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THE FALTERING FEMINIST IDENTITY: A STUDY ON FEMINIST BELIEFS  
AND IDENTIFICATION FOR COLLEGE STUDENTS

DANIELLE MACKINTOSH  
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Reviewed and approved\* by the following:

Laurie Scheuble  
Senior Lecturer in Sociology  
Thesis Supervisor

Jeffery Ulmer  
Associate Professor of Sociology and Crime, Law, and Justice  
Honors Adviser

\* Signatures are on file in the Schreyer Honors College.

## **ABSTRACT**

The purpose of this study is to examine predictors of feminist identification in a sample of college students. The data for this research came from a non-probability convenience sample of 403 students at a large northeastern university in the fall of 2012. The survey included questions regarding the respondents' beliefs on gender equality, gender roles, bodily rights, and feminist stereotypes. These factors along with sex, race, and class rank were used to analyze their relationship with feminist identity. The majority of the students do not identify as feminist and more students were unsure of their feminist identity than those who identified as a feminist. Major findings include that sex of respondent and holding feminist stereotypes play the largest roles in feminist identification. Females are more likely to identify as feminist than men and students who hold negative stereotypes are not likely to identify as feminist as compared to those who hold more positive views. Respondents who believe in non-traditional gender roles and gender equality are also more likely to identify as feminist. Implications are discussed.

Keywords: feminist identity, college students, stereotypes, gender beliefs

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## **Chapter 1**

### **Literature Review**

The meaning of the word feminism has received considerable attention in the theoretical and empirical literature focusing on gender. One issue that has been raised is the connotations attached to the word (Anderson, Kanner, & Elsayegh, 2009; Leaper & Arias, 2011; Robnett, Anderson, & Hunter, 2012). When many people think of feminism, they associate the concept with that of radical feminism including hating men, being unattractive, and being homosexual. McCabe (2005), using data from the Gallup Poll, found that only 29 percent of women and 12 percent of men identified as feminists. Those respondents with higher levels of education were more likely to report feminist attitudes than their counterparts. These are surprisingly low levels of identification with feminism which may be due to the view that many people hold that feminism is an extreme view. However people who hold feminists beliefs may not identify themselves as feminists because they have a negative perception of feminism. The present study focuses on factors behind feminist or non-feminist beliefs. Data come from a convenience sample of students at a large northeastern University. I examine the perceptions of feminism held by college students and the beliefs that define feminism, such as equality between men and women and gender roles. The primary research questions to be examined in my study are:

1. Do college students stigmatize the term feminism?
2. Do college students identify with feminist beliefs, but not label themselves feminists?
3. Does exposure to feminism play a role in whether college students identify themselves as feminists?
4. Does race and ethnicity determine feminist identification among college students?

### **Background**

Identifying as a feminist can have multiple meanings considering there are many different feminist perspectives. Five common perspectives are liberal feminism, radical feminism, cultural feminism, socialist feminism, and womanism or women of color feminism (Henley, Meng, O'Brien, McCarthy, & Sockloskie, 1998). Previous studies that measure feminist identification focus on attitudes that represent liberal feminism (Snelling, 1999). This perspective values ideas such as gender equality and dispelling traditional gender roles. When many people think of feminism, the ideas that come to mind are those that reflect radical feminism (Liss, O'Connor, Morosky, & Crawford, 2001; Snelling, 1999). Radical feminists believe that sexism and male dominance are major problems in society. Since most people tend to label all feminists as radical, a negative connotation often exists for anyone who identifies as a feminist.

There are however other feminist perspectives. Cultural feminism reflects the belief that men and women are biologically different, but society today values men's culture more than women's. Therefore, women's value needs to be more respected (Henley et al, 1998). Socialist feminism views all discrimination as detrimental to society such as sexism, racism, and class

oppression. They believe that all of these injustices need to be ended (Henley et al, 1998). Finally, womanism or women of color feminism arose because many women of color felt excluded from the original feminist movement. Their primary goals concern poverty, racism, as well as sexism along with the need for improvements within social systems like education and health care for all people of color (Henley et al, 1998). Each of these perspectives highlight the range of belief associated with feminism. Despite these differences, they each have common goals of equality. Increased awareness of the different views associated with feminism can show people, especially those who do not want to identify as feminists, that the idea of feminism can accommodate many ways of thinking (Dube, 2004).

### **Feminism and negative connotations**

It is not a new idea that the term feminism has negative connotations. Previous research supports this belief. In one study, college students were interviewed regarding feminism and they described feminists as “anti-male”, “extremists”, and “trouble-makers.” One male even stated that feminists “are like white supremacists” (Stone & McKee, 2011, p. 79). Stone and McKee (2011) also reported that 42% of males and 25% of females felt that the feminist movement had a negative impact on society. Moreover, college students are more likely to identify as a feminist, if they do not hold stereotypes about feminism (Leaper & Arias, 2011).

Lack of feminist self-identification, even when holding feminist beliefs, may come from a variety of factors. Many people stereotype feminists as being unattractive or unfeminine. Women may not want to be labeled as such and consequently they will openly avoid identifying themselves as a feminist (Rudman & Fairchild, 2007). Other stereotypes of feminist that discourage women from feminist identification include feminists being seen as undesirable,

plain, or gay (Leaper & Arias, 2011). Moreover, women who hold negative attitudes towards other women who fail to conform to traditional female gender roles are more likely to hold negative stereotypes about feminists (Robnett et al, 2012). The overwhelming majority of men reject the feminist label because they see it as going against their own interests (McCabe, 2005).

Other research however has shown that these negative stereotypes are not accurate descriptors of feminists. A study found that women do have more hostility towards men than men do, however, feminists have been found to have lower levels of hostility towards men than nonfeminists (Anderson et al, 2009). Thus, the common belief that feminist are men-haters is not empirically supported. Women who are nonwhite, less wealthy, have higher education levels and attend religious services less frequently are more likely to identify themselves as feminists than women who are white, wealthy, poorly educated, and frequently attend religious service (Peltola, Milkie, & Presser, 2004). Therefore, the stereotypes about feminists do not accurately describe who most feminists really are. Moreover, women have recognized the need to further dispel the stereotypes in order for the feminist movement to move forward and contribute to social change (Winston, Carletide, McLeod, & Mustafa, 2012). Until the negative stereotypes are removed from public perception, many people may be reluctant to identify as a feminist in order to avoid stigmatization, even if they agree with other feminist beliefs.

*Research Question 1: Do college students stigmatize the term feminism?*

Based on this research, I expect to support my first research question. Students may have been socialized into having a negative attribution toward feminism and have these attitudes while in college. I also expect that this will vary by gender of the respondent (Stone and McKee, 2011)



### **Identification with feminism**

Many people believe in some of the feminist movement's concepts, but they fail to identify themselves as feminists (Burn, Aboud, and Moyles, 2000; Liss et al, 2001). These concepts reaching levels of consensus include traditional gender roles, gender equality, and bodily rights such as abortion and sexual behaviors (Bolzendahl & Myers, 2004). Various studies have recognized the paradox in women valuing feminist beliefs but then distancing themselves from the feminist label (Leaper & Arias, 2011; Rhodebeck, 1996; Stone & McKee, 2011). This contradiction is because opinion does not form one's identity, but identity does construct one's opinions. Having feminist opinions does not necessarily mean having a feminist identity, but having a feminist identity usually means having feminist opinions (Rhodebeck, 1996).

Gender equality and ending traditional gender roles is an important issue for many feminists. One study found that having gender egalitarian attitudes is not a consistent predictor of feminist self-identification (Leaper & Arias, 2011). Another study of college students found that college women break away from traditional gender roles when they first get out of college by being very career oriented. However, as they enter motherhood, these same women fall into the traditional gender role molds by planning on leaving their careers to take care of their children and being financially dependent on their husbands (Stone & McKee, 2011). Both of these findings show that women may believe in gender equality, but not actually want it all aspects of gender equality for themselves. So, while the evidence shows that women are in favor of equality in the work force, they may still embrace the traditional view of wife and mother. Bodily rights are another important issue within feminism. Feminists think that women should be able to have control over their bodies, which means that abortion should be an option for women (Bolzendahl

& Myers, 2004). Moreover, feminists tend to reject the idea that sexual behavior is only acceptable for procreation purposes. They support same-sex and premarital sexual behavior (Bolzendahl & Myers, 2004). Although bodily rights are often an issue among feminist, Rhodebeck (1996) found that opinions about abortion rights is a weak indicator of feminist opinion compared to gender roles. This may not have as large of a role in predicting feminist identity. However, little research has been done to explore this causation. If more people were exposed to these beliefs and their connection with feminism, they might be more willing to identify as a feminist.

*Research Question 2: Do college students identify with feminist beliefs, but not label themselves feminists?*

I expect that, particularly for women, respondents will be in support of feminist issues without identifying with the label.

### **Exposure to feminist ideology and views of feminism**

A lack of understanding about feminism may cause people to identify as a nonfeminist. A higher exposure to feminism increases the likelihood of identification as a feminist (Leaper and Arias, 2011). Education about gender discrimination and feminism comes from a variety of places such as school, family, friends, and the media (Leaper & Brown, 2008). This exposure may not only raise awareness, but also minimize negative stereotypes. Both of these factors may be necessary in feminist self-identification.

Dube (2004), believes that the exposure most college students have to feminism is incomplete and out of context. The news media fails to talk about actual feminist issues. Instead, students hear people like Rush Limbaugh complaining about ‘feminazis’ and news coverage

debating whether Madonna is a feminist (Dube, 2004). Rarely does the public hear about the feminist movement as a social and political action or idea. The lack of accurate and relevant facts regarding feminists is prevalent and leads people to believe that equality between men and women exists. Often, it is not until women encounter a crisis, such as an unplanned pregnancy, sexual harassment, sexual assault, or sexism in the workplace that they turn to other women for advice and support. It is at this time that women are able to more easily understand and identify with feminists (Dube, 2004). Therefore, many women, and men, do not grasp feminist's beliefs until they are exposed to the inequalities the feminists are aiming to eradicate. If we look into how mothers influence their children, we may find that this exposure, or lack of exposure, plays a role in feminist identification.

*Research Question 3: Does exposure to feminism play a role in whether college students identify themselves as feminists?*

I expect that when respondents experience feminism more frequently, through their friends, their class material, and other outside sources, that they will be more likely to label themselves as feminists.

### **Feminism and race**

The relationship between race and feminism is complicated (Kane, 2000). As seen in the different feminist perspectives, women of color sometimes feel excluded from feminist beliefs because they feel that the goals do not apply to them. They believe that feminists only want white women and men to be equal, but not minority women. Moreover, gender attitudes between races differ, especially between African American and White women. African Americans are more critical of gender inequality than whites and have different social action

approaches to ending the inequality. When analyzing gender attitudes, race needs to be controlled for because of the potential for difference between groups (Kane, 2000, p. 425).

Many empirical studies have analyzed race and feminist identity and their results differ. One study found that feminist identification compares and contrasts among European American, African American, and Latina ethnicities (Robnett et al, 2012). The only similarity among the ethnicities is that hostile sexism, when women hold negative views towards women, predicts a higher likelihood of holding negative stereotypes about feminists and therefore means they are less likely to identify as a feminist. Although the ethnicities overlap here, the differences between them outweigh the similarities. Women of color are less likely to identify as a feminist if they have hostility towards men compared to the European Americans. Nevertheless, holding negative feminist stereotypes either partially or fully mediated feminist identification for African American women and Latinas, but not European Americans. African American women and Latinas may have different predictors of feminist identity than do European Americans (Robnett et al, 2012). Factors that predict a feminist identity may not apply to women of color and would account for the differences in race and feminist identity. Anderson (2009) found that many women of color do not identify themselves as feminists because there is a conflict of ethnic identity and not because of the negative stereotypes that are typically associated with feminism.

Despite these findings, some research does show that race does not have an effect on feminist identification (Bolzendahl & Myers, 2004; McCabe, 2005). This lack of relationship may be a result of the sample analyzed, as both of these samples had mostly White participants.

*Research Question 4: Does race and ethnicity determine feminist identification among college students?*

I expect that race and ethnicity will be a factor in feminist identification. If the sample of non-White respondents is not large enough however, race and ethnicity may not prove to be a factor.

## **Theoretical Framework**

### *Social Structure and Attitudes Toward Feminism*

Social structure, to a large extent, both focuses and constrains people's behavior (Henslin, 2013). One social structural variable that is examined in this research is gender. Specific behaviors are expected of men and women with the expectation that women are more focused on the world of family and work and men are more focused on work and family. Feminism directly affects women and their status in the society compared to men. Past research has shown that women are more likely to be feminists than men because women view it as more beneficial and relevant to their everyday lives (Anderson, Kanner, & Elsayegh, 2009; Bolzendahl & Myers, 2004; McCabe, 2005; Stone & McKee, 2011). I expect the same results in the current study.

Overall, younger people who are starting to enter their careers and start families are more likely to believe in feminist values because they want equality in the work place and within their marriage. People who are older and already settled down accept their position in society because they see it as 'just the way things are'. Young people also have larger dreams that they do not want to see interrupted due to their sex and they see the world as a just place with opportunities regardless of sex, race, and economic status. However, in the present study younger people are predicted to be less likely to identify themselves as a feminist because they have less collegiate

education and the older people are still young, but are in the process of starting their lives outside of school.

As respondents have increased years of schooling, they will have a greater tolerance and acceptance of ideas and labels like feminism (Bolzendahl & Myers, 2004; McCabe, 2005). I expect that as rank in college increases respondents will be more likely to identify themselves as feminists.

### *Socialization and Attitudes Toward Feminism*

Socialization takes place over the life course resulting in the development of attitudes and behavior (Bolzendahl & Myers, 2004; Cooley, 1902). I treat religiosity as an indicator of feminist socialization because it incorporates both the views and beliefs that the respondent was socialized into over their life course. . Research shows that people with strong religious beliefs tend to be more traditional in lifestyle choices, gender ideology, and marriage and family patterns (Grasmick, Wilcox, & Bird, 1990; Jensen & Jensen, 1993; Morgan, 1987). I expect that as respondents' level of religious importance increases the likelihood that they identify themselves as feminists will decrease.

Political and social views also influence how people view feminism. Socialization is one predictor of political views and, since the respondents for my study are college students, they are more likely to be influenced by the views of their parents than people of an older age. Previous studies have found that political affiliation predict feminist identification (Bolzendahl & Myers, 2004; McCabe, 2005). Another study found that politically conservative individuals are more likely to hold stereotypes about feminism and therefore are less likely to identify as one

(Liss, O'Connor, Morosky, & Crawford, 2001). I expect that respondents who hold more liberal perspectives are more likely to be accepting of feminism than those who are more conservative.

I expect that personally knowing someone who openly identifies oneself as a feminist increases the likelihood for one's own feminist identification. This relationship will probably lead to a greater understanding of what feminism is and simultaneously dispel many stereotypes that people hold regarding feminists. A greater understanding and dissolved stereotypes of feminism respondents may make people more open to feminism. I expect that learning about feminism from a close family member, friend, or teacher would make a respondent more likely to identify as a feminist and learning from the Internet or news would probably make one less likely to identify as a feminist.

### *Identity and Socialization*

Identities are the values applied to the self by one's self and others (Gecas & Burke, 1995). One's identity shows various plans of action that the individual anticipates to carry out (Delamater & Myers, 2011). Social identities are developed when one belongs to a particular group who are understood to share certain characteristics that define the group (Hogg, Terry, & White, 1995; Tajfel & Turner, 1979). Once an individual defines one's self as a member of the group their characteristics become standards for the individual's actions and beliefs. Social identities may lead to stereotypes if people hold certain overarching beliefs about a group. I believe that if people think that all feminists are extremists and man-hating, many people may avoid identifying as feminists due to this stigma.

People are motivated to plan and behave in ways that will confirm and reinforce the identities they want to claim for themselves (Burke & Reitzes, 1981; Markus & Wurf, 1987).

The link between identity and behavior is through common meanings (Burke & Reitzes, 1981).

If group members of a certain identity agree on the meanings of particular identities and behaviors, they can act in ways that establish the identities they claim to hold. If they do not agree on meanings of particular identities and behaviors, then it is more difficult for them to establish their preferred identities. I think that some people have difficulty identifying as a feminist because there are multiple types of feminism, so it is more challenging for outsiders to establish a feminist identity.

Choosing a particular identity to enact is another factor in feminist identification. One way that people figure out which identity to enact is through the hierarchy of identities. Role identities have a different importance to the self, so we rank them. The greater importance or salience an identity has the more likely an individual is to perform activities that express that identity (McCall & Simmons, 1978; Stryker & Serpe, 1981). Another way to determine which identities to enact is through social networks. If an individual has multiple and significant relationships that make it important to enact a certain identity, the more committed the individual becomes to that identity (Callero, 1985). Finally, identities are enacted depending upon situational opportunities. If an identity has no opportunity for profit, then one will be restricted from enacting that identity in social situations (Delamater & Myers, 2011). I believe that many college students fail to identify as feminists because they do not see it as important as other identities they hold, their social networks do not need them to be enacted, and the feminist identity does not have many profitable opportunities in college social settings.



## Chapter 2

### Methods

#### Sample

The data for my research comes from a survey of undergraduate students from a large northeastern university. The data were gathered and conducted in the fall of 2012. The sample was selected via convenience sampling, a non-probability sampling technique. After giving their informed consent, the sample of 403 students completed the survey for extra credit in their introductory sociology or methodology class. In the lower level introductory course 90% of students participated. In the upper level introductory course 36% of the students participated and the methodology class had 83% participation. If students did not want to complete the survey, but still wished to gain extra credit, their professor would provide them with an alternative option. The research project was approved by the human subjects review board at this University.

The survey included questions regarding demographics, relationships and dating, gender roles and feminism, leadership, and body image. Completion of the survey took about 30 to 45 minutes. For the purpose of this study, I only focused on questions regarding demographics, gender roles, and feminism among college undergraduate students in order to analyze what factors play a role in feminist identification.

#### Participants:

Out of the 403 participants, 46.4% were male and 53.3% were female. Their ages ranged from 18 to 29 years old, with the average age of 20 years old. Participates were 66% White, 10.6% Black,

12.5% Asian, and 7.8% are another race or ethnicity. The participants are 25.3% first year students, 19.4% second year, 31.5% third year, and 23.6% fourth year or more.

Measures:

### *Feminist Identity*

Feminist identity is the dependent variable and it measures whether participants label themselves as feminists or not. To measure this variable participants answered the question, "Do you consider yourself to be a feminist?" (0 = nonfeminists, 1 = don't know, 2 = feminist). The percentage of respondents who do not consider themselves to be feminist is 66.2%, 14.1% consider themselves feminist, and 19.6% do not know if they consider themselves to be feminist.

### *Gender Roles*

Eight questions were asked about traditional gender roles. These items were rated on a 5 point scale ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree. Table 1.1 lists these statements and shows the percentages of the participants' responses to each gender role question. I recoded the responses so that the items were in the same direction (1 = strongly agrees with traditional gender roles, 5 = strongly disagrees with traditional gender roles). A gender role scale was developed by adding the responses together and dividing by eight. The alpha coefficient for the scale is .675.

[Table 1 about here]

There are also two scenario questions asking the respondents what they expect a mother and father to do regarding work after having children. The different scenarios range from not taking any time off work to not going back to work, with a continuum of options in between.

### *Bodily Rights*

Respondents were asked two questions regarding bodily rights. Both questions asked whether the respondents agreed or disagreed with the statements, "sexual behavior is only appropriate for procreation purposes," and "women have a right to choose to have an abortion." I recoded each question,

so that the items went in the same direction (1 = strongly agrees with traditional bodily rights beliefs, 5 = strongly disagrees with traditional bodily rights beliefs). A bodily rights scale was created by adding the responses to these items together and dividing by two. The alpha for the bodily rights scale is .362.

### *Gender Equality*

Respondents were asked about whether they agreed that men and women should be equal regarding six different situations. These situations are listed in Table 1.2 along with the percentages of the participants' responses. I made a scale (1 = strongly disagrees with gender equality, 5 = strongly agrees with gender equality) by adding together the responses and dividing by the total number of items. The alpha for the gender equality scale is .926. A higher number indicates a greater amount of agreement with gender equality.

[Table 2 about here]

### *Negative Stereotypes*

Respondents were given 14 statements regarding beliefs about feminists and the feminist movement to measure whether they hold negative stereotypes. Table 1.3 lists the 14 items and provides the percentages of the participants' responses to the items. I recoded all of the items to go in the same directions (1 = believes in negative stereotype, 5 = does not believe in negative stereotype) and then scaled the items by adding them together and dividing by the number of items. A higher score indicates a more positive view of feminist. The alpha for this scale is .880.

[Table 3 about here]

### *Feminist Experience*

There were three questions on the survey that asked about the participants' exposure to feminism. These questions ask how many college courses the respondents have taken that cover feminism, whether or not the respondents have friends who are feminists, and how well the respondents think they understand feminism. I analyzed each question separately with feminist identity and also weighted each question in order to analyze participants' total feminist experience with feminist identity.

## Chapter 3

### Findings

The descriptive statistics for mean, standard deviation and sample size are presented in Table 4. The correlations among the variables used in the logistic regression models are presented in Table 5. There is a significant correlation for feminist self-identification for eight of the variables analyzed. Feminist self-identification is positively significantly correlated with sex, cumulative GPA, amount of feminist friends, and the number of classes the respondent has taken that teaches about feminism. Feminist self-identification is negatively correlated ( $p < .05$ ) with gender role beliefs, attitudes toward bodily rights, gender equality attitudes, and stereotypes. Race and understanding feminism are not significant correlations with feminist self-identification.

[Table 4 and 5 about here]

Table 6 is a multinomial regression of the independent variables with feminist identification as the dependent variable. Model 1 presents the effects of the independent variables. The first set of variables compares people who are not feminist (0) as compared to those who view themselves as feminist (1). Three variables are statistically significant and one is nearly significant. As grade point average increases, respondents are about 1.4 times more likely to view themselves as feminists ( $p < .05$ ). For each increase in religiosity, respondents are 28 percent less likely to be feminists ( $p < .05$ ). As the number of classes about feminism the respondent has taken increases, they are 2.4 times more likely to view themselves as feminist ( $p$

<.000). Finally, men are 82 percent less likely to view themselves as feminist as compared to women ( $p < .000$ ).

Model 2 illustrates the effects of the intervening variables along with the independent variables. Two of the variables are statistically significant, while two others are nearly significant. As the respondents increase in class rank, respondents are 69 percent more likely to identify as feminists ( $p < .05$ ). When respondents hold more traditional gender role beliefs, they are 62 percent less likely to identify as feminists ( $p < .05$ ) as compared to their counterparts. As respondents hold more feminist stereotypes, they are 80 percent less likely to identify as feminists ( $p < .000$ ) as compared to those holding fewer feminist stereotypes. Finally, if the respondent has friends who identify as feminists respondents becomes 2.9 times more likely to identify as feminists as compared to those without feminist friends ( $p < .000$ ).

[Table 6 about here]

Table 7 shows the comparison between respondents who do not know if they are feminist with those who indicate they are not feminist. In Model 1, only one variable is significant. Women are 40 percent less likely to see themselves as not feminist as compared to men ( $p < .05$ ).

Model 2 illustrates that three items are statistically significant. When respondents indicate that they understand feminism, they are 53 percent more likely to be unsure of whether they identify as feminists ( $p < .000$ ). As respondents hold more feminist stereotypes, they are 56 percent more likely to not identify as feminists ( $p < .05$ ) as compared to those with fewer or no feminist stereotypes. Finally, as respondents gain more feminist friends, they are 1.7 times more likely than their counterparts to be unsure of whether they identify as a feminist ( $p < .000$ ).

[Table 7 about here]

Table 8 is a crosstabulation comparing sex and attitudes towards gender equality within childcare. The majority of males (64.7%) and females (83.4%) either strongly agree or agree that childcare should be shared equally among men and women. Table 9 is a crosstabulation comparing sex and attitudes towards gender equality within careers. The overwhelming majority of males (82.1%) and females (93.4%) believe that men and women should have equality within their careers.

[Table 8 about here]

[Table 9 about here]

Table 10 is a crosstabulation comparing sex and what the respondents' own expectations are after having children regarding childcare and work time for mothers and fathers or themselves depending on their sex (females answered what they expect as mothers and males answered what they expect as fathers). Hardly any males (1.6%) and females (.5%) believed that the mother should not take any time off of work after having children. Conversely many more males (32.7%) and females (22.5%) believed that fathers should not take any time off of work after having children. Males (28.6%) and females (41.3%) did believe that mothers should continue to work full-time after a short maternity leave. The majority of both males (64%) and females (70.4%) believed that that father should continue to work full-time after a short paternity leave. Many more males (40.4%) and females (41.2%) felt that the mother should not return to full-time work until the children are in school; very few males (2.6%) and females (4.6%) felt the same way regarding the father.

[Table 10 about here]

## Chapter 4

### Discussion

The purpose of this study is to analyze factors that predict feminist identification. Overall, findings showed that beliefs in gender roles, gender equality, and stereotypes about feminists cause people to accept or reject feminist identity. I also explored whether sex, race, education level, and parental status played any kind of role in feminist self-identification. As reported in previous studies (Anderson et al, 2009; McCabe 2005), the biggest predictor of feminist identity is gender of the respondent. Females are more likely to identify as feminist than males. Although many of the results are not new, they provide support for the findings from research.

My findings support my first research question of whether college students stigmatize the term feminism. People with more stereotypes towards feminism are less likely to identify themselves as feminist than those with fewer stereotypes about feminism. This relates to previous research that discusses the negative connotations associated with the term feminist (Anderson et al, 2009; Leaper & Arias, 2011; Robnett et al, 2012). The more negatively someone views a group, the more likely s/he is to disassociate himself with that group. Many college students still view feminists as being irrational, sexist, radical, and man-haters. As long as the majority of people hold feminist stereotypes, identification as feminist will be hesitant and uncommon. Future research should focus on a pre- and post- survey of students in a course that discusses feminism to see if education reduces the belief in common stereotypes. Although there still would be selection bias involved because the type of people who take a course in women's

studies may have more feminist identification than those not taking such a course. However, this approach would still allow an examination of change in attitudes over time.

Another explanation for why few students identify with and lack an understanding of feminists may have to do with young people being worried about being judged by others; therefore they reject a label that they may actually believe. Future research should also focus on asking a question of whether the respondent consider themselves to be a feminist and whether that person would tell their friends that they are a feminist, as it may lead to further understanding of the impact of feminist stereotypes.

Another issue examined in this research focuses on the respondents who categorized themselves as “don’t know” when asked if they are feminist. I compared respondents who declared themselves to not be feminist in contrast to those who did not know if they were feminist. Although the findings are somewhat unclear, it does appear that those students with feminist friends are more likely to say they don’t know if they are feminists as compared to identifying with the not feminist category. Two other variables were significant. As students self-identified understanding of feminist increased, they were more likely to declare themselves to be not feminist. Perhaps this is due to having developed an ideology about what feminism means and then using it to justify not being a feminist. Also, as the number of stereotypes held increased, respondents were more likely to declare themselves to be not feminist. This finding is consistent with the expectation that stereotypes stop people from feminist identification. Future research should focus on the differences and similarities between the don’t knows and those respondents who are sure of their feminist views in order to determine if the “don’t knows” are people who genuinely do not know or if they are more likely those who are not feminist.



My second research question, do college students identify with feminist beliefs, but not label themselves feminist, is not supported by my findings. College students who hold more liberal gender role beliefs are more likely to identify themselves as a feminist, as are students who believe in gender equality and liberal ideals of bodily rights. These findings show that respondents who understand what feminism stands for are more likely to consider themselves to be feminist. Previous research emphasizes the common paradox between believing in feminist values and distancing from the feminist label (Leaper & Arias, 2011; Rhodebeck, 1996; Stone & McKee, 2011), however the current study does not find this paradox.

My findings do support my third research question about feminist exposure. Respondents who have more feminist friends are more likely to also identify as feminists. However, this finding may be in the opposite causal direction as people who identify as feminists are probably more likely to have friends who are also feminists. When respondents take more classes that teach about feminism, they are also more likely to identify as feminists. These findings support previous research that also found that a higher exposure to feminism increases the likelihood of identification as a feminist (Leaper and Arias, 2011). However, respondents who stated that they understood feminism and who had more feminist friends are more likely to be unsure of whether or not they identified as feminist, than not feminist. This finding may be due to the confusing nature of feminism, since feminism has many different subcategories and meanings; however it may also be a result of not wanting to be associated with the negative connotations applied to feminists. Further research should continue to analyze the relationship between feminist exposure and feminist identification by looking at the different messages people receive about feminism and where or who they receive them from, as certain messages and sources will be more meaningful to people than others.

Another finding that supports exposure feminism and feminist identify is that of class rank. The further along in college a respondent was, the more likely one was to identify as a feminist. So fourth year students were more likely to identify as feminist than third year students, third year students were more likely to identify as feminist than second year students, and so forth. Throughout college, many people change their opinions, as they are educated on topics that they previously knew little about. The longer that students attend college, the more they come into contact with knowledge about feminism and people who declare themselves to be feminist, and the more likely they are to consider themselves feminist. A higher class rank means that there is a greater likelihood that students had more exposure to feminism.

My final research question, does race and ethnicity determine feminist identification, is not supported by the findings. Race and ethnicity does not have an effect on feminist identification. Similar to the findings from previous studies (Bolzendahl & Myers, 2004; McCabe, 2005), the present study had mostly White respondents. It is possible that a difference in feminist identity may exist between Whites and non-Whites, but there need to be more non-White respondents in the sample to definitively examine a disparity or similarity. I suggest that future research oversample minorities in order have a large and equal representation of Whites and non-Whites, so that this research question can be analyzed.

There were other interesting findings that are worth mentioning. Another factor that effects feminist identification is cumulative grade point average (GPA). As GPA increases, one is more likely to identify as a feminist. Perhaps one explanation for this is the relationship between doing well in classes and willingness to consider ideas. The desire to do well in a class could inadvertently produce a situation where students learn more about feminism because learning the information was require to do well on the exam and consequently in the class.

Further research should focus on further analysis of this relationship. Additionally, as respondents view religion as more important they are less likely to identify as feminists. People who are more religious are more likely to have traditional values and therefore not align themselves with the feminist identity.

Most respondents, both male and female, believed that men and women should be equal within their careers and when taking care of children. These beliefs are more liberal and more associated with feminist thought. However, when this ideal was applied to their own lives as mothers and fathers, they upheld traditional gender expectations where the mother will stay at home and takes care of the children as the father resumes full-time employment. This finding shows that, although people may believe in liberal notions of gender equality, they do not want it themselves. People may view feminist beliefs as being unrealistic and unrelated to their own lives.

Future research should also look into whether parental status of college students plays a role on their feminist identification. Previous research has shown that mother's education is one of the clearest examples of a socialization variable (Liao & Cai, 1995). Also, higher education determines the likelihood of feminist identity because it exposes people to egalitarian ideas and dispels gender myths (Brooks & Bolzendahl, 2004; Rhodebeck, 1996). Mothers who have a higher education level are more likely to identify as feminists, which in turn causes their children to hold more egalitarian views (Powell & Steelman, 1982). However, I examined the respondents' mothers' education level and parents' professional statuses and it showed no effect on feminist identification.

## **Chapter 5**

### **Conclusion**

Feminism is a topic that many college students are quick to judge and then to disassociate from. However, people who agree with feminist values regarding gender roles and gender equality seem to accept the feminist label. Unfortunately, the majority of college students do not consider themselves to be feminist because of the constantly present stereotypes that are attached to the term. Many people are also unsure of their feminist identity and this relates to lack of feminist education and exposure. Future research can help supplement these findings and further explain college students' feminist identities.

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## TABLES

<b>Table 1. Percentage distribution of response to gender role items.</b>					
<b>Gender Role Questions</b>	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
It is much better for everyone if the man earns the money and the woman takes care of the house and the family. N=403	2.30%	16.20%	28.50%	30.80%	22.20%
If a husband and a wife both work full-time, they should share household tasks equally. N=403	38.90%	42.90%	15.20%	2.50%	0.50%
I see nothing wrong with giving a little boy a doll to play with. N=403	8.80%	24.20%	24.50%	29.30%	13.10%
A man who is very emotional and cries is not very masculine. N=403	2%	19.10%	21.90%	38.30%	18.60%
Female bosses are harder to work for than male bosses. N=403	4%	22%	40.40%	23.20%	10.40%
It is OK for women to cry in public but it is not OK for men to do so. N=403	2.30%	24.80%	27.80%	33.70%	11.40%
A person should generally be more polite to a woman than to a man. N=403	7.30%	29.90%	19%	30.60%	13.20%
I think it is all right for a woman to keep her maiden name after she marries. N=403	12.60%	28.70%	29.50%	23.40%	5.80%

<b>Gender Equality</b>	<b>Strongly Agree</b>	<b>Agree</b>	<b>Neutral</b>	<b>Disagree</b>	<b>Strongly Disagree</b>
Career Opportunities N=403	59.3%	28.8%	4.8%	2.5%	4.5%
Salary N=403	60.6%	25%	7.6%	2.5%	4.3%
Education N=403	63.9%	25.8%	4.6%	1%	4.6%
Professional Sports N=40	30.8%	22.5%	23.5%	14.1%	9.1%
Housework N=403	39.6%	32.1%	17.1%	6.6%	4%
Child care N=403	41.8%	32.9%	13.2%	7.3%	4.8%



<b>Table 3. Percentage distribution of responses for feminist stereotype items</b>					
<b>Feminist Stereotypes</b>	<b>Strongly Agree</b>	<b>Agree</b>	<b>Neutral</b>	<b>Disagree</b>	<b>Strongly Disagree</b>
Feminists hate men. N=403	3%	11.90%	23.70%	44.40%	16.90%
Feminists are extremists. N=403	7.80%	21.20%	30.30%	29%	11.60%
Feminists are sexist. N=403	5.90%	23.20%	28.20%	30.80%	12%
Heterosexual men can be feminists. N=403	12.50%	43.90%	29.80%	11.70%	2%
Women who are feminists are less likely to get married than women who are not feminists. N=403	3.50%	21%	34.10%	33.80%	7.60%
Most women who are feminists are probably lesbian. N=403	1.50%	7.80%	24.20%	40.90%	25.50%
All feminists have the same beliefs. N=403	1.50%	5.10%	19.10%	56.20%	18.10%
Feminists always agree with each other. N=403	1%	6.10%	21%	53.70%	18.20%
Most feminist beliefs are rational. N=403	2.30%	23.30%	49.40%	20%	5.10%
Feminists have improved opportunities for women. N=403	11.90%	47%	30.30%	8.80%	2%
Feminists are less physically attractive than non-feminists. N=403	3.30%	8.10%	32%	38.30%	18.30%

<b>Table 4. Descriptive Statistics</b>			
	Mean	Standard Deviation	Sample Size
Feminist Identification	.4574	.72670	352
Sex	.5313	.49973	352
Race	.3267	.46968	352
College Rank	2.62	1.153	352
Cumulative GPA	3.73	1.009	352
Religious Importance	2.75	1.049	352
Gender Roles	2.6372	.58748	352
Bodily Rights	2.0994	.88276	352
Gender Equality	1.9153	.93844	352
Feminist Understanding	2.3438	.87934	352
Feminist Stereotypes	2.5258	.64194	352
Feminist Friends	1.0625	.87807	352
Feminism Classes	1.6591	.63849	352

Table 5. Correlation of all the variables in the model

	Feminist Identification	Sex	Race	College Rank	Cumulative GPA	Religious Importance	Gender Roles	Bodily Rights	Gender Equality	Feminist Understanding	Feminist Stereotypes	Feminist Friends	Feminism Classes
Feminist Identification	1												
Sex	.255**	1											
	.000												
Race	.062	.060	1										
	.248	.265											
College Rank	-.036	-.098	-.054	1									
	.496	.066	.315										
Cumulative GPA	.107*	.087	-.048	-.226**	1								
	.046	.102	.371	.000									
Religious Importance	-.068	.050	.185**	-.028	.046	1							
	.201	.346	.000	.601	.393								
Gender Roles	-.399**	-.434**	-.075	-.118*	-.018	.052	1						
	.000	.000	.159	.027	.735	.328							
Bodily Rights	-.227**	-.136*	.066	-.175**	.062	.485**	.319**	1					
	.000	.011	.219	.001	.244	.000	.000						
Gender Equality	-.157**	-.253**	.028	-.026	-.039	-.063	.366**	.144**	1				
	.003	.000	.600	.632	.470	.239	.000	.007					
Feminist Understanding	.079	-.067	-.031	.068	.073	-.004	-.083	-.028	-.041	1			
	.140	.212	.559	.206	.173	.935	.121	.605	.440				
Feminist Stereotypes	-.432**	-.315**	-.051	-.101	-.083	.070	.630**	.233**	.224**	-.184**	1		
	.000	.000	.342	.058	.122	.191	.000	.000	.000	.001			
Feminist	.344**	.138**	.054	.043	-.055	.045	-.285**	-.122*	-.052	.186**	-.350**	1	

Friends	.000	.009	.313	.419	.305	.400	.000	.022	.328	.000	.000		
Feminism Classes	.122*	-.002	-.046	.264**	-.072	.058	-.103	-.046	-.042	.326**	-.196**	.206**	1
	.022	.967	.394	.000	.175	.277	.054	.391	.436	.000	.000	.000	
**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).													
*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).													

**Table 6. Multinomial regression of the independent and control variables on feminist responses.**

		Model 1				Model 2			
		B	Std. Error	Exp(B)		B	Std. Error	Exp(B)	
feminist (1) not feminist (0)									
	Class Rank	-0.114	0.15	0.893		-0.367	0.203	0.693	*
	GPA	0.328	0.178	1.388	*	0.355	0.214	1.426	
	Religious Importance	-0.317	0.157	0.728	**	-0.163	0.22	0.85	
	Feminist Classes	0.865	0.264	2.374	***	0.462	0.348	1.588	
	Sex	-1.674	0.381	0.187	***	-0.824	0.508	0.439	
	Race (0=white, 1=minority)	-0.565	0.34	0.568		-0.667	0.426	0.513	
	Gender Roles					-0.968	0.507	0.38	*
	Bodily Rights					-0.398	0.293	0.672	
	Gender Equality					-0.182	0.213	0.833	
	Understand Feminism					-0.175	0.273	0.839	
	Stereotypes					-1.618	0.482	0.198	***
	Feminist Friends					1.059	0.307	2.885	***
	Intercept	-2.205	1.007			4.407	1.863		
	Nagelkerke R2	0.326				0.326			
* nearly significant at (p < .05)									
** significant at (p < .05)									
*** significant at (p < .000)									

**Table 7. Multinomial regression of the independent and control variables on feminist responses.**

		Model 1			Model 2			
		B	Std. Error	Exp(B)	B	Std. Error	Exp(B)	
don't know (1) not feminist (0)								
	Class Rank	-0.084	0.125	0.92	-0.16	0.146	0.852	
	GPA	0.121	0.142	1.129	0.243	0.161	1.276	
	Religious Importance	-0.116	0.132	0.891	-0.136	0.173	0.873	
	Feminist Classes	-0.04	0.232	0.961	-0.053	0.27	0.948	
	Sex	-0.521	0.275	0.594	0.205	0.334	1.228	
	Race (0=white, 1=minority)	-0.425	0.289	0.654	-0.165	0.33	0.848	
	Gender Roles				-0.479	0.386	0.62	
	Bodily Rights				-0.062	0.219	0.939	
	Gender Equality				-0.115	0.184	0.891	
	Understand Feminism				-0.645	0.209	0.525	***
	Stereotypes				-0.826	0.351	0.438	**
	Feminist Friends				0.549	0.192	1.731	***
	Intercept	-0.604	0.833		3.143	1.458		
	Nagelkerke R2	0.326			0.326			
* nearly significant at (p < .05)								
** significant at (p < .05)								
*** significant at (p < .000)								

<b>Table 8. Men and women should share childcare equally</b>						
Sex	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree	Total
Male	5	23	37	62	57	184
	2.7%	12.5%	20.1%	33.7%	31.0%	100.0%
Female	14	6	15	68	108	211
	6.6%	2.8%	7.1%	32.2%	51.2%	100.0%

<b>Table 9. Men and women should be equal within their careers</b>						
Sex	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree	Total
Male	6	8	19	67	85	185
	3.2%	4.3%	10.3%	36.2%	45.9%	100.0%
Female	12	2	0	47	150	211
	5.7%	0.9%	0.0%	22.3%	71.1%	100.0%



**Table 10. Expectations after having children**

				No time off	Continue to work full-time after a short maternity/paternity leave	Work part-time after a short maternity/paternity leave	Stay home until the children are in school, and then return to full-time	Work part-time until the children are in school, and then return to full-time	Stay home until the children grow up and leave home, and then return to work	Work part-time until the children grow up and leave home	Total
Mother	Sex	Male	Count	2	36	22	27	24	8	7	126
			Percentage	1.6%	28.6%	17.5%	21.4%	19.0%	6.3%	5.6%	100.0%
	Female	Count	1	78	24	32	46	4	4	189	
		Percentage	.5%	41.3%	12.7%	16.9%	24.3%	2.1%	2.1%	100.0%	
Father	Sex	Male	Count	50	98	0	3	1	0	1	153
			Percentage	32.7%	64.0%	0.0%	2.0%	.6%	.0%	.6%	100.0%
	Female	Count	44	138	4	1	8	0	1	196	
		Percentage	22.5%	70.4%	2.0%	.5%	4.1%	.0%	.5%	100.0%	

## ACADEMIC VITA

Danielle Mackintosh

747 E. Beaver Ave Apt #323 State College, PA 16801/dlm5322@psu.edu

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### Education

Majors: Crime, Law, & Justice and Sociology  
Minor: Women Studies  
Honors: Sociology

### Work Experience

**Research Assistant** – University Park, PA  
Darrell Steffensmeier  
September 2010 – May 2013

**Teaching Assistant** – University Park, PA  
Caren Bloom – *Criminology/Women Studies 423*  
Jan 2013 – May 2013  
Darrell Steffensmeier – *Criminology 012*  
Aug 2010 – Dec 2010

**Campus Recruitment Ambassador for City Year** – University Park, PA  
Alissa Krutoff  
September 2012 – May 2013

### Volunteer Work

**THON Committee Member** – University Park, PA  
Morale Committee (Fall 2009 – Spring 2012)  
Finance Committee (Fall 2012 – Spring 2013)  
Independent Dancer Couple (Fall 2012 – 2013)

**Paterno Fellowship Program Advisory Board** – University Park, PA  
Jack Seltzer  
September 2010 – May 2013

### International Education

Avons University – Hertogenbosch, Netherlands  
Comparative Criminal Justice: June 2011