in this movement characterize the second wave of
feminism as a combination of political activism as well as a movement of social
change in the culture. Both of these first movements were centered on activism, political, and social changes.

**THEORETICAL DEVELOPMENTS**

The women’s liberation movement began with liberal feminism which focused on equality, “this means that laws should not grant to women fewer rights than they allow to men” (Jaggar, 1983: 35). “The earliest feminists were inspired by liberal ideals of human dignity, autonomy, equality and individual self-fulfillment” (Jaggar, 1983: 47). As feminism expanded the second wave liberal feminists were criticized for their emphasis on equality as well as being too essentialist. “Many feminist theorists have criticized the liberal feminist emphasis on rights, arguing that liberal rights analyses sets up a dichotomy and, thus, an antagonism between autonomy and nurturance, between individual freedom and relations with others, and between independence and community” (Tuana and Tong, 1995: 7). Furthermore, “some of the causes with which liberal feminists are most identified-affirmative action, for example- are ones that play out very differently for women of color as opposed to white women” (Tuana and Tong, 1995: 8). Thus Tuana and Tong argue that “unless liberal feminism thought develops its “equal rights” analysis in ways that legitimate the personal integrity of individuals who do not wish to become white in order to become socially and economically powerful, it will tend to remain a theory that favors and forwards the interests of white women far more than those of women of color” (1995: 8). These criticisms of liberal feminism prompted feminist theorists to branch out and begin to deal with these issues.
Feminist theory began to rapidly expand during the second wave and new theories were developed which began to emphasize the differences between men and women rather than focusing solely on equality. Carol Gilligan exemplifies this approach in her 1982 book *In A Different Voice*, where she lays out a theory of difference. She begins by explaining that "at a time when efforts are being made to eradicate discrimination between the sexes in the search for social equality and justice, the differences between the sexes are being rediscovered in the social sciences. This discovery occurs when theories formerly considered to be sexually neutral in their scientific objectivity are found instead to reflect a consistent observational and evaluative bias" (1982: 6). Critiquing psychological theories for this bias, Gilligan's theory of difference emphasizes the need for understanding women's own experiences and get away from the "assumption that there is a single mode of social experience and interpretation" (1982: 173). Gilligan's conclusion is that theories need to recognize the differences between men and women in order to have the most complete picture of human experience.

Feminist theory has continued to progress and branch out from its liberal heritage, as well as built on new theories, such as difference. One theory which has done this is radical feminist theory, which Jaggar (1983) suggests "originally signified their commitment to uncovering and eradicating the systematic or root causes of women's oppression. Later this label also came to indicate the radical feminist belief that the oppression of women was at the root of all other systems of oppression" (84). More specifically Mary Daly (1978) charges:
“Women’s minds have been mutilated and muted to such a state that “Free Spirit” has been branded into them as a brand name for girdles and bras rather than as the name of our verb-ing, be-ing Selves. Such brand names brand women “Morons”. Moronized, women believe that male-written texts (biblical, literary, medical, legal, scientific) are “true”. Thus manipulated, women become eager for acceptance as docile tokens mouthing male texts, employing technology for male ends, accepting male fabrications as the true texture of reality. Patriarchy has stolen our cosmos and returned it in the form of Cosmopolitan magazine and cosmetics” (5).

From these foundations, radical feminist have continued their analysis of patriarchal oppression of women and a variety of theories have emerged under this larger umbrella. These theories further suggest that men’s control of women’s sexuality is at the foundation of women’s oppression and that heterosexuality as an institution ensures male domination by forcing women into specific roles, such as wife and mother, as well as de-legitimizes women who do not fit into the heterosexual model, such as lesbians. Radical difference theory, such as Daly’s, takes Gilligan’s theory of difference a step further to valorize all aspects of women, to uncover women’s lost history and to pursue the future in a society free of patriarchy.

Other theories that emerged in response to criticisms during the second wave are Marxist and Socialist Feminism. Marxist feminism follows the tradition of Marx and Engels by suggesting that “women’s oppression originated with the introduction of private property” and that “private ownership of the means of production by relatively few persons, originally male, inaugurated a class system whose contemporary manifestations are capitalism and imperialism” (Tuana and Tong, 1995: 65). In contrast to radical feminism which sees patriarchy as the source of women’s oppression, Marxist feminism sees capitalism as the source of oppression and its
elimination as the only way to liberate women. Socialist feminism, on the other hand, embraces the Marxist theory of capitalism as the source of women’s oppression, but “rather than indicating capitalism as the sole cause of women’s oppression, socialist feminists argued that power, and thus oppression, arises from sex and race in addition to class; therefore, power and oppression are the results of the material and ideological conditions of patriarchy and racism as well as capitalism” (Tuana and Tong, 1995: 261). Socialist feminism incorporates the Marxist tradition with the radical feminist notion that men control women’s sexuality. This resulted in Socialist feminists taking into account both women’s production in capitalist society as well as women’s reproduction in the family.

The theoretical developments outlined so far have taken many steps to address the critique that feminism and feminist theory has been dominated by white, middle class women, however “to a greater or lesser degree, each of them fails to see how race, ethnicity, class religion, sexual identity, physical and psychological status, and age affect any and all gender-based analyses” (Tuana and Tong, 1995: 491). The result of this has been the development of global and multicultural feminist theories, which seek to further unpack the issues facing women from diverse backgrounds. In addition, these theories seek to understand how feminism can spread globally without simply transporting Western feminism into those societies. The third wave of feminism comes in the wake of these developments and while it continues on with the goals of becoming a more encompassing movement, it is also a movement which is attempting to define feminism for itself.
Other authors generally agree with the previous definitions which focused on active participation and the goal of social equality with several variations. Langer (1996: 9) states that “what unites all feminists, that they all have in common that makes them ‘feminists’, is the belief that they must question and challenge sexual stereotypes and that opportunity should not be denied to either men or women on the grounds of gender.”

The term feminism has taken on negative characteristics by society in recent years. Today “feminism for much of the mass culture has become equated with lesbianism, male bashing or male hating; for many it has also come to be defined narrowly as encompassing only woman of European heritage” (Harlan, 1998: 71). Thus, “identifying as feminist or anti-feminist may also indicate identifying with a deviant group” (Smith, 1999: 2). One reaction to the negative attitudes towards feminists is that there are fewer instances of people identifying as feminists because there is more of a reason not to identify this way. This is not to say that there was not opposition to the early movements. Today’s negativity towards feminists and the reluctance to identify oneself as a feminist exists in a society where these values have become subconsciously embedded. With this increasing negative attitude towards feminists, fewer people are willing to identify themselves as feminists, but more people embrace the ideology of feminism.

This dichotomy between identification and ideology has been investigated and discussed by several different authors. In the past twenty years, studies have shown
consistent results supporting this dichotomy. For example "in the early to mid 1980's, a number of studies concluded that while specific support for "feminism" was declining, overall acceptance of the goals of feminism was on the rise" (Arnold, 2000, 1). After looking at some collected data, Harlan (1998: 73) concludes:

Most people in the United States say they agree with the idea of equality for woman: 71 percent of women and 61 percent of men agreed in a 1995 National Woman’s Equality Poll conducted for the Feminist Majority. This would make them feminists by definition. Yet, in that same poll only 51 percent of the woman volunteered to identify themselves as feminists.

Rundle (1998: 2) describes

How young woman can be feminist without identifying that way: ‘Many... of us have integrated feminist values into our lives, whether or not we choose to use the label ‘feminist’. This is an important barometer of the impact of feminism, since feminism is a movement for social change—not an organization doing a membership drive’.

This barometer is important to explain the decline in feminist identity while the cultural and political values of feminism continue to progress forward. The idea that feminism has become so ingrained in society that the need to label oneself a feminist no longer exists is not the only explanation for what has been observed to be the decline of feminism. It is also important to look at what exists of a third wave to understand how it defines feminism.

THE THIRD WAVE

There are various and interesting themes that describe the third wave of feminism. Some discuss it comparatively to the pervious waves, others concentrate
on it as its own entity. Whatever the point of view, it appears that there is a third wave of feminism.

When using the comparative model, many authors cite the separation of a feminist identity as compared to an individual’s central identity. “Some writers claim that the second wave feminists saw their feminism as a central aspect of their identities while the younger generation are more likely to espouse a do-it-yourself feminism” (Bulbeck, 1999: 5). This do-it-yourself aspect reflects a difference between the second and third waves, that of the “‘victim feminism’/’power feminism’ divide” (Drake, 1997: 1). Drake (1997) characterized the second wave as “victim feminists.” This described women who saw themselves as victims of male oppression. On the other hand, “power feminism” stresses the individual feminist, the power of sexuality and of women. It has invaded the media in the form of “riot grrls” and the slogan “girl power”. The change in definition of identity from a group to an individual feminist identity is one of the factors that has made the third wave of feminism unidentifiable or considered non-existent.

There are other possible reasons the third wave has not been as clearly seen as the previous waves. For example, Drake (1997: 2) states, “maybe we’re just not as categorizable… So what may appear to be a splintering of this generation often comes from an honest assessment of our differences as each of us defines her place and role in feminism.” The focus is on individual issues, on our individual situations in life, in our generation, rather than issues “marked” feminist. “The defining feature of this generation, ironically, may well be its inability to be categorized. They prefer
disunity over homogeneity, choosing instead to embrace all their complexities” (Gilmore, 2001: 2). The unified feminists of the earlier generations with various labels and causes are still visible, but feminism today seems to play out more in individual lives.

In many ways this signifies the aim of the third wave for a more encompassing identity for feminists. For example, Drake (1997: 4) writes “we fear that the identity will dictate and regulate our lives, instantaneously pitting us against someone, forcing us to choose inflexible and unchanging sides, female against male, black against white, oppressed against the oppressor, good against bad.” This is an expansion of the earlier thesis that one reason feminist identity has been rejected is that previous movements were more exclusive, middle-class, and European based. This also illustrates the desire not to be lumped into an exclusive category.

There is no better evidence for the diversity of current feminism, as well as evidence that a new wave of feminists has emerged than the March for Women’s Rights on Washington, April 25, 2004. The speakers focused on all reproductive freedoms, as well as contraception, women’s health care, the global gag order tied to U.S. funding, HIV/AIDS, gay, lesbian and transgender rights, and race and ethnic issues, related to access to health care in native languages. It brought a crowd of hundreds of thousands of people, and was globally represented, with more than 60 countries from around the world participating. It was attended by hundreds of organizations including NOW, the NAACP, Planned Parenthood, The Feminist Majority, groups representing Doctors, Lawyers, Congress, Gays, Lesbians, Latinos,
Asian Americans, Native Americans, African Americans, as well as Pacifica Islanders. Most notably, an estimated one third of the marchers were college aged and younger. This is a significant proportion; it speaks to the impact feminism has had and continues to have on new generations. Furthermore, these students spoke about diversity of the movement, diversity of issues, human rights and universal rights. The 2004 March on Washington exemplifies the multiplicity of the current feminist movement. It shows this is an increasingly inclusive and globally aware movement; it is also a movement of generations of feminists. It exemplifies the idea that the third wave should not be defined as one generation of feminists, it is moving forward with the guidance of previous generations and the inclusion of new generations.

CURRENT RESEARCH

Research has continued to produce themes supporting feminist identity theories. Some of these findings include factors related to the importance of contact with feminists; accurate definitions of feminism; and internalized feminist attitudes. Furthermore, research on discrimination and sexism has shown high rates of women experiencing sexist events in their lives.

Research conducted by Rundle (1998), for example, is conducted by a young feminist and is an investigation into her own, as well as other young feminists’ positions in the larger women’s movement. Her methods of collecting data were through interviews, participant observation, and the use of a variety of written materials. One of the key ideas she found is that young feminists don’t feel
acknowledged by the women’s movement because of different definitions of ‘political’ and ‘feminism’ in the second and third waves. One example is the newly created venues they choose as their platforms, such as “zines, the internet, riot grrls (punk rock power feminism), girl bands and cartoons” (Rundle, 1998: 1). This idea came out explicitly in her interviews. As one participant told her: “Young women are not rejecting feminism, they’re completely reincarnating it—so much so that many mainstream feminists, and certainly the media, don’t even recognize it” (Rundle, 1998: 1). These statements reinforce the need to take a new look at feminism.

Other research, such as that by Horen, Mathews, Detrie, Bruke and Cook (2001), looked at the differences in identity development and feminism in the lives of two different generations of feminists. They conducted interviews with eight women, four from an “emerging” group comprised of female graduate students and four from an “experienced” group of feminist activists who came into feminism between the ‘60’s and ‘80’s. They found several key features in the emerging feminists. The first factor was initiation into feminism. Meaning that, “once they were exposed to a definition of feminism that was straightforward (i.e., feminists promote equality for women) it could not be dismissed” (Horen et. al., 2001: 3). Second, integration of feminist identity was an important issue due to the many negative representations of feminists and the environment in which their identity would be accepted. The experienced feminists recognized these negative attitudes towards feminism, however, they did not have the same experience because there was already a strong feminist movement going on and they had strong support systems. Between both
groups they found an acknowledgement of the negativity surrounding the feminist label and the need to overcome that to solidify their identity.

Research on discrimination and sexism has shown that many women perceive discrimination and sexism in our society. A study by Klonoff and Landrine (1995) was developed to measure lifetime and recent discrimination in women’s lives. Their sample consisted of 631 women from various places in the community and they were all given the Schedule of Sexist Events (SSE). Their results show, “the majority (99%) of the sample reported experiencing sexist events once in their lives, with some events reported more frequently than others” (Klonoff and Landrine 1995: 443). Furthermore, their results indicate, “younger white women (18-22) do experience more frequent sexist degradation (e.g., name-calling, sexual harassment) than do older ones” (Klonoff and Landrine 1995: 466). This research is important because it shows that many women perceive sexism and discrimination in society. Combining research on sexism and discrimination with feminist identity models should show a clear relationship between the two. This in turn will contribute to current research and the discussion about third wave feminism.
METHOD

FEMINIST METHODOLOGY

Feminist methodology emerged from criticisms by women engaged in traditional research practices. Some of these criticisms include:

"the selection of sexist and elitist research topics and the absence of research on questions of central importance to women; biased research designs, including the selection of only male subjects; an exploitive relationship between the researcher and subject and within research teams; the illusion of objectivity, especially associated with the positivist approach; the simplistic and superficial nature of quantitative data; the improper interpretation and overgeneralization of findings, including the use of person-blame explanations and application to women of theory tested on exclusively male subjects; and inadequate data dissemination and utilization (Fonow and Cook, 1991: 86)."

Following the emergence of these criticisms, feminists began the process of developing a methodology that would attempt to overcome these problems and lead to a research process which could be used with a variety of topics.

Overcoming the issues raised above was a process involving many in the feminist community. It involved a dialogue between feminists, as well as a dialogue between feminists and their research. What emerged from this work is a paradigm shift in the ways every stage of research is conducted.

The first step is to select a research question which seeks to understand and improve a particular aspect of women’s lives. The formation of this question can originate with a researcher’s personal experiences, those of other women, or a general belief that information women need to improve their lives is unavailable. The next step is to design a project suitable for reaching these goals, while at the same time creating a relationship between the researcher and subjects which is non-exploitive.
This is a clear distinction from traditional research where the goal is to have an objective researcher, who can remain unbiased and unattached from the research. Jayaratne and Stewart (in Fornow and Cook, 1991: 98) explain that:

Some believe that this perspective implies the exclusion of the concept of objectivity in the research process. It is clear, nevertheless, that most contemporary feminists reject the notion that objectivity should be renounced altogether. Although absolute objectivity is not possible (even if it were desirable), the pursuit of some types of objectivity, as a goal, does have the potential to protect against several forms of bias.

One of the ways feminist methodology has overcome the exploitive relationship between researcher and "subject" is the use of qualitative methods. However, qualitative methods are not used exclusively by feminist researchers. Each researcher must approach a project with the intent to minimize exploitation while optimizing the real voices and experiences of their research participants. Among the other techniques, feminist methodology advocates the use of interviews to gain a clearer understanding of the respondent's voice by creating a comfortable environment to have a reciprocal conversation. This methodology was chosen for this research because I felt it was the best way to understand what the respondents were thinking and feeling about feminism and their identity. I chose to refer to what traditional research calls "subjects" as respondents or research participants because these titles minimize exploitation and best describe their role in these interviews; active, engaged and responsive.

The final element is that "as much as possible... we should actively participate in the dissemination of research results" (Fonow and Cook, 1991: 103). This is an
important step because one of the central goals of feminist methodology is to contribute to the lives of women through research.

Another aspect of feminist research is that it is a process, and the researcher needs to be deeply engaged throughout. This includes reflecting on one’s own experiences with a feminist identity, the steps involved in creating a research project, the ways things worked, the ways they didn’t, the feelings and emotions in each stage of the process, and most importantly, the deep connection made to each of the research participants. This is called reflexivity, “the tendency of feminists to reflect upon, examine critically, and explore analytically the nature of the research process” (Fonow and Cook, 1991: 2). I began my research by thinking about my own identity as a feminist; my interactions with my parents, the experiences I had in high school with boys, attending an electronics class where I was the only girl, as well as my experiences exploring and learning about feminism in academics. The next step in the process was to create a literature review on feminism, feminist identity and issues surrounding a third wave. I used the literature combined with my reflections on my own experiences to develop an outline of the purpose of my research and what I wanted to know from my respondents. I felt the purpose of this research was to: understand their views on feminism; understand how they individually came to feminism or developed a feminist identity, understand how they live or practice their feminism, and finally understand what their views are on feminist issues and the future of feminism.
QUESTIONNAIRE DEVELOPMENT

After I developed the broad purpose of my research, I began to organize how I would approach each area with my respondents. I began with four lists of the purposes of my research, as well as my literature and my own experiences. From this I wrote down every question I could think of as fast as they came to me, which resulted in a disorganized and redundant mess. I re-read and re-wrote the lists several times so that I had four distinct categories under which all the other questions fell.

The first category that emerged was the identification of various feminist identities and definitions of feminism. This was the initial question so that my respondents would identify at the beginning of the interview what they thought about feminism. The first question was to identify what the respondents saw as being the current meanings or definition of feminism from the perspective of media, their family, friends, peers, partners and from school. I also wanted to identify how feminism fit into their lives and whether it was different or the same as their personal definitions or meanings from others. This followed with a question about how the respondents felt other feminists they knew lived or perceived their feminism and whether this was the same or different from the way they described feminism fitting into their lives. The final question in this section discussed whether or not the respondents felt there were any generational differences across the definitions of feminism they encountered. Some of the probes and follow-up questions were to describe what the differences were, whether they were associated with any individuals and what the impact of those differences were on feminism or identity. Addressing
generational issues was one of the ways I could begin to address the third wave. It was a technique for discussing it in the broadest context so that respondents did not think in the typical "second wave"/"third wave" dichotomy.

The next category was the identification of positive and negative stigmas attached to feminism and feminists. The first question under this section addressed "pop culture", or the general or popular views of feminists. The questions which followed addressed the impact of the positive or negative stigmas on respondents and their feminist identity on how they felt it impacted the identity of others. The first question was one I felt had been a salient aspect of the development of my feminist identity which was whether or not being feminist was acceptable or unacceptable in different situations. I listed some probes to help clarify and elaborate responses, such as when was it okay or not okay to be a feminist, for example at the bar or in a class and what people, such as family and friends was it ok or not ok to be feminist around. Another way to understand the impact of stigmas on feminist identity was to ask whether the respondents perceived a backlash against feminism and I wanted to follow up with questions about what the backlash was, where do they think it comes from and what the impact is on feminism and feminist identity.

The final question in this category was the hardest for me to place in the interview schedule and that is whether the respondents considered themselves to have a feminist identity. This was difficult for several reasons, first I wanted to begin with clear definitions of feminism as they saw it in their surroundings before delving into their feminist identity, second I wanted the discussion of their identity to follow the
stigmas so those factors could be taken into account. I felt I needed a variety of probes for this question to try and understand it from many angles, such as what is this identify comprised of and did it develop suddenly or was it gradual over time, what generation of feminists do you identify with and why. I also felt that this question should ask in general if there were any other important factors about their feminist identity or identity that they would like to discuss so that they had the opportunity to elaborate in any way they felt was needed because I didn’t want to leave them feeling like they had not had the opportunity to have everything they thought or felt included.

The third category was the respondent’s exposure to, and experiences with feminism, and other “push factors”. This section began with another open and broad question: Whether they could identify any positive or negative factors that led them to have a feminist identity. The purpose was to allow the opportunity to reveal anything they felt was important rather than directing or leading the questions. This question began originally as a question to address sexism and discrimination, but I also realized that it would go further than that and uncover instances of sexual assault and rape. This became problematic during HSIRB review because I had a couple of probes to delve deeper into the types of sexism and discrimination my respondents had experienced and there were concerns about how to handle these very sensitive issues during the interview. I decided to address this problem several ways. First I eliminated all of the probes associated with the question, and respondents were provided with a list of resources on campus and around Kalamazoo in the event that
the interview brought up an experience with which they needed additional help. In addition, I structured my recruitment so that respondents would contact me directly, and would not have to sign their names to a list. All of the contact information was destroyed as the interviews were scheduled and I also elected to conduct my interviews in private study rooms. Finally, I elected not to collect any demographic information from my respondents to maintain the highest levels of confidentiality in the final report. Another factor I felt was important under this category was the respondent’s exposure to other feminists, such as parents, relatives and friends throughout the stages of their lives and development of feminist identities. The final question in this section was to ask about how and why they elected to take women’s studies classes in college. By asking this question I was hoping to identify the most specific factors that led them to inquire further about feminism because for me college was the first opportunity I had to learn anything about feminism beyond what I did on my own and learned from my parents.

The final category was to identify the issues the respondents felt were important, as well as issues they felt needed to be addressed by feminism, but were not considered feminist under the traditional or historical feminist ideologies. I began this section by asking simply what does equality for women look like from the respondents perspective. I chose to follow this by asking have we reached equality, can it be reached and what else is needed to achieve equality. I also felt it was important that because I was taking with individual feminist that it would be important to understand what is needed for them personally to reach equality or to
avoid inequality. The final two questions address what is next for feminism including new issues, new directions, who should be involved and what will feminism look like in the future and whether this would be the same or different from the past.

INTERVIEWS

I worked through these categories and questions to set a final interview schedule (see appendix). Once this was done I did a pilot study and interviewed two feminist friends and had another reply via e-mail. I wanted to ensure that the ordering of the questions was workable and to anticipate any problems which might come up. One thing I found was that the responses would cover more areas than the question asked for and left some future questions redundant. However I did not find that his was happening in the same way for each person in my pilot so I decided I would not change the schedule, I would adapt during each interview depending on the response. For example, if a respondent brought up backlash in the first section I would mention that and ask that we return to that topic and elaborate on it.

Once the interview schedule was set, brainstorming with my thesis chair began on issues surrounding respondents, such as how many respondents to interview and how would they be recruited? A goal was set of 10-12 respondents with some background and exposure to feminism or women’s studies. This was done because in doing interviews recruitment was needed from a pool of individuals who had put some thought into feminism and how feminism impacted their identity. The number was settled on because it seemed like a manageable number of interviews to conduct and transcribe, as well as diverse enough of the population at the level I wanted to
look at  The recruitment was limited to students on Western's campus due to convenience. Three women's studies courses were selected to make announcements in, because one was a capstone course in Women's Studies and the other two the professors felt they had some students who would both be interested and knowledgeable about the topic. I also recruited at meetings for the Women's Equality group on campus and the organizing meetings for Take Back The Night march because I felt I could also find some feminists who would be different from those in the women's studies department. The selection of respondents was not limited in any other ways; for example, I did not require respondents to be women, feminist, of any particular age or background. After sorting through these issues of respondents, flyers were created and verbal announcements for recruitment were made.

Once the interview schedule had been set and all other documents had gone through the appropriate channels, the recruitment process began. First, initial announcements were made in the classes and then follow-ups were made by the professors over a two-month time period until there had been ten scheduled and completed individual interviews. Interested respondents replied by e-mail to my address which was available on all of the flyers and during the announcements. Once they contacted me I would schedule interviews around their free time and then destroyed all of their contact information once each interview was scheduled. This was done in order to protect respondents confidentiality and in the one case where the respondent didn't show up I was unable to reschedule with her and had to schedule and interview with someone else. I met each respondent in the hallway out side of the
Sangren Education Library. We would then go in to the small study rooms available at the library. Each interview was conducted in a private study room and tape-recorded to ensure a comfortable flow of conversation as well as to have accurate transcriptions of the interviews. The interviews ranged from thirty-five minutes to an hour. Following each interview I made notes regarding interesting points or documenting consistencies across the interviews to help identify themes to go back to. For example I would note that one person felt their parents were especially helpful in shaping their identity or that they had held some type of job which made them turn to feminism for a variety of reasons. As each interview was completed I would attempt to transcribe them from the tape onto the interview schedule. I found this to be a slow process and was backed up on transcribing when I had completed all of the interviews. I found that this was an unexpected benefit because I had time to reflect in between the interview and transcription so I began to make lists of themes and things I found interesting as I continued the transcription process. One of the things I did during transcription was to space the questions on each page so that each question had a full response with it, and some of the time two or three questions would fill a page, but other times each page only contained one question and one response. I did this so that during my analysis I wouldn’t have to flip and shuffle pages for one question, it would keep the interviews organized. A second thing I did during transcription to maintain organization in my analysis was to indicate in the footer the interview number and the page number out of how many so that they could easily be
take out of order and reorganized quickly. Once all of the interviews were transcribed I printed them each out and began my analysis.

**THCHNIQUE**

I began my analysis by selecting four different color highlighters and page tabs in corresponding colors. I did this as a way to identify themes in the four main categories. I started with the first question and read that question across all ten interviews. As I did this I highlighted most of the replies and took notes on the themes or ideas from each respondent. I repeated this for each question and looked at all ten responses to each question before moving on to the next question. What I found when I finished was that I generally had four to five themes for each question and a lot of highlighting. My next step was to see how reliable I found these themes to be for individual respondents. I re-read all of the interviews from the beginning to the end individually this time and once again highlighted and took notes on themes. What I discovered was that this list was consistent with the first, but it was redundant and had not uncovered the themes as thoroughly as my first approach had. While I do believe it was important for me to do the analysis by both reading across questions for all interviews as well as down each interview, I feel that the first approach was the most helpful and revealing. Therefore I have presented the findings and themes as they arranged themselves from this approach. Once I was comfortable with my themes I began to cut down the highlighted sections I would later use for my findings. I found this was a more difficult process than I had anticipated because I had grown attached to my respondents’ replies and felt that only they could fully express the
themes I was identifying from their words. So the findings that follow might appear to be excessive or at other times redundant, but all of my respondents have their own life experiences, and while I identified themes that ran through them all, each is unique and deserves due attention.
FINDINGS AND THEMES

In the section that follows I will describe the different themes I found within each section of questions and provide examples from my respondents to illuminate those themes. The themes, to me, were where the response sets were re-occurring among the respondents. The quotes that I have selected for this process represent a variety of the responses and some quotes were chosen because they best illustrate a single theme or they are representative of a variety of themes within a single response.

CATEGORY I-WHAT IS FEMINISM TO THIS GENERATION

Under the first section, I found that for the first question, "What do you see as the current meanings or definitions of feminism?" my respondents felt that these definitions were different for everyone and that they found these differences to be skewed compared to how they defined feminism for themselves. These definitions were simplified to concepts such as equality, ending sexist oppression and equality for women and all races and classes of people. I also found that my respondents felt that people were too hung up on definitions of feminism and that those definitions should be more flexible.

-I think that feminism is something different to everybody. For me personally I think feminism is a way of teaching people, of educating, of bringing things to common terms and common playing-ground for everybody. (Respondent #7)

-That’s a tough one, it’s so different depending on who you ask, I mean a lot of people would just say its women’s rights, women are looking for equality, but I think its more than that. I think that we’re looking for equality between the genders, I mean there are some things that men have an advantage to and I think that there are some things that women have an advantage to...so I think, I would define it from my perspective, feminism as equality between the
genders not just the same rights for women as men have. I think that men should have the same rights as women have also. I think definitely from the media and maybe from peers you get this idea that all feminists are hairy lesbians and all they do is ball busting, and I don’t think that’s really what feminism is intending to do... as far as from my family experience my mom has always been a big feminist and I remember as a little kid, you know, a big right of passage was getting your first bra and I remember my mom saying real women don’t have to wear bras, so from my family its always been a bit of a skewed perspective, so I think my family has really encouraged different ideologies. (Respondent #10)

- To me a feminist is anyone who wants to elevate the status of women and I think that a lot of people get hung up on definitions. You know, it’s as if to be anti-choice is to be anti-feminist or to be pro-war is to be anti-feminist. I disagree with a lot of that, so to me it’s a very simplistic definition. (Respondent #5)

- It’s so contradictory. Just ending sexist oppression, sexism, I guess is the optimal goal. (Respondent #3)

- Basically the way I would describe it is basically just trying to get equal rights, you know what I mean, like that is the flat out definition that gets skewed across the board. You know a lot of people think it means a lot of different things, like over compensation and stuff like that. But I mean I just think it’s trying to get equal, like that statistics say that on so many levels that we’re not, and I think it’s just a really big problem that we need to work on. (Respondent #8)

- Usually I equate feminism with activism, just because I feel you have to take an active role to call yourself a feminist, but I don’t think that means belonging to an organization. Just typically just living your life honestly and claiming yourself as a women who wants equality or as a man who wants equality. (Respondent #9)

For question two, "How then does feminism fit into your life?" many respondents felt that feminism gave them the knowledge to understand their lives and the tools to speak about their experiences and to others about what feminism has
taught them. I also found that being a woman or being close to other women such as mothers, sisters and friends, my respondents felt they had something at stake by being a feminist and by being knowledgeable about feminist issues.

- I'm extremely outspoken, so, I mean, I guess any time I hear any sort of comment, I'm sure people who are close to me get sick of it, but then they don't say stuff, ya know. I guess it's just being conscious to society is how I treat it in my daily life. (Respondent #1)

- I use feminism to see the way social settings around me aren't just random, they are a part of a bigger perspective, and it angers me. But, I guess it helps me to understand the way things are the way they are. (Respondent #3)

- I've always seen this stuff and it helps me with the way I view things. When I see things now I understand them, like we live in a patriarchy and why things are happening, rather than, wow, this sucks. I can see it's happening and I understand why and can think about what is going on in a situation. Also little things I see happen every day, like things I see in class like how women are always getting interrupted, little things like that. (Respondent #4)

- It is my life. It is a big part of my life because I think it is impossible to identify with something and not live it every day of your life even if you're not really conscious of it. So I just think, I mean just in my classes and conversations with people, just getting insight I have, through what I think, through what I have learned about feminism and trying to create further awareness for other people is probably how I do it on a daily basis. (Respondent #9)

- I guess feminism fits into my life, because, well I have two sisters, and I would hate to see them mistreated or misjudged on the basis of being women...another one would be, lets say if I was dating somebody I would not want to display stereotypical roles, of like the boyfriend. I wouldn't want to portray negative stereotypes of the boyfriend, girlfriend sort of thing, so I think that's how feminism fits in to my life, you know. (Respondent #2)

- Yeah, it's the same and I feel very personally affected by feminism. You know some of the trials and things I have gone through. To me the whole idea
of the personal is political is a thing that has really pushed me to study feminism more, and especially being a women I have something at stake when I study these things and I take them very seriously. (Respondent #5)

- I think I’ve always been proud to be a woman. Like my mom is a midwife and a nurse and my parents got divorced when I was 12, so she’s been, she’s had to become strong, ‘cuz she’s had to take care of everything herself. And so it is starting to fit even more into my life right now ‘cuz I’m understanding how I want to raise my male and female children and play out those gender roles in my family. (Respondent #7)

- Basically, obviously I’m a woman, so on that level it definitely does and a lot of the people who are really important to me are women, and I think my mom definitely raised me to be a feminist and I think, you know, that’s had a lot of impact on me, and basically I mostly got involved my freshmen year in college. We went to a Women’s Equality meeting and it was like that little light bulb goes on where you’re like oh, my gosh, other people really do think about this stuff and care about this stuff, you know, and they’re working on it and I could be a part of that. (Respondent #8)

- Well I think that there is a big part of my life that appreciates what feminism has done in the past, especially with women getting into the work place because I’m in a rather nontraditional field for women. I’m going into mathematics, and there’s still a hugely skewed perspective in mathematics as far as the sexes go. I mean mathematics is 95% men, so having feminist ideology and being able to believe I can still do this even though I’m not the right sex, so to speak. For this field I think that really helps in my life because I am surrounded by mostly boys in my classes. Almost all professors of mathematics are men, so there’s something that helps me, this is what I love and what I want to do, and even though it’s not what women are supposed to do in society, it’s something I am able to do and I think that’s because of feminism. So that’s one facet, and I think also in the way that I live my life and I try not be restricted by gender roles as much. I mean there are some gender roles that I fit into and some that I don’t, and I think I give myself a little more leeway than most people as far as what I look like and what I do in a gendered way. (Respondent #10)

The next question, “How do other feminists you know live or perceive their feminism?” there was a variety of different themes across the spectrum from the same
as my respondents to very differently than the way that my respondents live their feminism. One thing that was consistent across this spectrum was that my respondents felt that there was a distinction between academic and activist feminists. For some, this distinction was a sense of pride to be one or the other, and for others this was a place where they questioned their own feminism because of whether they felt that for example, being an academic feminist might be less of a feminist than an activist. I believe that this distinction is an important finding for understanding how young feminists feel they “fit in” with other feminists, as well as how they see others defining and living feminism.

- I think it’s probably about the same. I think definitely different people have different areas where, you know, it means more to them. I think there are different sections or different areas of their lives where it means more to them or it means different things to them, but I think more or less we’re basically on the same page. (Respondent #8)

- Usually when I think of feminists I think of people who are activists or people who teach it, so no, I don’t view it in the same way. I don’t do much with it. (Respondent #3)

- Yeah, like I’m also involved in women’s equality, so that’s another way I live out feminism, and so I’m an activist on campus and all of my friends in women’s equality are obviously activists too. It’s also important to mention that not only are we advocating feminism, but we’re advocating other forms of oppression too, you know, to eliminate them, like living the wage campaign on campus. Just other things too, Progressive Student Alliance, but we focus on one form of oppression more than another just because of the facts of our lives. But we don’t just focus on that because we have to build solidarity and work together, I mean they’re all the same really. And so my friends and I are really active on campus, and I think that’s important, and just speaking up, like not taking shit from anyone, your boyfriend, or professors or anyone, you know, your boss, just living out feminism every day. (Respondent #4)
- Sometimes I think that a lot of people see that in order to be feminist you have to be involved in some group, which I think I’ve seen with people I know, that in order to truly live this ideology I have to prescribe to some group of people who do such and such a thing and I don’t think that’s necessarily true, and I think that’s the interpretation of a lot of, not just feminism, but a lot of different liberal perspectives or radical perspectives, is that in order to truly do it you have to be active and involved and I think that you don’t have to, you just have to live your life in a way that supports your ideology. (Respondent #10)

- I consider myself a very academic feminist, I read a lot of literature about it, I analyze it, I’m not necessarily a social activist which is how I perceive a lot of feminists I know, to them you’re not a feminist unless you go on pro-choice marches or join Women’s Equality Group here on campus and to me that’s not how I use my outlet for feminism. (Respondent #5)

- I think that there is a spectrum of them, I mean I think there are people who just basically live the way I just described, but then there are people who take a more extreme active route, they make it their whole life, they have a profession in it, they dedicate themselves to it, but whatever degree it is there is some level of dedication. (Respondent #9)

For question four, “Do you perceive any generational differences?” I found that some of my respondents felt that their generation was different from others because they saw their peers as being less feminist and having more internalized feminist values than previous generations. I also found that my respondents compared themselves to different generations of their own family and found there were a lot of differences between them. The final theme was that respondents felt that the second wave of feminism was very white, middle class and they felt that their generation was doing a better job of recognizing diverse issues and expanding demographics to include more people and voices, which is crucial for progress.
- I think actually our generation is probably, I would say is less feminist than a lot of the previous generations just because I think a lot of people, a lot of women especially, grew up thinking well I can vote now, and I can go to college so everything’s ok for me. You know, like we have the right to abortion, a lot of people just don’t understand that that’s in jeopardy, and basically I think that has made a lot of people complacent with how things are and not really question. But specifically people I know, well maybe some of my friends from high school, and I’ll talk to them and they’re like feminism, that’s totally back in the 60’s, we’re ok now, and I’m like what are you talking about. So basically, once I got to college I think there were definitely a lot more people on the same wave length as I am. (Respondent #8)

- Right, yeah I do see generational differences. Like I remember being younger and my mother really talking with me about issues in the work place and for me I had a hard time grasping it, I didn’t know if she was exaggerating the pay gap between men and women and how she receives less than her male counter-parts, so yeah, to me the whole second wave to me was about the work place. Like the first wave feminism was about the vote, second wave was about the work place and the third wave to me has been traditionally about body issues, and you know, like the “Vagina Monologues”, like I can’t imagine my mother’s generation going to something like that and being ok with it and being like yeah, this stands for feminism. So that’s kind of how I see the differences generationally. (Respondent #5)

- Yes, definitely, I would say my experiences in my family, like my mom’s mom was a strong woman. She, I would say, she claims herself to be a feminist, but she was also working and taking care of the kids and made the dinner, did the laundry, did all those things, and her husband didn’t help with those things. She was expected to do the domestic chores, and then my mom came along and I think she kinda backlashed towards my dad, just like she was, “I’m going back to school, I want to get my midwifery certificate, I’m already a nurse, I’m going back to get my masters”. So she wasn’t at home doing the domestic stuff that she was supposed to be doing and I think that caused a lot of problems in their marriage and it was definitely a huge reason for their divorce. And then like my sister is 10 years older then me, and how she is with her feminism is even different then how I am. So there is definitely, just within my family from experiencing it that’s how I see it, I think. But also from education, just seeing how women were historically, how, the different waves of feminism, how we are feminist now, back in the 1920’s they couldn’t be because they didn’t even have the rights we have now, so they were just fighting for just the right to be equal at that point, whereas now, I think even though we are not still created equal, we are at least are on
that playing ground that we can fight for things that matter even more, in our personal lives, in our marriages and families and stuff, so I think there is definitely generational differences. (Respondent #7)

- Yes, I can especially go back to my mother. She, I would say, in her generation she is a feminist, but she still does prescribe to a lot of gender roles that I don’t think that my generation, or at least in my generation of feminists would prescribe to. For example my mom is a nurse and does work, but when we were little she was the one to stay home and take care of the kids, whereas my sister, her husband stays home and takes care of the kids and my sister works, so I think its definitely a different perspective generationally in that the older generation worked for some equality, but still kinda prescribed to the traditional gender roles a little more then the newer generations who are finding more of a balance. (Respondent #10)

- The first wave to me, I guess I see as white middle class, and the second wave included more people. But today feminism is more complicated, more arguing and about an image today then previous generations than it is about rights. It’s also more contradictory today, I mean there are some upper-class women who want to get paid the same as their male collogues, and then there is the other perspective that third wave feminists talk about, like women in third world countries who just want to get water for their babies. I think that it is a lot more broad and covers a lot more areas. (Respondent #3)

- Well, when I think back to second wave feminism, you know, I automatically think back to Betty Friedan, and she was the big icon and Gloria Stinem, and I just think of white middle class women, and that is just what it seems to be dominated by, so generational differences. But obviously I wasn’t around, but just from my mom talking about it and reading about it, but I think now it seems like a broader stroke, but I’m white and middle class too, so, I just hope it’s broadening its horizons. (Respondent #4)

- Yeah, I think there is a huge generational gap, unfortunately, because I feel that, at least what I have been confronted with as a young feminist is that third wave feminism is dead and doesn’t exist, you know the story. (Respondent #9)
CATEGORY II: POSITIVE OR NEGATIVE STIGMA

Under the next section, for question one, "What do you see as the general or popular views of feminism?" respondents were most aware of the negative stereotypes many of us have heard about feminism. These include all negative stigmas such as man hating, hairy, ball busters, but my respondents also showed that they were aware that these were just stereotypes held by people who were either ignorant about feminism or irrationally reacting to something they felt threatened by.

- I guess your typical militant, lesbian, man hater, it just holds a negative connotation in society, like whenever you say it, maybe unfair, like if you’re a feminist you’re trying to get above men... it has this really negative connotation in society, and that you have to not conform to any feminine or beauty standards to be a feminist, but it’s not really either or, you can be a feminist and wear makeup, you can be a feminist and work out, for a lot of people it’s too hard to get away from that. (Respondent #4)

- Right, well there’s definitely a negative stigma that goes along with a feminist, you know you’re seen as hostile, obviously man hating, not focusing your energy in the right place, and victimizing ourselves, those are the kind of popular bad views of feminism. (Respondent #5)

- I think it's basically the backlash perspective is the dominant perspective right now, that feminists are all basically, you know what I mean, like trying to overcompensate and bring men down, and they're all lesbians and they don't shave and you know stuff like that basically is the dominant stereotypes right now, which I think is unfortunate, and I think it is unfortunate for women who are lesbians and who don't shave their armpits to be like if this is what people don't like, is it bad that I 'm like this, like you know that's what I think is really unfortunate about it is we get this scape-goat status for feminism and yet there are people like that, and so it's really hard because you don't want to say that not all feminists are like this, but then you don’t want to disqualify feminist who are like that either, and I think that's a very big problem for feminism. (Respondent #8)
- Negative, definitely negative, I think most people would use the term feminist when describing someone they don’t like, like don’t listen to her she’s just a lesbian feminist, blah, blah, blah, I mean I’ve heard that, I’ve heard guys saying about girls they’ve dated, stuff like that, that feminism is such a negative thing, and feminists are really radical people working for really radical social change, and I don’t think that’s necessarily the truth, that’s defiantly a big thing from the media, is that people who believe that there should be some change believe that everything should change, and that’s so off. (Respondent #10)

- I feel like the negative stigma stands out a lot more and I see them a lot more because generally I just think that people are ignorant and they just really don’t even think about it, it’s not that they don’t know it just doesn’t register in their minds most of the time, and I think people just don’t take the time to educate themselves, they obviously don’t really know, I mean you have to know what’s going on in the legislation to know how it’s really effecting you and people don’t take the time to get to know those things. (Respondent #9)

The next question, “Is being a feminist acceptable or unacceptable in different situations?” resulted in several different responses. One was that, yes, it is always okay to be a feminist, it is a part of them and they will always be feminist in every situation. Another response was that expressing feminist views was always okay, but the respondent would not always reveal to their audience that those views were feminist, per se. Finally, some respondents explained that being feminist for them was situational, that it depended on safety, respect for others and environments such as work or in religious settings.

- For me, never, ever. I will fight, I will yell, I mean there is nothing, that would ever, I mean, I guess how headstrong some people are about religion and will never deny that religion, this is mine. I know friends who would never admit they were feminists, well fine, fuck you, that would never happen with me. (Respondent #1)
- Yeah, I realize it’s always okay, like when I was in high school I couldn’t speak up or stick up for myself, even when people would say that things were harmful to women I would keep quiet, but now I realize it’s necessary to speak up in all situations. I think it is necessary too, why wouldn’t you? (Respondent #4)

- Yeah, I’m a confident person and I’m pretty self assured and I’ve never felt shy about discussing my views about feminism. I’ve never felt ashamed about it. I just feel like I have a personal set of beliefs and respect for myself and like if I go to the bar I’m not going to abandon those beliefs to get a guy or something. I guess that’s how I would explain it, I feel comfortable in all situations. (Respondent #5)

- Yes, I feel like I can always think like one, like my definition as a feminist and I can say feminist ideas, like I believe in equality for everyone, but I wouldn’t use the word feminist, I wouldn’t use the word, but I would still use the idea and the frame of mind. (Respondent #3)

- I think being a feminist is always acceptable, but I think stating the fact that you are a feminist is not always acceptable because everyone perceives the word differently and it kinda freaks some people out. And you know they hear all the stigmas when you say the word feminist before you say anything else so I think that, like I said you’re always being a feminist so if someone doesn’t like the way you are then obviously they’re not going to be okay with you being a feminist or being anything else. But if you say feminist, it depends on the person. It might jump at them and interest them or it might jump at them and freak them out or draw them back. In social settings it’s typically not a problem, but in a more professional setting you use different wording because a lot of times people aren’t really open or aware and don’t expect it, and when you say it, they don’t really know what to do with it. (Respondent #9)

- I think for me personally it is acceptable wherever I’m at, because that’s who I am. But in accordance to society I don’t think it’s acceptable every where you go, and I think that within religion it’s a touchy subject, you know, being a feminist, I don’t know how it got so messed up, especially in history, with women being men’s property, but that’s not what the Bible claims, but I think in different situations you can definitely feel that it is unaccepted, but I’m just an overbearing person, so I make people listen. (Respondent #7)
-I definitely think it is different for me in different situations where it is a lot harder for me...people I work with are very conservative...but I feel like some times it’s not necessarily my place to say things, you know, ‘cuz it’s a work environment and I want to be respectful of everyone...it’s hard to be respectful and not have a emotional response...so it does depend on the situation and the people I’m around, you kinda have to get a feel for it, you know, before you go making assumptions, I think it’s just like anything else. (Respondent #8)

-I think, yeah, there are some places that are a little more accepting of a feminist ideology, like in dorms, at parties at bars, people are not expecting a feminist ideology there, they’re expecting people to get drunk, and the girls act a certain way and the guys act a certain way, so that’s kinda a place where you’re just supposed to accept your gender role and that’s just the way it is. (Respondent #10)

The next question, “What, if any, are the benefits or downsides?” I found that my respondents felt that meeting people was both a benefit and a downside. It was seen as a benefit because they were able to meet people who were like them and thought like them which reinforced their feminist identity. On the other hand, they also felt that meeting people who did not have feminist beliefs was frustrating. Another theme, which came up as a previous theme as well, was having knowledge and understanding about the world around them. Knowledge and understanding was also seen as both a benefit and a downside because while it was positive that feminism gave the tools for understanding the world, this knowledge made respondents cynical or less carefree than before they knew about feminism.

- Definitely, I think, the benefits are just understanding and appreciating where women came from to where we are now to where we can go, and taking those benefits into our personal lives. But then the downfalls are those situations when people just don’t understand what you’re talking about or they don’t
think it affects them. Like there’s so many people that I talk to that just don’t think it affects them at all. If you’re not part of the solution then you are part of the problem, so just living in ignorance your part of the problem. Educate yourself. So I see serious downfalls when talking with people who are not educated and you’re trying to educate them and they are just not getting it. (Respondent #7)

- The benefits I would definitely say, it’s silly, but you get to meet women who are like you. You do develop a sisterhood, and that’s something I never had growing up, like I was definitely one of those people that was only friends with guys and girls kinda scared me, so meeting girls that felt the same way I did created a really good support group and stronger friendships. The downsides I would definitely say are meeting people who disagree with you, who know how you feel and will go out of their way to point things out to you, like oh well did you see that, blah, blah, blah and you just kinda have to put up with it I guess. (Respondent #8)

- Well, the benefits, well, it’s an interesting time, and I think it’s important to learn about women, and their status and the history and where we are now. And I’m a women so it’s important to me and growing up I didn’t learn any thing about it. Women’s issues weren’t that important in high school. So the benefits for me personally are keeping informed and being an educated person and knowing my rights legislatively, and what I can do and can’t do. Or I take a friend to Planned Parenthood, what are her rights? There are so many more benefits. The downsides and the stereotypes, after a while you get over them and learn how to deal with people who are less open minded. (Respondent #4)

- The benefits for me, as I’ve read the literature, it’s given me words to explain things I never had words for. You know, like everyday observations that people notice but they don’t know how to name. So it’s allowed me to be able to name something, dwell on the idea, digest it and feel confident about having an opinion about, you know, the causes. On the other hand, the negative, once you get into this mindset it’s so hard to get out of it. To try to have fun and try to take things at face value because I’ve grown so used to critically analyzing everything. It’s like I can’t escape it. You know, it’s like the MATRIX, you know, you can take this pill but you’re never going to be able to go back. Like you wish, should I have taken the other pill, should I have not opened my mind to this because it seems like I was much more care free when I didn’t. (Respondent #5)
-Well, benefits is something I was talking about before with being able to pursue something I want to do regardless of the fact that it's a male dominated field. I think that's a big benefit, that women are now given this opportunity to pursue what they want to do. If they want to stay home and raise kids that's fine. If they want to go to work and be the CEO, fine also. (Respondent #10)

When asked, "Do you perceive a backlash against feminism?" my respondents revealed three different sources of backlash. The first source of backlash they saw was the current administration, President Bush, right wing conservatives and the rich white power base in the U.S. The second was that they saw U.S. society as increasingly blaming individuals for problems rather than looking at structural causes, such as blaming the homeless for being lazy rather than addressing economic inequality in our country. Finally, respondents saw a backlash from individuals who feel that feminism challenges societies’ values and norms, as well as deeply held religious beliefs. The consequences they saw from all of these sources was that it was steering women away from feminism by making feminism look radical and unattractive.

- Yes, there is a backlash. I think it comes from the media and people in power in society basically. You have men and women who think there should be a power differential between the genders, and I would say it comes from our government, our current administration. The impact is that people don't initially... they get ideas about feminism and it makes people prejudiced. (Respondent #3)

- Yeah, lately it seems like, I don't know, but maybe there is some type of backlash, just because I thought there wasn't, but then Bush got re-elected so it seems really hard for me to see how there wouldn't be. Obviously it's coming from really powerful people in society, conservative white men with a lot of money and power who are dominating the mass people. So maybe it's not the majority, it probably isn't, just who have the power in society. It's really frustrating to see that, not only the people in the U.S. it's effecting, but
like overseas, like the global gag rule and the war in Iraq. It’s frustrating and depressing. It’s just a backlash against women these days, like Roe v Wade possibly being over-turned. It’s really scary. And so now we’re just trying to protect the rights we did gain in the 60’s and 70’s. We’re not going forward, we’re just trying to patch up the laws. Its ridiculous and sad it has to happen in the 21st century. (Respondent #4)

-Yeah, I do, I mean, I think it comes from the conservative takeover of our country. I hate to sound like such a liberal radical person, but it’s true. Our country has gotten progressively a little bit more conservative. And this new focus on family values, I don’t know where that came from, I mean that’s definitely contributing to the backlash I would think. And I think also that people in a patriarchal society are really uncomfortable when they see women starting to do things that women weren’t supposed to do in the past. And women starting to be able speak for themselves and say what they mean. And I think that makes a lot of people uncomfortable, which I think has really contributed to the backlash. And that’s kinda the introduction of the angry lesbian feminist, I would think, its part of this big backlash where all feminists are this ways and this is a bad thing to be. (Respondent #10)

-Yeah, I think there has been a huge backlash against feminism. I think it ties into this postmodern idea of thinking that there are no social problems, that there are individuals that are bad and individuals that are good and thinking about it on individualistic terms which erases the whole social nature of humanity. Like, for instance, when we think of rapists these are sick people, they are bad people and yet we don’t think that we live in a society which fosters this kind of mentality. Outside of feminism I see it linked with homelessness and cutting a lot of social programs, affordable housing and shelters. There is legislation against public homelessness, we just see these people as poor because they want to be poor, or they are too lazy to get a job or they’re drug addicts and that’s how they got there in the first place. And it really ignores the power systems that are put in place that keep these people there. I can’t imagine many people wanting to be homeless, just like I can’t imagine many women who want to be weak and submissive and all these things that define femininity. (Respondent #5)

-I think a lot of people’s values are challenged by feminism which is why a lot of people get really, really defensive. So, like, I don’t want to blame things on the church, but it’s really hard when I see things coming out of the church that
I think a lot of it is from religious and cultural beliefs. I definitely think there are a lot of women who won’t say they’re feminist, a lot of silencing of people who otherwise would be really supportive of things. (Respondent #8)

-I blame the media for where it comes from. I know it’s there. People have a very misguided idea about what feminism is about and they think it’s only about a few certain things. They have no idea that it encompasses, like, every part of their life. Like that’s what it is, it’s about women’s lives. I think that the major impact is steering women away from it, they don’t want to have a part in it because it will some how make them less attractive. (Respondent #1)

When asked, “Do you consider yourself to have a feminist identity and what is it comprised of?” I found that some of my respondents felt that feminism was imbedded in their lives and they couldn’t pinpoint a moment when they became feminist. Others believed that feminism was a constantly changing process as they learned more about feminism and as different issues entered their lives. Another theme was that, yes they believed they were feminist, but that meant making feminism what ever they wanted it to be. The final theme I found was that some respondents did identify as feminist, but were unattached or were not connected to any groups, organizations or “brand” of feminism. None of the respondents were non-feminist, and one respondent preferred humanist to feminist.

-I didn’t just wake up one morning or I didn’t have a class or I didn’t read a book where I said to myself “oh, that sounds like a good idea, I’m going to become a feminist now”. To me it’s just common sense. (Respondent #2)

-Yes, I think it’s embedded in me. I think it’s embedded in a lot of people. Some people deny that, but now that I’ve had education and learning about it it is something I’m acting on now, where as before maybe it was just a part of
me. I mean I’ve always been like, “wow, that’s not right, that’s wrong”, you know and I never identified it with the fact that women just didn’t have the same respect as men. So I think it’s just something I’ve been learning about my whole life and finally now that I’m in a classroom setting where I can be educated about it I’ve been learning about it in an educational way that it’s not just personal experience any more. (Respondent #7)

- Yeah, I definitely think it is a process and it still is, obviously my identity is always changing so my identity as a feminist is always changing, like what I’m thinking about and focusing on right now is different than the way I was thinking a couple of months ago. And I definitely think my identity as a feminist has become a lot more concrete. Like as I have gotten older, especially in college, I have definitely realized, like I wasn’t afraid to say I was a feminist and an advocate for women and an advocate for feminism. I feel like that is more of what I do than what I am, like that is a part of me and a part of the way I see the world. (Respondent #4)

- Yes, I think I identify with this generation, rather than my mother’s. Pretty much if you want to call yourself a feminist in this generation you can make that to be whatever you want it to be. (Respondent #3)

-I call myself a feminist, yeah, but I haven’t attached myself to a collective. I don’t know if I would call myself a third wave feminist. I tend to disagree a lot with third wave feminism, but I don’t attach myself to a type of feminism, I’m too young or I haven’t experienced or read enough literature to start narrowing my ideas down to one type of feminism so I’m just trying to keep an open-mind about it. I consider myself more on the conservative side of feminism, not conservative feminists, you could call them anti-feminists, but I remember when I first started getting into feminism and taking classes here there was just such this hype about it and such this social activist nature. And I remember being swept up initially, but now I try and distance myself and look at things really critically. I don’t blame all the problems on men. I think women create a lot of these problems too. I guess I take more time to digest thoughts before getting lost in like the whole, you know feminism can get really propagandized sometimes and I find myself not buying into that. (Respondent #5)

-I would say I definitely see myself as a feminist. I think it is comprised of an overall optimism, I guess, that there can be equality and social justice. I think that a lot of, I guess this has to do with third wave in my opinion, is more of a
branching out, that it’s not just gender equality, it’s racial, it’s class and sexual identity and all of that stuff. So I definitely think in general, I call myself a feminist. But I also call myself just a general supporter of social justice, and I would hope that other people see that in me. I definitely think that my mom raised me to be a feminist. I think, it’s kinda weird ‘cuz I started out in that backlash of, well I don’t need to be a feminist, I have all these rights and I never really felt oppressed as a women. And then I really think that kinda generally I started realizing that just because I’ve never been oppressed doesn’t mean that everyone has had that advantage. And then I started to realize that some of the things that have happened to me have been because I’m a woman. So I think there was that kinda gradual realization. And then basically going to that first meeting was kinda like there is something I can do about it, basically and it’s not everything I believe in, at least it’s kinda a jumping board for getting ideas from other people. (Respondent #8)

CATEGORY III: EXPOSURE OR EXPERIENCE WITH FEMINISM

When inquiring, “Can you identify any positive or negative factors that led you to have a feminist identity?” the question elicited several responses. On the positive side, respondents saw their relationships with other people as the factor that led them to have a feminist identity. This included family, friends and others who showed them that it is “okay” to be a feminist. The negative factors fell into two categories. The first was negative experiences with sexism, society, backlash and religion. The second was negative experiences with men such, as rape and sexual assault.

-Definitely, just like being surrounded by other people who consider themselves feminist and just seeing that’s okay. Definitely growing up with my mom, my mom’s a single mom so I saw her struggle. And she was a really strong women, she was always informed about what was going on in the world. And my grandmother too. And then I got to school and a lot of professors and the people I was becoming friends with I was just drawn to them because of stuff I was thinking. They had the same ideas and were actually talking about them, like in everyday conversations. Just being in that
environment where you can be comfortable with that identity. (Respondent #4)

-Positive factors would be my mom. So I’ve realized, wow she’s a powerful women. She takes care of herself, she did what she wanted to do and didn’t let anyone hold her back, not her husband, not her kids, and for her I think that’s awesome because that’s her calling. So she’s definitely a positive role in that. (Respondent #7)

-Positive, my mom, basically her one thing is she is really adamant about me getting a good education, and she doesn’t want me to get married before I establish a career, because she grew up in a time where women were, even when women would get an education it was like, okay, go get married and have kids and it was kinda lost. So I think she is just really supportive of being everything you want to be first before you compromise any part your identity. So I think that’s been a really good influence on me. (Respondent #8)

-Positive just the influences in my life, the people in my life, my family, my friends, have somewhat similar ideals. (Respondent #9)

-Just general society, backlash and everything. One thing I can pick up on is the whole girl power movement, like when I was in middle school or high school and it was kinda a mockery of feminism. And I think it’s one of those things that influenced a lot of would-be feminists to keep away. It’s just like silly and oh, yeah girl power. And it was all about yeah, I’m awesome, I’m a girl and you’re bad, you’re a boy and this silly school yard definition. And I think it was definitely something that kept me far away from it for a while, because I’m like, if that’s what feminism is, I don’t want a part of that. (Respondent #8)

-Negative factors, I kinda noticed. I guess I became more conscious of a feminist identity when I was confronted with people who threatened my identity. I guess even if it’s through casual conversation, I mean just saying things that rubbed me the wrong way and just didn’t sit right with me, and I knew there was just something wrong about them. And that kinda led me to think more about, well, you know, what do I believe? What are my morals? And what should I be doing to change the things people are saying? Or to try
and impact the things people are saying to make them realize that they might not be completely aware of what they are talking about. (Respondent #9)

-Yeah, negative life experiences, like I started really getting into it, I was raped when I was 16 and it took me a really long time to start to digest it. Then I remember the first book I read about feminism and it had a few chapters devoted to this and it helped me come to grips with it and see in non-individualistic terms, like this was a collective social problem that happened to me. Yeah, it just helped me digest those thoughts so I guess that was a negative experience that brought me to feminism. (Respondent #5)

-A negative experience that I just placed my hands on recently was a sexual assault that I encountered that I thought was my fault. I was not raped, this guy just came on to me. I was clothed, and he was thrusting his body on me. I didn’t think it was my fault, I just kind of thought that he liked me, and I kinda liked him, and maybe he thought it was okay, but that’s not okay. I was saying no and I was pushing him away. He was just 200 lbs. bigger than me, so that’s definitely a negative experience that has made identify more with feminism. And it’s really common and I don’t know any woman who hasn’t experienced it in one shape or form. But I know way too many women who push it off as, oh he was drunk or it didn’t mean anything. (Respondent #7)

Regarding the dimension, “Have you known other feminists?” my respondents reiterated the positive relationships they had with feminist family and friends. These were feminists in their family they had known from childhood or friends they had met in adulthood. A second theme that emerged was that they did know some feminists in their early years of education, such as elementary school, but were not aware at the time of that person’s feminist identity and now realize that the person’s beliefs were feminist.

-My aunt really. When I started getting more into feminism we started talking more and realizing that she was really into this, too. It’s been kind of a bonding thing with my family. (Respondent #8)
- Yes, and I think that’s part of having a feminist identity. This is the human psychology, we seek out people who are similar to ourselves. It’s just comfortable for us to be around people that have similar view points and there’s no dissonance there. So I would say yes, but I think that’s partly because of my own feminist identity. I think another big influence was another one of my very good friends in high school who was just raised with absolutely liberal everything. She grew up in a hippie commune, I mean so she was just one of those people who really drew me into feminism. And from there I mean hanging out with all of her friends, who were all people who would identify themselves as feminist was just a major turning point for me. My parents, I wouldn’t say my dad so much, he does what my mom says most of the time, so I would say my mom yes, and my sister also. But in general, my extended family is pretty conservative. My roommate also would identify as a feminist, and my boyfriend would identify as a feminist. (Respondent #10)

- I think now looking back I think a lot of people I did know, like a lot of my mentors and a lot of my peers were feminists, but I didn’t realize it. (Respondent #9)

Question three in this section, “What brought you to take women’s studies classes?” returned to the theme of being educated or knowledgeable about their lives as woman. The second theme was that they had come across a book about feminism and that lead them to want to know more about it.

- I think I was just really interested. I saw it in the course pack, and as a woman I feel I should be educated about where we have come. I don’t think we should take that for granted and just forget about it. (Respondent #7)

- I was like well, I should probably get an academic background on it so, you know, when people do start questioning things you can state facts and everything that are more well known. (Respondent #8)

- Because I would identify myself as a feminist I think that it is important to understand what you are saying when you say something like that. When you make such a broad sweeping generalization you have to understand what that
means and it means so many different things. I mean there’s so many different types of feminism that I think it’s important to understand who you are before you can say who you are, so that’s one of the things that drew me to WST. (Respondent #10)

-When I got here I decided to take it because I had never had it before, and I was in soc and feminist studies was something I was a little more interested in and I started reading about it before I took a class. I think Feminism is for Everybody by bell hooks, and I fell in love with it so I thought I would take women’s studies. Then I took it and then I thought, “Where has this been my whole life.” It just really spoke to me. I can relate it to every day things like on campus or around the world. It just made so much sense to me, why wouldn’t I. (Respondent #4)

CATEGORY IV: WHAT IS NEEDED

The final section of the interview covered what is needed for feminism. This was consistently was the most difficult for my respondents to answer. Inquiring about, “What does equality for women look like?” resulted in several themes. Some felt it would be similar to the current state or would continue to improve by enforcing laws that are in place. Others felt they just couldn’t say because they had never seen equality or wouldn’t know equality if they saw it. Still others felt that the word equality just explained equality, while others couldn’t see equality being at all in a capitalist society.

-Realistically I think that it will look similar to the way it looks now. I think, it’s just hard to look ahead and see that ideal picture when you see the way things have been and the way things are now and how obviously we’ve made strides but at the same time we have so much more to do. (Respondent #9)

-I guess all men and women would have the same opportunities and be allowed the same experiences, but I don’t think that could ever happen though, so I don’t really know what equality would look like. I just know it looks different from now. I don’t really think that it could happen. (Respondent #3)
-I don’t know, I haven’t seen it so I don’t know if I would know it if I saw it. But I mean, I guess that’s what they fighting for right now, just to have reproductive freedom, and women globally and advocating for women who are poor and women and children who are poor and bring more women into congress, letting women have more positions in power. (Respondent #4)

- Basically, this is one of those things that makes me go and put my head in my hands. It’s just really frustrating because I can’t pinpoint it. I don’t really, you know, I try and look at things that worked in the past, like the suffrage movement. It’s so amazing but it took so long, and it’s frustrating but you just have to keep optimistic about it. (Respondent #8)

- Equality for women looks like not having to say any thing about equality for women. I think the fact that we’re still talking about it means we don’t have it and I think, I can’t think of any thing else to say about that. I mean if we had equality we wouldn’t still be bitching about things that we think that we should have or things that we don’t have because it wouldn’t even be an issue. (Respondent #10)

- If that was so easy to answer, everything would be fine wouldn’t it? I don’t know, the more I study the more kinda, it’s so overwhelming and you wonder, “Can this be done?” I don’t know, I think it could get better, but I don’t think I can foresee equality, especially in capitalist society. (Respondent #5)

- I guess at this point we need certain laws that would say that women should get paid the same as men and have the same opportunities as men, but there also need to be something that make sure those follow through and resulted in it, because laws can be there and not really mean anything. But I guess just for women to feel like they have choices without public ridicule and make their own decisions. (Respondent #3)

- I think equality for women, and for men is their right to choose what is right for you in your personal life. When it comes to marriage, if you both want to work, if you don’t want to, there are ways to make things possible. And I think that for women and men their voices should be heard and their concerns should be taken care of. That’s in a marriage. For society is a much different thing ’cuz women still have to fight harder than men. But I think equality
would be equal pay, equal respect, that women should be moved up at the same rate as men if they are qualified. Equality is exactly in the word, it explains it, equality, that’s what it should look like. (Respondent #7)

For the question, “Have we reached equality between the sexes?” elicited a simple “no” response from some respondents. Others were more optimistic and responded that yes, we can over generations and with increasing peoples education of feminism and feminist ideals to achieve equality.

-No, I don’t think it will happen. (Respondent #3)
-No (Respondent #4)
-No, absolutely not. (Respondent #5)

-I think it can, I definitely think it can. I’m not saying it’s going to happen tomorrow, but I think it’s worth it even if it’s three generations from now. Like I said with the suffrage movement, a lot of the founding people didn’t get to see the rewards from that, but we get to see it. And the same with a lot of the second wave stuff, we get to see a lot of the benefits of that, so it’s hard to work toward something that you’re not really sure you’re going to see, but you just have to hope that people will start accepting it slowly. (Respondent #8)

-It has not been reached, that’s obvious. What else is needed is that more people need to be educated on the topic. (Respondent #7)

For the somewhat more reflexive question, “What is needed for you personally to reach equality or avoid inequality?” respondents again raised the issue of needing more awareness and education in society about feminism. Another theme was that
respondents felt that as individuals they needed to have self-confidence and respect to achieve equality or to avoid inequality.

- I guess just education, for me personally, because I’m a student and I would like to continue my education, but I don’t see it happening because of money and stuff. (Respondent #4)

- I’d say at least more awareness in the general population because I feel that’s a huge problem and until we do that we’re really just at a stand still, making little changes, but really not a huge impact. (Respondent #9)

- For me personally, I think to not feel like I’m being judged based on my gender, which is actually something that I do feel all the time, especially in a field like mathematics. When I want to apply to some research thing or do something like that, I’m not sure if I’m gonna get the grant because I’m good at what I do or because I’m a woman and they need some more women to get the grant. And that is always this pervasive thing in the back of my mind, is “Am I being given something because I’m good or am I being given something because I’m a woman?” So I think one of the biggest things for me is to eradicate that whole idea and that would feel like more equality because in my personal relationships most of the people that I surround myself with do identify as feminists so that’s not something I think about. But in academia and what will be my professional life I think that’s really important because in an environment where I’m surrounded by men all the time, to be able to feel like I belong in that environment and I am good, I think that’s an important thing for me. (Respondent #10)

- To me, it is to the point where we need to start battling some of this internalized stuff. You know, I can’t control how other people are going to think about me or perceive me, I can only control how I react to it and that would be not to let them affect who I think I should be. (Respondent #5)

- Basically I think self-confidence is a big step, just because there are a lot of situations where people are going to try to cut down your beliefs. And like I said being a woman, it’s really easy for them to do that and then say it’s because you’re a woman. No one’s perfect, but a lot of people say, okay, you’re not perfect and it’s because you’re a woman. So I think that its just
really necessary to have the strength in yourself to know that that’s not it and to try to make yourself as strong as possible. (Respondent #8)

- For me personally, well in the work setting I need to be respected. Like, that’s just me being a person. But I’ve experienced it now more so being a woman, where as I’ve always just thought I’m a person, never really thought I’m a woman. Which I think is now something that I really need to think about. And so I need to be respected, with intimacy, which means with a man in a relationship. He needs, I really hope that the person I’m to be with is educated about feminism because that would make our relationship a lot easier, and just having the respect of each other as a man and as a woman and sharing with each other and how that specifically effects our everyday life in different areas. And like with friends, I just, most of the people I’ve met, like my good friends are respectful people and understand the different issues we all deal with, not even just including feminism, but family problems and money issues. (Respondent #7)

When asked, “What is next for feminism?” respondents named three main themes. The first was the need for feminism to address issues facing women in other parts of the world. The second theme was for feminism to address other issues facing women, such as the intersection of race and class issues. The final theme was the need for more people to get involved, including politicians and men.

-More issues are being brought up today than before. Like I would say today it seems like the concern is more of a global approach, maybe more than in the past. I’m interested in women in developing countries. I think that’s really important that instead of looking at women in western society we look at women everywhere. That’s what I’ve been thinking about. (Respondent #4)

- I think it needs to be a more global issue. I think that we need to learn more about other cultures and respect those cultures, because granted there are women who are in unequal positions but don’t seem to mind it because that’s all they’ve been brought up with. And I think we need to respect that but I also think that we need to integrate and give people the education so they
know about these ideals and then they can have the choice to make themselves. (Respondent #9)

- I really think that in order for feminism to reach a more broad social acceptance, I think just speaking out on other issues, that aren’t necessarily feminist, like with race issues and class issues. I think we basically just need to form a barrier of minorities, reaching out and recognizing that we’re all being oppressed and that it’s not just a gender thing. And I think that’s something that feminism needs to recognize, because it’s really hard when you’ve been working for one thing for so long to say, well okay this isn’t working. We need to look at it and get more support, and kinda let other people in. And one thing that is insanely frustrating for me is minorities oppressing other minorities, and I think that that is a really huge step in realizing equality when we can all realize that as long as some one is held down we are all not free. (Respondent #8)

- Ideally I wish that ethnicity would play more of a role in feminism, I wish it was more of an international issue verses just an issue we’re dealing with here, because I feel that until we identify the fact that this idea was based on middleclass, white feminist ideals we’re not going to be able to push further. We need to look at a black woman’s identity, an Asian woman’s identity, a Jewish woman’s identity and I think that’s a new problem because there’s not enough people who identify or realize that they are feminist or can be feminists. So in the future, I wish that we will have looked at that a little bit and maybe more people will join the movement and then we can take it from different angles and pool more resources. Maybe then we’ll have equal pay, and we’ll have better jobs and we’ll not have to work so hard to show what we have and not be compared to men constantly. (Respondent #9)

- I think more men are getting involved, and I think that’s a really important point. So I think this generation now has to reach out to everyone and know that if we are going to reach equality or just move forward and combat sexism obviously we have to have both sexes involved. And educating and trying to combat that and I think that both men and women need to be involved. First we have to make sure that what feminists have fought for in the past are set in stone before we move on. (Respondent #4)

- I think one of the things you said, “Does anyone need to be involved?” and I think one of the biggest groups of people who need to be involved in feminism is men. I think if we get men involved in the cause, if we get men involved in
trying to gain equality not only would it be so much more enlightening for the women involved who are used to thinking only about themselves, but it would help the men because there are things men should have that they don’t have like paternity leave, the right to work part time and not be judged. So I think getting men involved would turn feminism into something men need just as much as women need. I think that’s very important.

I think we’re still struggling with a lot of the issues second wave was trying to bring up. We’re still struggling with freedom of choice, as far as body goes, abortion, birth control even. Some states are trying to pass laws that pharmacists don’t have to fill birth control if they don’t want to, they don’t have to fill the prescription and we’re still struggling with some of the issues from the previous wave of feminism, like we’ve made a lot of progress, but I would be hesitant to think of new issues when we haven’t solved the old ones.

Well, I think it’s mostly the same, I mean the previous generation, at least in thinking second wave, I think they did a lot of things for women today for us to have this conversation and I don’t think they owe us anything. I think it’s a continuous struggle, I mean we’re still working for the same things they were working for, and I think if we continue to work on those things we can make progress. (Respondent #10)

For the final interview question, “What should feminism look like in the future and is this the same or different from the past?” respondents gave several different themes. The first was that they felt that feminism needs to be more broad than in the past. Another theme I found was that my respondents felt that once again, more education was needed, such as in early education and in places where it could be more available to everyone. Respondents also felt that feminism should address respecting and valuing both men and women more in the future. Finally, they felt that feminism should work to present more positive views of women and feminists to combat the negative views represented in the media.

- I would definitely say just as a broad social movement with class and race, and sexual identity. And I think in a lot of ways it is kinda similar to the past,
like the suffrage movement, kinda stemmed off of African American suffrage. And I think basically that’s when we’re the strongest, is when we realize that we’re all people and we all need basic rights. I think with feminism, because I’m a woman and because, well women aren’t a minority, at all, like we’re 51% of the population, we’re being oppressed. And just because women get equal rights it doesn’t mean that there still won’t be a hierarchy of people that are left behind. But I think basically we really need to look at that and the way we view equality, nothing is a binary system basically. (Respondent #8)

- I think that it should be more accessible to more people, not just people studying gender studies or feminism. I think it should be accessible to all women, all colors, all sexes. Maybe just educating people, I don’t know how to make those things happen. (Respondent #4)

- You know there is so much talk about equality, and it seems like some people misinterpret equality with sameness. And there isn’t such a thing, respect men for being men and respect women for being women, and have those two different life styles be equally valued. There is so much “equality, equality”, but you’re not going to get equality when there are these inherent differences between men and women, just value each for being each. (Respondent #5)

- Well, I hope that those negative connotations are taken out, and the media more accurately shows feminism, I would like to think that the negative connotations, like women are just power hungry, more so what it really is, equal rights, equal treatment, right to be heard. (Respondent #2)

- It depends on how far you want to go in the future. I think that one of the things we need right now is a rebirth of feminism because all of this backlash and all the stigmas feminists are given in society. Many people I think would identify as feminists are kinda afraid to say so, and I think that what would really help feminism in the future is that more people are able to say, I am a feminist, this is what I believe in and I am willing to vote, work and live for that cause. And I think that is a hugely important thing, is what we need in the future is for people to stand up and say something. And I think that if ever this backlash settles down I think that will happen. But I mean if you go far enough in the future, I would hope that equality for women isn’t even an issue any more, that we look back in the past and say, view it the same way as we view slave owners nowadays, that was okay at the time but that was wrong. And we think that’s wrong and I would hope in the future they would say,
women didn’t have equal rights, that was okay at the time but that’s wrong, so I would think that feminism shouldn’t even be an issue anymore. (Respondent #10)
DISCUSSION

Understanding the formation of certain aspects of one’s identity is complicated under most scenarios, however understanding how a feminist identity is formed in our current social climate is particularly difficult. As we have seen there are multiple factors which can inhibit the formation of a feminist identity, such as negative stereotypes, backlash, and generations who have internalized some of the gains previous feminists have made. But there are young feminist out there. We have seen through my respondents’ voices the various ways feminist identities are evolving. They have revealed to us the very personal experiences and relationships which helped shape those identities.

We can see that feminist identity is developed and refined during the course of our lives, through our various interactions with others. This is similar to Griffiths (1995) metaphor of the web, which is created and reinforced by social factors in the environment and the social climate at a particular point in time, as well as an individual particular life experiences. This research not only supports Griffiths (1995) theory of the web, but it also identifies some of the particular factors under which feminist identity can develop.

Defining feminism and feminist identity has become increasing problematic, there are multiple branches of feminism, and feminism is continually being re-defined. However, when we listen to the voices of young feminists in this study we hear simple and comprehensive definitions of feminism, i.e. “just ending sexist oppression”, “basically just trying to get equal rights”. This supports the findings of
Horen, Mathews, Detrie, Bruke and Cook (2001: 3) which showed that “once they were exposed to a definition of feminism that was straightforward (i.e., feminists promote equality for women) it could not be dismissed.” These findings combined support the need for feminist groups and organizations to convey straightforward definitions to the public. This can be problematic across the various types of feminism because they might have developed as a result of a variety of differences. However, there are ways that these simple and comprehensive definitions can be transmitted, such as bell hooks book, *Feminism is for Everybody*, which is basic and straightforward, or through public education campaigns locally.

Visible movements and clearly defined issues have narrowly defined the parameters by which feminist academics seek to define a new generation of feminists. Often these definitions of feminism include some form of activism or involvement in feminism. The definition of a movement has problems of its own. Gilmore (2001) points out that there are a variety of structural factors which preclude young women’s active participation in a movement, such as time, money, social status, as well as sexuality, class and race. These factors limit their participation in many of the activities that might be defined as activism by the second wave, such as having the time or money to march on Washington. As we saw with my respondents, they had mixed feelings about where activism fit into their feminism. Some of my respondents who were activists felt that all feminists should be activist, while others expressed that they were not activist, but still felt that activism was part of the definition of feminism. However, both of these groups acknowledged that feminist activism didn’t
necessarily equal marching on Washington, they felt that feminism was something
that they could be “activist” about in many ways, such as in their personal lives or
through contributions in academe. This is just one example of the many ways young
feminists are redefining feminists in their generation, and a reason for researchers to
be careful when they are defining feminism.

In addition to having accurate definitions of feminism which fit the reality of
young peoples lives, it is also important that they are in contact with people who are
supportive of their beliefs. We have seen that feminist identity is developed through
exposure to other feminists or the need for knowledge or understanding to make sense
of events and experiences in their lives. These people and events are the catalysts
which lead individuals beyond the media representations of feminists. Not only are
they catalysts, but they also help to confirm and lend support to the formation of
identity. People like family, friends, teachers and mentors are all important factors in
this process, and probably one of the steps that feminists can take to encourage and
expand feminism around the country. What I am advocating here is not the same as
consciousness raising was in the past, although it could involve some level of
education. Generally I am talking about getting out there and meeting young people,
mentoring them in all aspects of their lives, and as a part of this I envision an infusion
of feminist ideology in every aspect of life. This should not be limited to feminism,
but as we saw with my respondents, they expressed the need for overall equality,
across race, class and gender. This involves addressing all inequality in the world,
when you see it in the streets, on TV, and through other sources.
One of the most surprising things for me, which came up over and over again was the importance of having knowledge and understanding about feminism. I have always realized that being educated about feminism has been very beneficial to me in the way I see the world. But I found my respondents bringing up their use of this knowledge or the reasons for pursuing this knowledge to be very different from my own. This was because I feel my desire for knowledge about feminism has been driven by my parents and just seems to be part of how I was raised; learning about women and society. I felt the respondents were driven by their specific histories, such as experiences with sexism and discrimination. Another thing I realized was that this gift was also a burden. It struck me when a respondent said what has become my favorite quote from this whole project, particularly because of its pop culture reference to the 1999 movie The Matrix:

once you get into this mind set it’s so hard to get out of it, to try to have fun and try to take things at face value because I’ve grown so used to critically analyzing everything. Its like I can’t escape it. You know, it’s like the MATRIX, you know, you can take this pill but you’re never going to be able to go back. Like you wish, should I have taken the other pill, should I have not opened my mind to this because it seems like I was much more care free when I didn’t. (Respondent #5)

This appears to be another factor which would deter young adults from identifying as feminists. The simple fact is, once you begin to learn about feminism and internalize many of the things feminism talks about, you can’t help but carry that with you all of the time. Feminism restructures your belief structure and makes you critically aware of your surroundings, as well as the ways you are treated by different people. I have found that my interactions with others are always viewed through a feminist lens, in
my personal relationships, as well as professional. I have always felt the need to gain more and more knowledge, but I can see now how this might be viewed by someone teetering on the verge of a feminist identity, they might see the ways feminism infiltrates every aspect of your life and think “am I going to get that uptight too?”

Another aspect of this project that I really found interesting was the different situations where it was okay or not okay to be a feminist. In some ways feminism is similar to politics and religion, they are all sensitive topics. There are different times, places and people when we each have to decide whether or not to reveal our positions on these topics. What we say can depend on our status in a particular situation, power differentials, the context of the environment, differences in personality and how strongly we hold a particular belief. I found that as a young feminist I have experienced this in the same ways as my respondents expressed it. Some felt it was always okay to be feminist, others expressed that feminist beliefs were okay, but they concealed the “F” word. Understanding the ways and situations when individuals expose their identity is important not only on the individual level, but it can also be an indicator of the acceptance of feminism in different spheres of society.

Along with understanding how individual feminist identities are formed in the current social environment, I also wanted to reveal the ways the current feminist movement is different from the previous ones, as my respondents see those differences. This is an important step because if you are trying to understand something, it is better to use the words of those who experience it rather than
imposing a past or outdated definition on them. We can understand this in a couple of different ways.

First, Harlan's (1998) research indicates that belief in equality for women is high, although the number of those who identified as feminist was low. This could indicate internalization of feminist values, it could also indicate a rejection of "feminism" as it has been conceptualized in the past or it could indicate a hidden identity. Second, Drake (1997) explains that third wave feminism may be hard to identify because of the difficulty of categorizing this generation. My respondents expressed that they did identify as feminist, however they also expressed how their identities were not attached to a "collective" and that "if you want to call yourself a feminist in this generation you can make that to be whatever you want it to be." This research reveals new complexities in understanding feminism, as well as new ways to approach future research on the subject.

In terms of the particular issues and new directions for the future of feminism, my respondents talked a lot about broadening the scope of feminism. This included addressing global issues, as well as issues of race, class and gender. My respondents expressed concern about the situations of women throughout the rest of the world. They spoke about their concerns with women's health, quality of life, education and ability to raise their children in other countries. However, they did not talk about simple solutions or injecting Western feminism into these societies. Rather they were keenly aware of the drawbacks of those approaches and spoke about the need to recognize cultural differences and making basic needs a priority. This is different
from the accusation that feminism is based on a white middle-class model which is limited to the issues facing white women. The issues of racial and class equality in our own country were also brought up. My respondents expressed the sentiment that "as long as someone is held down we are all not free." They also indicated the need for mutual support for all of the issues facing different populations, such as working for a living wage or saving affirmative action.

Another key element my respondents suggested was for feminism to take into consideration the involvement of men. Men have been involved in feminism since the beginning, but there remains the dominant belief that feminism is for women and that feminism helps women, but not men, or even that feminism is male bashing. However, men growing up with the fruits of feminism in their lives have also begun to internalize these values. Many men are the children of divorce which can expose them to some of the issues feminism has addressed. Furthermore, they have mothers, sisters, and daughters which make them sensitive to the treatment of women, as the male respondent in my sample expressed: "I guess feminism fits into my life. Well I have two sisters and I would hate to see them mistreated or misjudged on the basis of being women." There were different reasons for encouraging more involvement of men by my other respondents, such as for their physical and emotional health, as well as to have more time to be with their children. There is also a hidden benefit to more involvement and the visibility of men in feminism, and that is to encourage more young women to identify as feminist. For example, I have often heard or read about young feminists wondering about how the significant men in their lives fit into their
emerging feminist identity. Someone might believe that feminists should hate all men, as if it were a requirement. This might lead them wonder, what will their relationship with their father or brother be like? Or what about boyfriends, marriage, and kids? If more men, fathers, brothers, and potential boyfriends, were involved in feminism I think that help encourage more young women to be comfortable with feminism.

Finally, the most disheartening aspect for me was to listen to my respondents feelings about what equality looks like. I was surprised to find that that my respondents said they didn’t know what equality looks like. I expected utopian answers, creatively envisioning a world of equality between men and women. I was wrong. They expressed frustration about how they just don’t know what equality looks like because they have never seen it or that equality is simply when we don’t have to talk about equality anymore. While I didn’t expect this finding, I feel it might be explained simply by our nation’s history. From our history books we see the repeated attempts to gain equality in our country; from the civil war, to African American and women’s suffrage, to the civil rights and women’s movements in the mid twentieth century. It’s not that these movements for equal rights have been a complete failure in some way, but the continuing need to fully achieve equality following these movements might be the source of my respondents’ frustration.
CONCLUSIONS

LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

Some of the limitations of this research are the fact that it was conducted in a single geographic location and the sample exclusively includes white, middle and upper-class, college educated students with exposure to courses on women’s issues. I am curious myself whether the findings would be different for young feminists in other locations or who were drawn from a population with no exposure to a college environment. On the other hand, I don’t feel that these limitations have a substantial impact on my findings because I believe that this project is a preliminary step in gaining an in-depth understanding of feminism in its current context and environment, as well as taking the history of feminist movements into careful consideration. This research lays the foundation to allow research on feminist identity to expand to other populations.

One of the limitations which was apparent throughout the project was addressing the impact of sexism, discrimination and sexual assault on feminist identity. The limited resources for this project prevented me for acquiring trained counselors to be at hand during the interview to respond to any distress that might arise. Instead I chose to minimize the impact of the question, while still allowing the opportunity for my respondents to volunteer information comfortably. I did find that more than one of my respondents confided in me about events such as rape and sexual assault, which I feel is sufficient support for my argument. However, I do feel that these issues should be further addressed in future research on feminist identity.
Another limitation I realized upon reflection about the ways I was trying to understand the background factors leading to feminist identity was exposure to feminism in high school. I anticipated my respondents exposure to feminists, whether peers or adults, as well as some exposure in the classroom, but I underestimated how little the exposure in the classroom was. This was brought to my attention by several of my respondents, therefore I have thought of several ways exposure to feminism could be addressed at the high school level.

There are several places this investigation must begin. One is in high school textbooks. This is a first step to understanding what individuals are exposed to outside of the home and in the company of their peers. It is be important to look at the ways feminism is described. Is “feminism” even used? Is it called “women’s rights”, “women’s liberation” or “women’s movement”? What are the issues associated with the definition? Are there any people, particular events or “cases” which are mentioned?

The next step would be exploring other ways young adults are exposed to feminism other than the classroom. These things might still be with in the bounds of the school context, in the form of special lectures or programs, conferences or clubs. It is important to note that this could be a very subjective approach because it is unlikely that many of these things would be defined as feminist, therefore it would be up to individual researchers to define what constitutes as “feminist”. However, some topics I would suggest would be self-esteem and self image, domestic and sexual violence, sexuality, gender and reproduction. These are limited suggestions and an
adequate assessment would have to rely on a list of activities available for a particular area.

All research has limitations, whether the researcher recognizes it or not. There are restrictions on cost, time and other resources. I believe that the feminist method used in this research was able to delve more deeply into the intricacies of feminist identity that a more broad based approach might have overlooked. Furthermore, I believe that research is a process that continues long after a “project” is completed. Research should build on the past, contribute to the present, and pave new directions for the future.

CONCLUSION

The third wave of feminism does exist and there are a variety of factors that explain why this movement has not been as visible as the previous ones. One factor is that the gains made during the movements of the past resulted in feminist values being more integrated and a subconscious part of our social identity. This has increased the number of people who have feminist values, while decreasing the number of people who consciously make feminism a part of their identity. There has also been a shift towards a more individual identity in society. That has made the current feminist movement hard to categorize. This is important to realize when doing research on feminists because if a researcher where consulting an organization’s membership list or attending meetings a researcher might not locate many feminists because they are not associated with these types of groups.
This research broadly contributes to feminist understanding of the third wave by showing that young feminists see gender inequality from a systematic view, rather than as an individual issue. My respondents spoke about how feminism helped in their personal lives, but consistently emphasized the continuing need for feminism because of the many women in the U.S. and around the world who continue to be systematically oppressed. This is important to recognize because young feminists have been criticized for focusing too much on their own lives. Furthermore, I also found that my respondents are feminist activists, in their own lives and in the larger fight for other women's rights. This is another aspect of the third wave which has been criticized and theorized about. Listening to the voices of young feminists, we can see that many of the criticisms aimed against them are unfounded and we can have confidence in the future direction of feminism.

The process of formulating a question about feminist identity and the exploration of its many variables involved many thought processes. I began with observations about my feminist identity, how it was formed and is expressed. Then I compared my feminist identity to what I observed in the people around me and what I observed in the media about attitudes towards feminists and feminism. What I found was a contradiction between identifying as a feminist and living with feminist values but not identifying as a feminist. To try and explain this contradiction, I looked at theories on identity formation, past feminist movements and the current views on feminists and feminism through the eyes of my respondents.
My identity as a feminist is consistent with the theory I have outlined in this project. I identify as a feminist because of my positive interactions with other feminists, specifically my parents. My personal experiences strengthened the need for feminism in my life. Furthermore, today’s social climate is one where there is less activism than in the past and a greater focus on individuality, reflected in the practice of feminism in my life and relationships. I found that my experiences with feminism were very similar to that of my respondents. Our experiences as feminist are unique to the time and social environment in which we have grown up. It is a snapshot in time. Those who came ahead of us had different experiences and the children growing up today will also have different experiences with feminism in their lifetimes. I am a feminist in the third wave that exists outside of the definitions imposed by the previous waves of feminism. It is a new generation of feminists that is continuing to work towards the goal of equality for women and men.
APPENDIX A

INTERVIEW SCHEDULE
INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

CATEGORY I

-What is feminism to this generation?

Q. 1. What do you see as the current meanings or definitions of feminism?
   -From:
     The media
     Family
     Friends/peers
     School
     Partner

Q. 2. How then does feminism fit into your life?
   -How is that the same or different than just described?

Q. 3. How do other feminists you know perceive/live their feminism?
   -Is this the same or different from your experience/life?

Q. 4. Do you perceive any generational differences?
   -What are they?
   -Is this associated with any individuals?
   -What is the impact?

CATEGORY II

-Positive/negative stigma

Q. 1. What do you see as being the general or popular views of feminists?

Q. 2. Is being a feminist acceptable/unacceptable in different situations?
   -When is it ok/not ok?
   *Family, friends, in class, campus organizations, at the bar, with roommates, in the company of men

Q. 3. What, if any, are the benefits or downsides?

Q. 4. Do you perceive a backlash against feminism?
   -How so? What is it?
   -Where does this come from?
   -What is the impact on feminism and feminist identity?

5. Do you consider yourself to have a feminist identity?
-What is this identity comprised of?
-Do others identify you as a feminist?
-What generation of feminists do you identify with? Why?
-If feminist, did you suddenly realize/become a feminist or was it gradual, over time?
-Are there any other important factors about your feminist identity or your identity you would like to discuss?

CATEGORY III

-Exposure/experience (push factor)

Q. 1. Can you identify any positive or negative factors that led you to have a feminist identity?

Q. 2. Have you known many feminists?
   -Are your parents or other relatives feminists?
   -Before feminism.
   -Currently

Q. 3. What brought you to take Women’s Studies classes?

CATEGORY IV

-What is needed?

Q. 1. What does equality for women look like?

Q. 2. Have we reached equality between the sexes?
   -Can equality be reached?
   -What else is needed to achieve equality?

Q. 3. What is needed for you personally to reach equality or avoid inequality?

Q. 4. What is next for feminism?
   -Are there new issues?
   -Is there a new direction?
   -Who will be/should be involved?
   -What is this generation’s responsibility?
   -What is the previous generations responsibility?

Q. 5. What should feminism look like in the future?
   -Is this the same or different from the past? -How? Why?
APPENDIX B

PROTOCOL CLEARANCE LETTERS
Date: May 5, 2004

To: Susan Caringella-MacDonald, Principal Investigator
   Sara Brightman, Student Investigator for thesis

From: Mary Lagerwey, Ph.D., Chair

Re: HSIRB Project Number: 04-04-09

This letter will serve as confirmation that your research project entitled "Third Wave Feminist Identity" has been approved under the expedited category of review by the Human Subjects Institutional Review Board. The conditions and duration of this approval are specified in the Policies of Western Michigan University. You may now begin to implement the research as described in the application.

Please note that you may only conduct this research exactly in the form it was approved. You must seek specific board approval for any changes in this project. You must also seek reapproval if the project extends beyond the termination date noted below. In addition if there are any unanticipated adverse reactions or unanticipated events associated with the conduct of this research, you should immediately suspend the project and contact the Chair of the HSIRB for consultation.

The Board wishes you success in the pursuit of your research goals.

Approval Termination: May 5, 2005
Third Wave Feminist Identity

Western Michigan University
Department of Sociology

Student Investigator: Sara Brightman
Principal Investigator: Dr. Caringella-MacDonald

You have been invited to participate in a research project entitled “Third Wave Feminist Identity”. This research is intended to gain insight into the identity and views of feminism of the current generation of feminists. You are being invited to volunteer to participate in an interview regarding your experiences with feminism. We anticipate participation will involve up to two hours of your time.

One way you may benefit from this research is by having easy access to the results. As well, results will be contributed to the Women’s Studies Program, and hopefully useful in feminist academe. You will be able to see how other young feminists understand their feminist identity and their insights into the future progress of the movement.

However, as in all research, there may be unintended risks to you as the participant. One of the risks involves the inconvenience of the time out of your schedule to participate. Another risk is that during the course of the interview, negative memories may arise. You will be provided with a list of help groups you are free to contact should you so choose to follow up if questions about how you came to view feminism bring up any difficult times of experiences.

All of the information you provide will be kept completely confidential and your name will not be recorded anywhere. Your taped interview, and my notes, will be kept in a secure location. You are welcome to see the results, as they will be made available through the Women’s Studies Program and the Sociology Department. These results will maintain your confidentiality by not reporting the context of what is said in your interview including, locations, events, situations and other types of contextual events.

You have the right to refuse to participate or discontinue the interview at any time without prejudice or penalty. You may also choose to skip any questions you are not comfortable answering. If you have any questions or concerns you are free to contact Sara Brightman, the student investigator (616-291-6111), or Dr. Caringella-MacDonald, Professor of Sociology and the advisor of this thesis (387-5279). The participant may also contact the Chair, Human Subjects Institutional Review Board (387-8293) or the Vice President for Research (387-8298) if questions or problems arise during the course of the study.

This consent document has been approved for use for one year by the Human Subjects Institutional Review Board (HSIRB) as indicated by the stamped date and signature of the board chair in the upper right corner. Do not participate in this study if the stamped date is older than one year.

Participant Signature ___________________________ Date ___________________________
APPLICATION FOR CONTINUING REVIEW OR FINAL REPORT FORM

In compliance with Western Michigan University's policy that "the HSIRB's review of research will be conducted at appropriate intervals but not less than once per year," the HSIRB requests the following information:

I. PROJECT INFORMATION

PROJECT TITLE: Third Wave Feminist Identity
HSIRB Project Number: 04-04-09

Previous level of review: ☐ Full Board Review ☒ Expedited Review ☐ Administrative (Exempt) Review

Date of Review Request: 03/06/05 Date of Last Approval: 05/05/04

II. INVESTIGATOR INFORMATION

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR OR ADVISOR
Name: Dr. Caringella-MacDonald
Department: SOC
Mail Stop: 
Electronic Mail Address: susan.caringella@wmich.edu

(1) CO-PRINCIPAL OR STUDENT INVESTIGATOR
Name: Sara Brightman
Department: SOC
Mail Stop: 
Electronic Mail Address: swingbright@aol.com

(2) CO-PRINCIPAL OR STUDENT INVESTIGATOR
Name: 
Department: 
Mail Stop: 
Electronic Mail Address: 

III. CURRENT STATUS OF RESEARCH PROJECT

Please answer questions 1-4 to determine if this project requires continuing review by the HSIRB.

1. The project is closed to recruitment of new subjects.
   ☐ Yes (Date of last enrollment: ) ☒ No (Project must be reviewed for renewal.)

2. All subjects have completed research related interventions.
   ☐ Yes ☒ Not Applicable ☐ No (Project must be reviewed for renewal.)

3. Long-term follow-up of subjects has been completed.
   ☐ Yes ☒ Not Applicable ☐ No (Project must be reviewed for renewal.)

4. Analysis of data is complete.
   ☐ Yes ☒ No (Project must be reviewed for renewal.)

   • If you have answered "No" to ANY of the questions above, you must apply for Continuing Review. Please complete numbers 5-12 on page 2. If you need to make changes in your protocol, please submit a separate memo detailing the changes that you are requesting.

   • If you have answered "Yes" or "Not Applicable" to ALL of the above questions, please check the Final Report box below and complete questions 5-9 on page 2.

   • If your protocol has been open for three years and you still want to collect or analyze data, you must close this protocol by filing a final report using this form and apply for approval of a new protocol using an Application for Initial Review. Please make a Final Report on your project by completing numbers 5-9 on page 2.

IV. ☒ Application for Continuing Review

V. ☐ Final Report
5. Have there been changes in Principal or Co-Principal Investigators?  □ Yes  □ No

(If yes, provide details on an "Additional Investigators" form (available at the HSIRB web site, http://www.wmich.edu/research/compliance/hsirb/hsirb_2.html).)

6. Has the approved protocol been modified or added to with respect to:
   (If yes to any item below, provide the details on an attached sheet.)
   a. Procedures □ Yes  □ No
   b. Subjects □ Yes  □ No
   c. Design □ Yes  □ No
   d. Data collection □ Yes  □ No

7. Has any instrumentation been modified or added to the protocol?
   (If yes, attach new instrumentation or indicate the modifications made.)
   □ Yes  □ No

8. Have there been any adverse events that need to be reported to the HSIRB?
   (If yes, provide details on an attached sheet.)
   □ Yes  □ No

9. Total number of subjects approved in original protocol: 12

10. Total number of subjects enrolled so far: 4
    If applicable: Number of subjects in experimental group: Number in control group:
    • If this is a FINAL REPORT you may stop here and return the form electronically.
    • If this is an APPLICATION FOR CONTINUING REVIEW continue with numbers 11-13 below.

11. Estimated number of subjects yet to be enrolled: 8

12. Verification of Consent Procedure: Provide copies of the consent documents signed by the last two subjects enrolled in the project. Cover the signature in such a way that the name is not clear but there is evidence of signature. If subjects are not required to sign the consent document, provide a copy of the most current consent document being used.

13. If you are continuing to recruit subjects for this project, please remember to include a clean original of the consent documents to receive a renewed approval stamp.

Principal Investigator/Faculty Advisor Signature  3/6/05

Co-Principal or Student Investigator Signature  3/6/05

Approved by the HSIRB:

HSIRB Chair Signature  3-21-05

Western Michigan University
Human Subject Institutional Review Board – Mail Stop 5456
(269) 387-8293 research-compliance@wmich.edu

Revised 7/03  WMU HSIRB
All other copies obsolete.
Third Wave Feminist Identity

Western Michigan University
Department of Sociology

Student Investigator: Sara Brightman
Principal Investigator: Dr. Caringella-MacDonald

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Participant Signature_________________ Date_________________


Jandy, Edward C. *Charles Horton Cooley: His Life and His Social Theory*. New


