Examining Feminist Consciousness in LGBTQ University Constituencies

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Abstract

There is little data on the perception of LGBTQ constituencies toward feminism. This research team conducted focus groups on campus and within the surrounding community on perspectives of LGBTQ students, university-employed gay men, community-based transgender individuals, and community-based gay men toward feminism. The team analyzed findings using Bem's (1981) gender schema and Ridgeway's (2009) construct of individual, interactional, and institutional aspects of gender identity. The results show that most of the LGBTQ focus groups held positive views toward feminism, associating it with equality for all genders and social justice, except for community-based gay men, who negatively associated feminism solely with women's rights.

Keywords: Feminism, LGBTQ issues, diversity, women's centers, social justice

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On July 21, 1857, Susan B. Anthony wrote to fellow activist Lucy Stone that "we have always claimed that our movement was Human Rights – not woman's – therefore we need not confine ourselves" (Blackwell Family Papers, 2016, Box 82, Reel 65). This question about the nature of feminism as either inclusive of all human rights or exclusively focused on the advancement of women is one that has a long history and no singular answer. The women's movement has been both criticized for failing to acknowledge the complexities facing women who also experience race and/or class prejudice (Crenshaw, 1989; Combahee River Collective, 1978; Thompson, 2002) and celebrated for its embrace of intersectionality, or the understanding that individuals may belong to more than one marginalized category (for example, being both female and Black, or working class and gay) and therefore experience unique forms of oppression that they would not experience if they only belonged to one marginalized group.

The critical theories that gave rise to intersectionality arose in the context of feminism, and feminist scholarship arose from the understanding that oppressions are interlinked and cannot be solved in isolation (Davis, 2008; McCall, 2005). According to McCall, "intersectionality is the most important contribution that women's studies . . . has made so far" (2005, p. 1771). Davis noted that it is inconceivable that a women's studies program today would consider only gender as a locus of research or teaching, and that feminist research and scholarship place extreme emphasis on issues of race, class, and heteronormativity. Finally, gender oppression can affect all genders, as well as the multiple identities of women as they intersect with race, ethnicity, class, ability, nationality, sexual orientation, and other axes of oppression (Kasper, 2004; Marine, 2011).

For this case study, the research team conducted a series of focus groups on the perception of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ) individuals of varying constituencies in or around this university toward feminism. More specifically, the team wondered if they perceived feminism to be inclusive and to advocate for equal rights for all marginalized groups, or if they perceived feminism to be focused on advancing only the rights of women. Further, by exploring LGBTQ individuals' perceptions of feminism, the researchers hoped to gauge the feasibility of offering LGBTQ support and programming at the university women's center. Women's center programing today has expanded to encompass LGBTQ community concerns (Marine, 2011), with more than half of all women's centers reporting

involvement with and services for the LGBTQ community (Kasper, 2004). The researchers'
university-funded center is an example of this trend. The researchers are or were employed at a
feminist organization working with all marginalized gender populations and their multiple
identities, along with other axes of oppression, both on campus and in the surrounding
community.

The researchers held the focus groups with LGBTQ individuals from both the university
and the larger surrounding community. The center's research and activism extend beyond the
university to the surrounding community, and the team actively partners with community
agencies and advocates to address women's rights issues, LGBTQ issues, and broader human
rights issues. The center's vision and activities are supported by the strategic plan the university
adopted in 2017, endorsing community engagement as a vital part of the university's mission.
Along with Borak (2000), the researchers believe in the necessity of an ecosystem approach to
diversity and inclusion efforts which includes the larger community. The center, which by its
activities and history is feminist in reputation and activities, conducts research and raises
awareness around sex discrimination and the status of those who are marginalized in society due
to under-represented status, as well as offering leadership programming and service-learning
opportunities.

The university is a research-intensive university with a Carnegie Classification of
Doctoral University in a midsized, northeastern city with a long history of feminist activism. Its
mission is research leadership, education innovation, health care transformation, and community
engagement with a core focus on data science, neuroscience, performing arts, and humanities,
and its values include respect, inclusion, and sustainability. The university is in an urban
environment within a larger rural region covering 4,676 square miles with a population of over
1.2 million people. While it is only a 30-minute drive to reach rural populations which are
largely White, more than 60% of African Americans living in this region reside in eight urban
zip codes that are only 10 minutes from the university.

As of 2018, faculty at this university were 37.2% female and 62.8% male; 78.4% of the
faculty were White and 21.6% were Asian, underrepresented minorities, or multiracial. Among
the staff, 72.0% were female and 28.0%; 75.3% of the staff members were White and 24.7%
were underrepresented minorities, Asian, or multiracial. Enrollment of undergraduate and

graduate students university-wide was 11,817. The student body was 48% female, 52% male, and <1% non-binary. The racial and ethnic backgrounds of students are shown in Table 1.

Table 1

Sociodemographics of Students (May Identify with More Than One Category)

Student Racial / Ethnic Backgrounds	
African American / Black	8%
Asian American	16%
Hispanic / Latino	9%
Multiracial	5%
Native American / Pacific Islander	<1%
White, non-Hispanic	57%
Unreported	3%
International	34%

Feminism and Diversity Approaches

In both this paper and the team's work in general, the researchers draw upon an equity feminist approach, which focuses on attaining equal rights, and a gender feminist perspective, aimed at dismantling society's oppressive sex/gender system (Hoff Sommers, 1995; Nicholson & Pasque, 2011). Equity feminism promotes the ideals of first wave feminists in the 19th and early 20th centuries, who fought for equal social, legal, and political rights for women based on enlightenment principles of individual justice (Guczalska, 2016; Kuhle, 2012; Nicholson & Pasque, 2011). Beginning in the 1960s, second wave feminists developed an understanding of feminism based on the understanding that race, class, and gender oppression are all related (Combahee River Collective, 1978, Nicholson & Pasque, 2011). Gender feminism arose out of second wave feminism; it rejected culturally dominant gender roles (Guczalska, 2016, Wittig, 1997) while also advocating legally for gender equity; it is "closely tied to principles of social justice" (Nicholson & Pasque, 2011, pp. 8-9).

Some feminists, particularly womanists or feminists of color, criticize both first wave feminism, second wave feminism, and gender feminism as being created by and for middle- and upper-class White women, despite the emphasis all these feminisms place, to varying degrees, on ending race and class oppressions (Alarcón, 1997; Brown, 1997; Moses, 2012). However,

Nicholson and Pasque (2011) considered the perspectives of both equity feminism and gender feminism to be useful frames for considering ways to promote equal rights in the university sphere (2011), the position taken in the center. The center's working definition of feminism is based on both equity and gender feminism, and advocates for equal rights for all, particularly women and LGBTQ individuals, while rejecting limited gender definitions and roles.

       The team understands the criticism that gender feminists mainly focus on equity for middle and upper class, able-bodied, straight, White women to be grounded within the real-world consequences that arose from the first and second wave feminist movements that further marginalized the voices of women of color, trans women, and differently-abled women. Consequently, in this study of LGBTQ perceptions of feminism, the researchers were particularly interested in the views of LGBTQ students and administrators, as well as LGBTQ members of the surrounding university community (including alumnae/i) about feminism and their perception of the movement's ability to advocate for all human rights.

       The intersection of race and sexuality also affects LGBTQ college students. Rivera-Ramos, Oswald, and Buki (2015) noted that lesbian, gay, and bisexual students of color (queer and transgender students were not included in their study) are unlikely to see the intersections of their identities addressed during their college experiences. However, Woodford, Kulick, and Atteberry noted that "[p]revention efforts that aim to diminish the existence of interpersonal heterosexism, including subtle manifestations, on campus may have positive impacts on the sexual minority students' health" (2015, p. 83). Education on these issues has been one of the primary tools to improve campus climate for LGBTQ individuals (Githens, 2012). To continue the work of improving the climate for LGBTQ individuals both on university campuses and in society at large, a feminist lens may prove helpful.

       Grace and Hill (2004) noted that integrating LGBTQ knowledge into the larger knowledge of universities helps institutions to resist heteronormativity and to transform campus culture to embrace all LGBTQ individuals. However, approaches to diversity vary in relation to institutional culture, context, and individual actors (Githens, 2012). Githens describes five dominant approaches that institutions are currently taking to promote diversity efforts. The approach the researchers' center uses to explore the interconnection of feminism and LGBTQ communities is the identity-influenced coalitions approach, in which minority and majority groups create coalitions to act and create social change, maintaining the importance of identity

politics but rejecting the projection of social ills onto the majority group (Githens, 2012).

Student development theory posits that included among the very short list of basic human psychological needs (as opposed to desires and wants) are both competence, defined as "feeling effective in one's interactions with the social environment - that is, experiencing opportunities and supports for the exercise, expansion, and expression of one's capacities and talents" (Ryan & Deci, 2017, p. 11) and relatedness, defined as "experiencing others as responsive and sensitive and being able to be responsive and sensitive to them - that is, feeling connected and involved with others and having a sense of belonging" (p. 11). Research into the fulfilment or frustration of these needs shows corresponding positive or negative correlations in wellness and functionality (Ryan & Deci 2017). This research motivates the researchers in their work at the center for social justice in their desire to support and create environments both on and off campus that allow for the full expression and inclusion of individuals in all the intersections of their identities.

The research team was an interdisciplinary group, consisting of members with expertise in gender, sexuality, and women's studies; higher education; anthropology; law; liberal studies; and diversity and LGBTQ policy. Team members were all cisgender individuals, but of varied sexual orientation (gay, queer, and heterosexual).

Methods

This paper is grounded in community-based participatory research principles (CBPR) (Israel, Schulz, Parker, & Becker, 2001), which enhances researchers' ability to understand community priorities through inclusion of the voices of participants in the target group from the beginning of research study design through development, evaluation, and dissemination efforts (Wallerstein & Duran, 2010). Data for this research study comes from an umbrella research project, with 22 focus groups and 175 people. Students, faculty, and staff were included at its inception and design, and university alumnae/i were included in the dissemination of results.

In this research on the perceptions of LGBTQ individuals toward feminism, the research team collected data between May 2013 and March 2015, recruiting LGBTQ participants through existing student organizations, partnerships with community-based agencies, and snowball sampling (Maxwell, 2005). The researchers conducted focus groups both on the campus and in the community at times and locations convenient for the participants, paying attention to parking,

privacy, and comfort. The team conducted a total of five LGBTQ-related focus groups: two groups consisting of members of a campus LGBTQ student advocacy group, which was large enough to require division into two focus groups; one group of university-employed gay men; one group of gay men living in the larger community; and a group of transgender individuals also living in the larger community. (The gender-neutral pronouns, they, them, and their are used for transgender participants.) Groups ranged from three to 12 participants per group, with a total of 35 participants. Table 2 below shows participant demographics. The researchers tape-recorded the focus groups using two recorders, one primary and one back-up. In addition to the five focus groups listed above, the research team also ran a focus group for lesbians living in the larger community, but unfortunately both the primary and backup recorders failed, and so we are unable to include this group in the transcript review.

Each participant read an information sheet describing the strategic planning project for the center before the researchers began the focus groups, in which participants answered a series of open-ended questions on their perceptions of feminism. Focus groups were led and/or co-facilitated by three of the authors. Participants completed a sociodemographic form. The researchers provided $5 gift cards to show appreciation to the participants. Following the focus groups, the digital files were transferred to a professional transcriptionist, who then transcribed the recordings into Microsoft Word documents. The University Institutional Review Board approved all aspects of this study. Prompts for the focus group discussions included:

- What does the word feminism mean to you?
- Does feminism inform the decisions you make?
- Did your family of origin introduce the idea of feminism to you?
    - If so, was the context negative or positive?
- Does feminism play a role in your relationships?

For the purpose of seeking answers to how LGBTQ constituents perceive feminism, qualitative research methods were appropriate. Such an approach allowed to not drive a hypothesis-informed study but rather an investigation guided by research questions that asked about the relationships among or between constructs that are not bound to a particular investigative course and are open to discovering relationships, concepts, and ideas about the topic that the team may not have considered prior to collecting the data (Maxwell, 2005).

The team utilized a framework approach (Pope, Ziebland, & Mays, 2000) to analyze the data, using Bem's (1981) gender schema theory as the frame. As Bem noted, a "schema is a cognitive structure, a network of associations that organizes and guides an individual's perception" (1981, p. 355). The team was interested in researching the perception of feminism within LGBTQ communities, particularly as those perceptions relate to the intersection of an individual's various identities. Since a "schema functions as an anticipatory structure, a readiness to search for and assimilate incoming information in schema-relevant terms" (Bem, 1981, p. 355), using this frame would allow consideration of how the perspectives of LGBTQ individuals toward feminism might affect their assessment of feminism as a movement working to advance the rights of all marginalized people. Gender schema theory also dovetails with Ridgeway's (2009) understanding of gender identity as a system that functions on an individual level (associated with attitudes), an interactional level (associated with behaviors), and an institutional level (associated with culture). The researchers utilized these three categories in the analysis of responses to feminism in different LGBTQ constituencies.

For coding, the researchers created a diagram of Bem's (1981) theory, representing the ways an individual's gender is internalized and reinforced through social interactions (see Figure 1). The diagram illustrates the ways that individuals process incoming stimuli from society with their own attributes, according to a pre-existing schema. The team used the consensual qualitative research (CQR) approach (Heppner, Kivlighan, & Wampold, 1992) for coding, deeming it compatible with the center's feminist philosophy and approach "in that it relies on team members using unconstrained methods of coming to consensus though open dialogue. The process places a value on researchers working together collectively as a team to construct a shared understanding of the phenomenon" (Wang & Heppner, 2001, as cited in Heppner, Wampold, Owen, Thompson, & Wang, 2015, p. 394). Three of the authors were involved in the focus group facilitation and read all the transcripts. Transcripts were coded using line-by-line coding, with Figure 1 as a guide. Process notes were examined, considering the dynamics in the room, the tone of the participants, and disagreement within the focus group participants. The senior author was an auditor, and the team reached consensus to resolve coding discrepancies.

Because the researchers are members of the university community and residents in the local community, and all the authors self-identify as feminists (although not all are members of the LGBTQ community), the team felt it necessary to address the idea that a backyard research
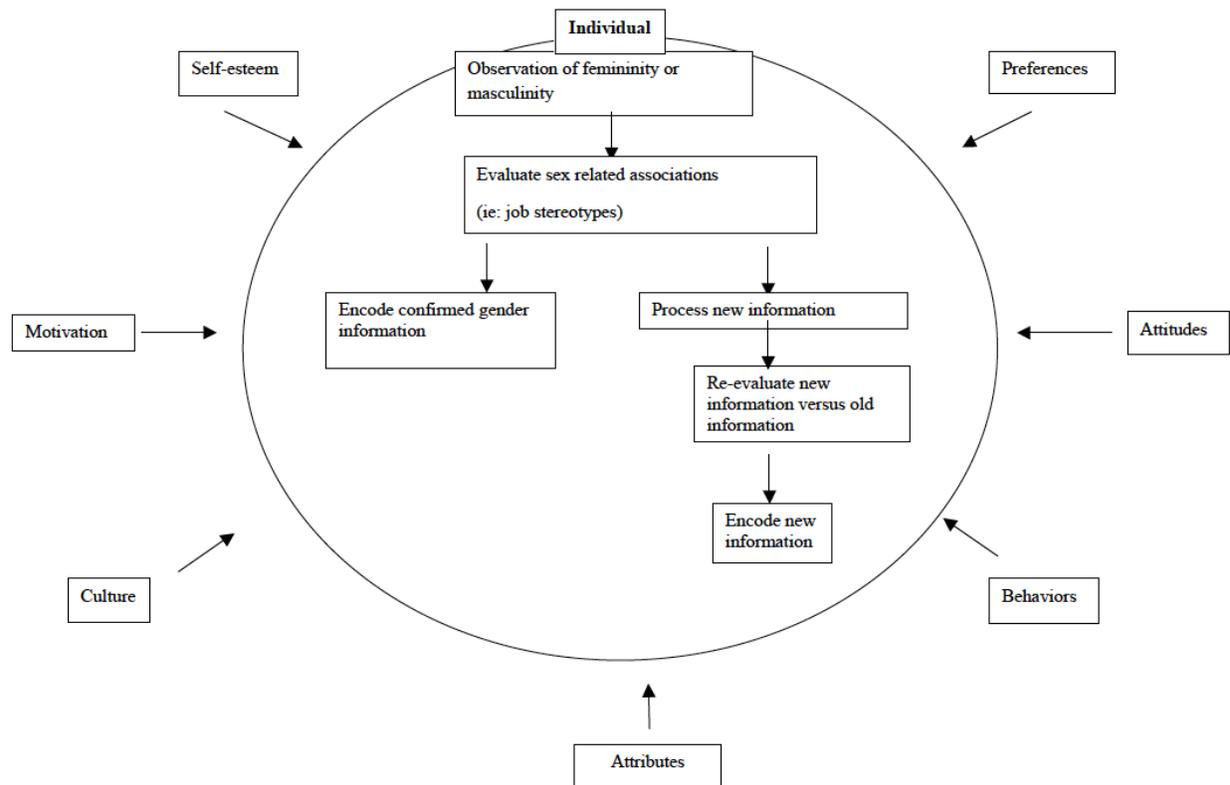
Figure 1. Virtual map of Bem's (1981) gender schema theory used for coding focus group data. Reprinted from "Exploring Collegiate Perceptions of Feminism Through Bem's Gender Schema Theory" by A. Alani et al., 2016, *New York Journal of Student Affairs, 16*(1), p. 23. Copyright [2016] by Alysha Alani. Reprinted with permission.

project could potentially suffer from insider bias. In addressing this issue, Zulfikar (2014) noted that there are both advantages and disadvantages of insider research, in which a researcher is part of the cultural group being studied. Based on a literature review, Zulfikar (2014) noted that insiders may be capable of gaining access to genuine social and cultural expression as well as truly understanding the shared culture in ways outsiders do not. Outsiders, while they may be more objective in their research, are not immune to personal subjectivity (Zulfikar, 2014). In order to limit subjectivity, the focus groups were moderated by individuals whose identities did not align with the identities of the focus group members, except for the group of community gay men, which was facilitated by a gay man.

Participants

Table 2

Sociodemographics of Focus Groups

Group	Participants	Number of Participants	W	B	H	A	AI/AN	Age (s.d.)
10	University Gay Men	4	2	1		1		41.00 (13.95)
15	LGTBQ Advocacy Students A & B	22	18	1	1	1	1	18.82 (.95)
18	Community Transgender Group	6	4	1	1			30.50 (7.34)
20	Community Gay Men	3	3					42.00 (3.6)

Limitations

As with all studies, there are limitations inherent to this research. The participants were self-selected via various announcements: through university listservs, fliers, emails, and other mechanisms for recruitment. It is possible that those who responded were already sensitive to feminism and/or were eager to help the center, a feminist institution, to set its course. It is a significant limitation that the lesbian focus group recordings could not be retrieved. While lesbian women participated in other focus groups, such as the student group, they did not have the chance to speak as a cohesive group representing the off-campus community. Because of the importance of lesbians in the feminist movement, this oversight limits the discussion of the relationship of the LGBTQ community to feminism. Furthermore, the LGBTQ student group was not divided according to gender, so the researchers were not able to analyze gender differences within that group. Finally, this is a limited sample of respondents; except for the LGBTQ student group (n =22), the number of participants in each focus group was small, ranging between n = 3 and n = 6.

It is important to note that one cannot assume that membership in the LGBTQ community is not without individuation of attitudes, opinions, and behaviors regarding the status of women and marginalized individuals. Even the concept of feminism, itself a diverse movement, has great heterogeneity in its definition among this group. In addition, this paper

reports focus groups from one northeast community, and it is possible that other regions of the country might have different findings. Future studies can address these limitations.

Results

LGBTQ University Students – Perspectives on Feminism

Overall reactions. The findings show that the LGBTQ student groups locate feminism in the spheres of politics, society, and economics, as well as equality in the arenas of education, work, and interpersonal relations. To them, feminism means: "equality" and "educating people" as well as "giving people the power to be who they are and that comes with being equal to men" and being "equal politically, socially, economically" (Group 15A). They associated feminism with a historical movement aimed at raising awareness and consciousness, and they related feminism with efforts to achieve equal pay for work, gay issues, body image issues, and the pro-choice movement as well as a broad and inclusive social justice movement: "I think the idea of feminism is not like even inequality it's just like inherent in any sort of social justice movement. Not necessarily like feminism but like the idea of removing inequality" (Group 15A).

Attitudes/individual level. The LGBTQ students consider feminism to address issues of equality, but not exclusively from the perspective of equality between men and women. Descriptions of feminism from student participants range from a straightforward "most basic level equality" (Group 15B) to a more complex deconstructive viewpoint, describing feminism as "dismantling the difference between genders" (Group 15A). Feminism also played a role in many other social justice issues for the LGBTQ students, including animal rights: "equality for women, people of color, people with different sexualities, animals" (Group 15A). They noted that a hierarchical structure still exists in the dominant culture, creating double standards for men and women and leading to societal stigma. For example, in relation to sexual choices they stated: "There are lots of double standards between what's acceptable of and what's viewed positively as far as men like interacting sexually and what is acceptable and not stigmatized for women" (Group 15A).

Behaviors/interactional level. Students reported that feminism influenced their behaviors. They were quite cognizant that being informed led them to self-awareness in terms of the language they use, and that certain words, such as bitch and slut, were hurtful towards women. Female student participants felt that their casual use of certain words, including whore,

even if it was meant in a casual setting, gave men some sort of power to also use those words. The groups highlighted the fact that certain gender-specific slang terms have positive connotations when associated with men, but have negative implications when associated with women:

> a quick example that comes to mind is like using like the word 'balls' is like something like positive to have and then like calling someone a pussy is like a negative derogatory term, so like that all equates to feminism. . . . I really hate when people say that. (Group 15B)

In addition to affecting language choices, feminism influences who these LGBTQ students choose as friends: "I don't necessarily like to hang out with people who like speak misogynistically or really like bash women, like that's one of the biggest turn offs in like a friend group" (Group 15B). People with anti-feminist agendas are viewed as being more aggressive and as being in attack mode. Some students try to educate and inform these types of individuals, giving them the opportunity to change before cutting off the friendship.

Their families of origin had not informed most students' perceptions of feminism. However, feminist concepts may have been part of their upbringing in ways not apparent to them at the time:

> I guess that topic was just never discussed with my family. But that's not to say that women in my family weren't, not that they were feminists but that they didn't believe in the feminists' ideas, they just didn't associate the term with it because I think for the older generations there are a lot of negative stereotypes surrounding it. (Group 15B)

Despite feminism rarely being a topic of discussion while growing up, some the female participants shared that they have been treated as equals in terms of gender:

> It was never specifically mentioned, but then my sister and I were both raised to be like, yeah you can do your own things, you're not held back, you can do anything you want and like both my parents were like really supportive of that. (Group 15B)

Other students shared being raised in households with either traditional gender roles in which the mother "until recently was dependent on being married and taking care of her kids" or "my dad . . . he holds very misogynistic views" (Group 15A).

In relation to the concept of feminism several students refer to receiving mixed messages some have been taught that feminists are "overly aggressive . . . like it was always a bad word"

(Group 15A) but another relates that "when I was really little, like 6 or 7 I had a friend who her mom worked and her dad stayed at home. And I asked my parents about that and they said that it's just different" (Group 15B). One student stated:

> But that's not to say that women in my family weren't, not that they weren't feminist but that they didn't believe in feminist ideas, they just didn't associate the term with it because I think for the older generations there are a lot of negative stereotypes surrounding it. (Group 15B)

Participants discuss how feminist ideas about equality affected their behavior in relationships, addressing the problem of heteronormative gender roles in relation to non-heterosexual relationships. "I feel like the way that I try to always conduct my relationships are really informed by my feminist views" (Group 15A). For some, the different dynamics of same-sex relationships skew the traditional viewpoints on sexism and feminism: "Yeah if two women are in a relationship, can you call it sexist if one does the dishes and the other doesn't? Or can you call that unfeminist" (Group 15B). They found it offensive when people try to impose heteronormative gender roles on their non-heterosexual relationships: "It's asking which chopstick is the fork" (Group 15A). For example, students in lesbian relationships express frustration at people asking, "Who wears the pants?" because of the implication that "wearing the pant"' or figuratively being male means being in control and being superior. These common misconceptions have been perpetuated further by the imposition of masculine and feminine roles on lesbian relationships, suggesting that there is always a butch and a femme. In gay male relationships, a similar analogy is the assumption that one of the partners is "girly" or the "bottom." In contrast, the LGBTQ students reject these stereotypes: "The whole point is in a relationship with two guys there is no woman, and in a relationship with two girls there is no man" (Group 15A).

Culture/institutional level. In terms of the surrounding culture, the students considered feminism in relation to several institutions: college campuses, work environments, the media, and the legislative arm of the state. They were insightful in suggesting that changing the rape culture of sexual objectification, slut shaming, and victim blaming that exists on college campuses might change people's minds about feminist ideas of equality. In an interesting corollary to their view of feminism as dismantling a gender binary, they view rape culture as not exclusively the purview of men. Many have female friends who contribute to this culture: "I

have heard from my female friends oh you wore that out last night? Oh, were you asking for it?" (Group 15B).

Many of the students specifically see college as the place where they learned about feminism.

> I don't think I like fully understood what feminism was until I got into a college setting because it's like an academic setting and there are a lot of like young smart people with a lot of ideas and I don't, I guess that the topic was just never discussed with my family. (Group 15B)

Another stated:

> I had an understanding of [feminism] throughout high school 'cause there were a good chunk of teachers in my school who were very feminist and worldly and humanistic and I latched right onto those professors or teachers because it made sense to me. But I never got a thorough education in it until college. There were no words to put to things in my head until I came here. (Group 15A)

The LGBTQ students consider feminist concepts in relation to employment, the media, and the law. One student noted that "there is still a glass ceiling [in the sciences] as far as positions within the department go, there are five full professors, only one of which is a woman" (Group 15B). Another stated that "I've heard it from someone applying for a computer science job somewhere . . . and she . . . didn't get the job . . . and the real reason that she felt was that they didn't want her there because it would ruin their little like bro-programmer culture" (Group 15B). They stated that the media presents extreme and limited images of feminists; for example, the false "stereotype that all feminists are lesbians and that all lesbians are feminists, and neither is true" (Group 15B). In addition, the students noted that "you don't hear about any laws being passed regulating men's reproductive rights, only women's" (Group 15B). In contrast, they noted the legal mandate for paternity leave as an example of feminism benefitting males in a positive way.

> Men are getting paternity leave to go home and help their wives with the baby so they can both get back into the work world faster. And personally, I think it's a really good thing. It's equality going the other way. (Group 15B)

University-Employed Gay Men – Perspectives on Feminism

This group associates feminism with equality, activism, and independence for women. One participant described feminism as "a social, political, and intellectual movement to disrupt patriarchal regimes" (Group 10). They considered it a very active cause; as one participant stated that "we've come a long way and still have a long way to go" (Group 10). While considering feminism to be primarily for women (e.g. "being woman dominated" or "more . . . of a female only thing" [Group 10]), their perception has broadened:

> When I was younger I always through it was like okay women will do that and it's like a women's issue. So, I think as I've grown up and I've learned more about myself and more about what the movement is I understand more about how . . . it's kind of like an opposite of patriarchy. (Group 10

These university-employed gay men stated that they considered themselves to be feminists because of the importance of social justice issues in the feminist movement and its application to their lives and work.

Attitudes/individual level. Their identity as gay men influence their perceptions of feminism:

> And I think as a gay man I understand feminism not from the exclusion of men but from the idea that there is a very rigid and small definition of what masculinity is, what power is, and feminism serves to balance that." (Group 10)

Because their understanding of the intersection of race and class in social justice issues, these gay university employees state that feminism cannot be viewed as a lone issue. Many feel that because they are champions for other marginalized groups based on sexual orientation or race that they also identified as feminists.

> I'm certainly on the continuum of [feminism]. And that's because of the intersectionality of gender and gender sexual orientation, race, et cetera where all those things intersect. And when I think of myself as champions from all those groups I'm certainly somewhere on that continuum. (Group 10)

One participant further identifies as a Black feminist since he draws on Black feminist scholarship in his work. Some consider feminism to be an important issue, even using it as intellectual framework for their academic work: "You know queer studies was enabled by feminist scholarship so it's always been like an intellectual framework for me" (Group 10).

Behaviors/interactional level. Feminism played a major role in influencing the behavior of the gay university employees, especially in the workplace. It allowed them to understand their male privilege and how to position themselves as men in predominantly female spaces: "But when it's an all-female group I often wait to speak, and I try to pace myself because men can so easily just dominate conversation and therefore set the agenda" (Group 10). A participant noted that women are sometimes ignored in meetings and that he will say: "'In addition to what my colleague here said because it's like somehow they didn't hear her" (Group 10). Another gay male university employee noted that "it is very tough for any female in [this department] to advance because it's an old boys' network . . . when I'm taking on students . . . I will . . . make sure I have a good balance of female students, different races, ethnicities" (Group 10). One participant feels that "I've actually seen more damage coming women to women because of the internalization of sexism et cetera than anything else" (Group 10).

The university-employed gay men were aware of the language they use to address mixed gender groups: "I say don't say 'you guys' when you're in a mixed group of women and people" (Group 10). This participant discussed the inappropriateness of using the term girls in the workplace, especially when talking about women of color. "Well the girls are gonna do this and the girls are gonna do that and then when they start talking about people of color and they say girls that's when my antennas go off and I'll say something" (Group 10). There is a general perception of femaphobia, or fear of women, in the gay male community, though the participants do not agree with it: "I always try to challenge that notion in saying, '[W]ell it's not right of you to discriminate against a person just based on like who they are or where they were born'" (Group 10).

These participants describe growing up with strong female role models in their mothers, the majority of whom worked, but that feminism was not part of their awareness growing up in their families of origin: "There was no feminist consciousness in my family" (Group 10). Another participant noted that gender consciousness was not a priority: "[O]ur focus was on race consciousness since we were one of the few Black families in the White suburb and so gender was not on the radar at all" (Group 10). In many cases, both parents worked but traditional gender roles were followed, the mother cooking and cleaning and the father taking care of the house and yard.

Culture/institutional level. On an institutional level, different ethnic cultures of origin play an important role in the perception of feminism and gender stereotypes in the families of these university-employed gay men. One participant whose parents emigrated from Asia during the Vietnam War stated:

> So the men are the bread winners and the women are the housekeepers and that's been reflected in the notion that if someone in my extended family had an affair, everyone would be like well he's a man and that's kind of expected so it's not that big of a deal. (Group 10)

The participant viewed this perception as a double standard; in addition, he has witnessed his mother be affected negatively by sexism in the workplace. "And my mom worked full-time, and I watched her struggle to get promotions when men would, she would say like her male colleagues would get the promotion rather than her" (Group 10). Despite this sexism at home and in the workplace, he suggests that his mother had an understanding that there is a feminist movement in the United States of America: "[T]here is this notion that women can work just as hard and be just as acknowledged, but I watched her hit the glass ceiling and be frustrated with that" (Group 10).

The members of this focus group used a gender feminist lens, "a historical social construction of gendered and sexual power" (Group 10), to consider equality and social justice issues (or their lack) in their institution. They are aware of the bias of the executive leadership of the university, noting that it consists largely of "White males over 50" and that career and pay disparities affect women and people of color. One participant noted, "I think the breakdown of percentages of females and males at the across the university . . . and I think it's 75% female. But if you look across the board at the executive leadership, I mean it's abysmal" (Group 10). Another stated, "[At] the medical center . . . I heard someone refer to the leadership as the three White men in a room. And I thought how accurate that was" (Group 10). Interestingly, feminist theory informed their awareness that some women have benefitted more than others from feminist advances, and that some groups of women have benefitted more than other groups of men.

In terms of the larger culture, these gay men expressed an inclusive and broad understanding of feminism as redressing social injustice. One of the participants expressed the

need to change the broader structural issues that disproportionately marginalize women across the globe:

> I've been influenced by the work, by transnational feminists who have pushed us to look at how broader political economic policies disproportionately affect women and children. And so, and how that work has kind of pushed us to the final feminist agenda, not within this very kind of narrow conventional narrative of women's rights but like universal access to healthcare which would have a disproportionate impact on women or universal access to education which would have a disproportionate impact on women. (Group 10)

Community Transgender Individuals – Perspectives on Feminism

The focus group consisting of transgender individuals from the larger community around the university has a very inclusive conception of feminism, with an equally high awareness of systemic oppression as opposed to a singular oppression based on gender. A participant describes feminism as: "social advocacy towards the goal of changing culture and power structure to establish equality for all genders and ideally for all people" (Group 18). The community transgender group describes feminism as "advocating for a breakdown in the inequalities inherent in society [and] holding up women and advocating for women's power" (Group 18).

This group expressed a deep awareness of systemic inequality; in fact, one individual stated that they support people who have moved from rallying against patriarchy to protesting kyriarchy, a term created by feminist theologian Elizabeth Schussler Fiorenza (1992).

> My understanding of feminism generally is social advocacy towards the goal of changing culture and power structure to establish equality for all genders and ideally for all people. So, and that's why . . . I'm on board with the people who have changed to from rallying against the patriarchy to using the term 'kyriarchy' because it's something that's a lot deeper and more broadly established than just patriarchy. Patriarchy is part of it but there is a much deeper systemic inequality involved. (Group 18)

Kyriarchy refers to established oppressive power structures beyond patriarchy, and the fight against it represents a feminist approach to oppression which transcends gender and addresses many other institutionalized forms of inequity (Fiorenza, 1992). Participants in this transgender focus group were particularly interested in the interconnection of feminism with other oppressive institutions, such as racism, homophobia, and transphobia. One participant stated that

my definition of feminist . . . it's just like a word that encompasses working to make all kinds of people have the ability to interact and move through the world in a way that is respectful, and I don't know treats them right in a way. And like so and that applies to like race, gender, socioeconomic status and all that. (Group 18)

Attitudes/individual level. Some participants in the community transgender group preferred the term womanism over feminism; one participant noted that she prefers womanism "because feminism to me . . . [is] just like stopping only at rights for women, especially White women who are at like a certain socio-economic level" (Group 18). The womanist movement was preferable to them "because in like issues of sexism with women of color like the sexism is largely racialized and like the racism is often largely sexualized" (Group 18). One person noted: "to only examine oppression on the singular axis of patriarchy is lacking in a way" (Group 18). In contrast to this general idea of an expansive feminism, one participant questions if men can claim to be feminists or if they can only be feminist allies: "I've met many feminists who like really directly believe that like men can be feminist allies, but for men to be feminist is like similar to a White person being a Black panther" (Group 18). In contrast another participant noted, "See I believe gender is so fluid that anyone can be feminist" (Group 18).

Because their gender identity is not congruent with their sex assigned at birth, this group has often faced unique challenges and opposition from certain subgroups of the feminist movement that inform their relationship to feminism. Trans-exclusionary radical feminists, or TERFs, are an extreme group who claim that transgender women are men and who advocate for their exclusion within feminist organizations. "There are extreme groups that still support this ideology and they do things like for instance out trans people, find trans people and out them, testify in court against trans health care and anti-discrimination benefits" (Group 18). A transgender individual in the focus group stated that TERFs feel that: "trans women are very specifically men trying to sneak in and impose the will of patriarchy on feminist groups and in women's faces" (Group 18). In response, the transgender participants feel the need to clarify their positions in the feminist community: "And it's at the point that I consider myself a radical feminist and I have to make the point that I am trans-inclusive" (Group 18).

Behaviors/interactional level. The participants in the community transgender focus group reports that feminism does affect their relationships and plays a major role in their choice

of friends. Some of the participants found it impossible to have relationships with certain people because of the transgender individuals' discomfort with sexist behavior. One person noted

My opinion of feminist issues does affect my relationships with people and makes it impossible in some cases for me to have a good relationship with individuals. . . . There are things that people will say . . . that makes it really difficult for me to be around them. Off the cuff misogynistic humor, rape jokes, things like that, just talking shit about women constantly" (Group 18).

Based on an increased sensitivity to feminist issues, many participants had noticed changes in relationships they have cultivated: "My base of friends and the people I interact with over the last decade has shifted radically because of increased awareness and understanding of what is going on around me" (Group 18). They discuss how some people can remain in their circle of friends because of the "moveable middle" concept: "And then there's the folks in the in-between that just don't know better and given a chance and given some education they can be shifted" (Group 18). Another participant stated, "I seem to find myself doing a lot of educating about different issues all over the place" (Group 18).

The idea that the family of origin has introduced participants to the idea of feminism was generally consistent among all members of the transgender group, although one Black participant stated that in their upbringing "that [feminism] was always secondary and just like because like race was the primary thing, class was the primary thing" (Group 18). One participant discussed how their mother's experiences of childhood and adolescent sexual abuse influence how their mother raised her daughters, noting that she had been: "very much focused on feminism and the idea that women can be independent and like a real push for education and not taking shit from male oppressors in a way" (Group 18). They stated that at the same time their mother bought in the whole rape culture idea, which seems to be anti-feminist: "[M]y brother could bike to work at 15 but there was no way that daughters were gonna walk a mile to work in the middle of the day" (Group 18). The participant had negative views of such experiences, leading them into research and exploration of feminism.

Another participant shared that despite coming from a patrifocal family, women were in charge:

I grew up in a highly patrifocal family and culture was very Catholic, very there was a lot of value placed on the male head of something, the male head of the family, the

male head of the church, the male head of all these things and they were very patrifocal. I wouldn't call them patriarchal because at the same time and paradoxically it was hyper-feminized and that was who was running the family, it was the women. Where were the men? The men lived somewhere else and sent us money because they were supporting us in some way, but men were not around. . . . My grandmother ran our family and my mom was the one who raised us. . . . And so, in this paradoxical sense I grew up and became more entrenched in feminism and much more radical in my feminism because of my lived experience. (Group 18)

Culture/institutional level. For the community-based transgender individuals, dealing with the larger culture and its institutions is an involved and often difficult process, one they approach with a strong gender feminist sensibility. There is extensive discussion about losing or inheriting privilege based on both gender-transition and race, and the role that both play in personal safety. A participant describes newly inherited privilege when transitioning to male:

[B]efore I was ID'ing as a trans man I was dressing in masculine clothes . . . especially at dusk, I'm not gonna get the attention that some other people will and that seemed awfully, I don't know in a way, it almost like compounded it for me cause like the fact I feel more safe dressing like this and walking on the street" (Group 18)

Another participant described the intersections of lived experiences as both a Black female and a Black male:

Cause I know my thing sort of just victimization sort of side shifted because you get read as a Black woman and then you get read as a Black man and it's like really not basically, I go from being exotified to vilified. Right so instead of someone seeing me as like a prey it's like that's a criminal right there . . . well most of the first few times that I passed [as a man] were very much like a group of White women or one White woman seeing me [and] crossing the street (Group 18).

Finally, these community transgender participants express feminist ideas about gender:

A lot of the sexism that's encountered, a lot of the homophobia that's encountered, a lot of these things exist because of violations of social taboos relating to the gender binary. . . . And I think that if there was a way to enshrine a person's rights to self-identification and self-expression whereas it concerns gender, I think that would go a huge way toward rectifying a lot of these inherent imbalances and oppressions. (Group 18)

Community Gay Men – Perspectives on Feminism

In contrast to all other groups, the focus group of community-based gay men largely has negative and narrow views of feminism, although they express views about human rights, equality, and inclusion in accord with feminist theory. They perceive feminism to be focused almost exclusively on women's rights and they express a strong gender divide, associating feminism almost exclusively with women. One participant stated, "I don't think of men being feminist" (Group 20). Another stated, "I don't consider myself a feminist in any sense of the word, but I consider myself someone who cares about human rights and equality" (Group 20). While admitting that the pay disparity between men and women is an issue, this group of community-based gay men does not equate feminism with the pursuit of equality, but rather sees feminism as a more radical pursuit of women's rights to the detriment of men.

Attitudes/individual level. Despite connecting feminism to other human rights disparities that exist, members of the community gay men group mainly describe it from a negative viewpoint. One participant stated: "[F]eminism rings a little negative with me" (Group 20). They characterize it as being "used in extreme cases to mean someone who overly advocates for women's rights in a way that doesn't fully connect that this issue is a human rights issue" (Group 20). A feminist to this group is "somebody that is going past the point of equality" and "purely focused on that issue" (Group 20). The participants would be more motivated to act personally or politically if feminism is referred to as a human rights issue or an equality issue, rather than a feminist issue.

The participants in this focus group felt that believing in equal rights for women does not necessarily equate to feminism: "Like I believe that women should be treated as equal as men, but does that make me a feminist? No, I don't think" (Group 20). Being labeled a feminist would feel inaccurate to one participant and offensive to another, who when asked if he would be offended to be called a feminist responded "Yes" (Group 20). This quote represents a consensus among this group: "I wouldn't want to be labeled as just a feminist . . . I would want to be a human rights activist, not just a feminist" (Group 20). One participant even went on to state: "I feel like that phrase taints my perspective on things. It makes me feel like there is some sort of an agenda behind it . . . it's more about advancing women over men than it is about trying to make them equals" (Group 20). Some participants viewed affirmative action to aid the advancement of women in the workplace as unfavorable, a process of "ignoring someone's credentials but

instead looking at quotas to say we could choose a woman for this job, we could find but forget about the fact that the man might be the better candidate" (Group 20). One participant stated that "I don't see any discrimination or anything. . . . Not at [the] workplace, not at home" (Group 20). Another participant disagreed: "I do think I've seen opportunities where a man gets elected for a role, but I think I know of a woman who could do equally as well if not better" (Group 20).

Behaviors/interactional level. In terms of feminism in relation to behaviors and relationships in the work world, the community-based gay men have mixed reactions. Most of the participants have workplaces where most employees are female, and among their colleagues some observe working mothers with stay-at-home husbands, a choice the participants found to be acceptable (and much more so by the not-for-profit sector). "[O]ne of the not for profits I'm involved in, our leader, our CEO is a female. Her husband stays at home with the kids. That's a conscious choice for the man" (Group 20). There was a perception that women are more successful in reaching corporate executive roles than people of color: "[T]hinking of my organization, women fare better than people of color" (Group 20). While this is the same conclusion reached by participants in the focus group of university-employed gay men, the community-based gay men do not apply a feminist lens to the issue but see feminism as part of the problem. In addition, some of the participants perceive both male and female leaders in gender-stereotypical terms: "[T]he men in leadership roles, they want statistics and facts and they want an answer and they want it. And for the women who want a discussion and come up with a definition for a term that takes two weeks" (Group 20). In contrast, another participant noted that "my boss is female and I have not met many males that are as decisive as she" and a third participant stated, "[m]y boss is fairly decisive and it's a female" (Group 20).

The participants' families of origin have not provided a grounding in feminism, but the participants did have feminist behavior modeled in their homes. All have been raised in households where both parents worked and many of the chores were shared. For some, the father cooked more than the mother and the children did their own laundry. One participant stated that "People would make comments about how much my dad cooked and for me it was like . . . he's a good cook so I like his food. And my mom would bake more" (Group 20).

Their first exposure to feminism as a belief system has been interactions with individuals proclaiming to be feminists or through the media:

It's probably with the actual interaction with somebody that proclaimed they were a

feminist and their thoughts were so extreme and so much on the radical end of things it

made me think, I thought feminism was supposed to be about pushing for equal rights.

But the way you're acting about it is that you want equal and beyond. (Group 20)

Another asserted:

I think some of my exposure to that too is the media and I just seeing like now and other

organizations that so like woe is me, we're underrepresented . . . the point beyond

equality where it becomes a little bit radical . . . my sense is that people who proclaim

themselves as feminists believe that men are out to get them. Men are out to take the jobs

away from women. (Group 20)

However, participants in this community gay men's focus group felt that they related

differently to issues of equal rights, including women's rights, because of the marginalization

they have faced because of their sexual orientation. This exchange between participants

illustrates this perception about feminism:

Participant: I think our bent on this is probably a little bit stronger because we are gay

and because we do not have equal rights as a straight man.

Participant: A feminist would say to you, well you can hide because you're a man.

Participant: Correct.

Interestingly, when asked to give an example of something they have witnessed or been

part of that demonstrated the inequality that women face, the participants struggled to respond.

Some participants felt that women have achieved parity while one stated, "Do we have complete

equality? No" (Group 20).

Culture/institutional level. In relation to society, the community-based gay men in the

focus group do not associate feminism with larger cultural inequities:

I mean, we want gay rights, but I also want people with disabilities treated the same way

and I also want people of different races and religions treated equally. . . . I don't think it

[feminism] has anything to do with it. (Group 20)

Another participant stated:

When I hear feminist, I think of the women who are part of the National Organization for

Women who carry their signs and stand on the you know, and they are overly zealous

advocates for this issue. The fact is the issue exists and I don't need to call myself a

feminist to believe in women's equality. (Group 20)

In general, the participants express the belief that feminism needs to focus on the broader

perspective of human rights, without any awareness of feminisms that explicitly address racism,

classism, ableism, and other forms of discrimination. Therefore, they appear to embrace feminist

views while rejecting a feminist label or ideology.

Discussion

Figure 2 provides a visual map of the major themes that emerged, illustrating the overlap

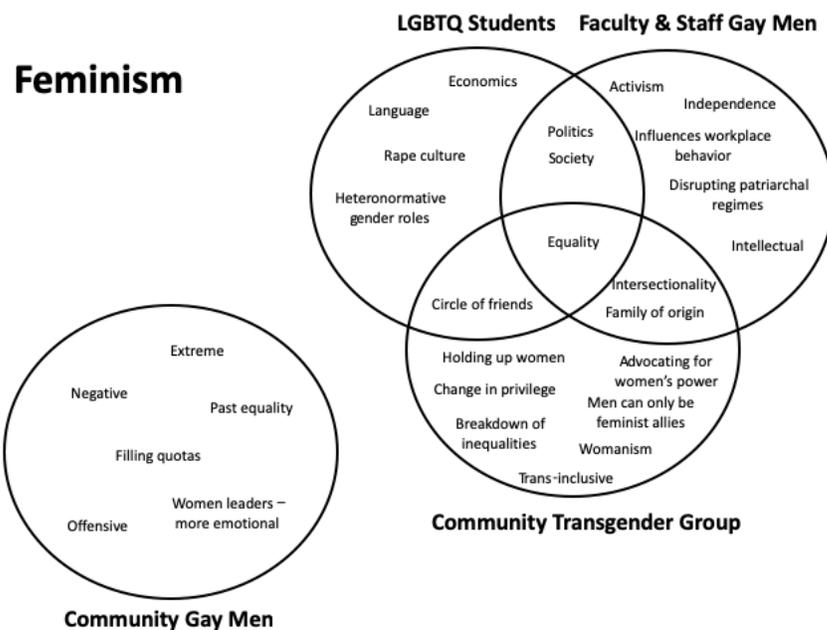as well as the differences between each group.

Figure 2. The overlap and differences regarding feminism between the focus groups.

The Role of Age and Family of Origin in LGBTQ Perceptions of Feminism

Neither age nor the exposure to feminist ideas in the family of origin had a strong

correlation with the perception of feminism in the study focus groups. Both groups of the gay

men were of a similar age (mean of 41 for university-employed gay men and 42 for community

gay men) and neither group was exposed to feminist ideas in their families of origin; however,

their beliefs about feminism were fairly polarized into positive and negative. The community-

based transgender individuals were exposed to feminist ideas by family members, a finding that correlates with positive associations with feminism, but as they were the only group with exposure to feminism from families of origin, the researchers cannot make a strong claim of correlation. With a mean age of 30.5 years the trans individuals are approximately a decade younger than both groups of gay men, so there is a possible correlation with age as a predictor toward positive views of feminism as well. This potential correlation is confirmed by the LGBTQ students in both focus groups, who were young (mean age of 18) without exposure to feminism in their families of origin, again suggesting a correlation. The LGBTQ students were not influenced by feminist ideas in their families of origin but rather by their collegiate environment and peers, a finding in agreement with Chickering's assertion that the educational environment has a considerable impact on student development, including institutional directives, student-faculty relationships, student development programs and services, and friendships and student communities (Evans, Forney, & Guido, 1998).

Neither the focus group of LGBTQ students or the group of university-employed gay men perceive gender to be an issue with their personal identification as feminists; however, the focus group of transgender individuals from the community and the focus group of community gay men both perceive gender to impact identification as feminists, although for different reasons. Beginning with Simone de Beauvoir, feminists have declared the gender construct of woman to be created by society, not biology, but in the complexity and variety of feminist thought, lesbian, Black, and radical feminists have debated the validity of using a biological basis to delineate who can claim to be a feminist (Collins, 1997; Wittig, 1997). The transgender group addresses a similar issue in that they questioned whether men can be considered feminists or only feminist allies, due to their position of male privilege. They are more woman-centric in their perception of feminist identity yet see a clear need for the movement to be trans-inclusive. Their position may have been influenced by their own experience of crossing to a different gender, and a desire to embrace this new gender identity to the exclusion of their old one. In this focus group only one individual identified as gender queer; the other members embraced a specific gender.

It is noteworthy that this group of transgender individuals prefer womanism over feminism as a more inclusive movement, even though radical feminism has a long and courageous trans-inclusive history (Williams, 2016). It is important to distinguish radical

feminism from the smaller subset of the trans-exclusive radical feminist (TERF) movement, which is founded on a biology-based/sex-essentialist ideology regarding who qualifies as a woman. Williams (2016) noted that conflating TERF ideology with radical feminism erases the voices of numerous radical feminist opinion leaders. Worse, failing to notice the voices of radical feminists who had stood by the Trans community diminishes the very feminism that braved violence and possible death to ensure that all women, even Trans women, were included in their work toward the liberation of women (Williams, 2016, p. 34).

Some radical lesbian feminists, such as Jeffreys (2003; 2014), suggested that transgender individuals who opt for surgery are conforming to the normative ideas of sex and gender, thereby weakening feminism by succumbing to the greater forces of patriarchy. In a parallel, queer theorist Currah argued that "people who understand themselves as having been born in the wrong body [and] people who reject most gender norms [and] people who identify as non-binary [can all find shelter] under the protective carapace of the transgender umbrella" (2017, p. 10).

The focus group of community gay men perceived feminism to be associated only with women and reject identifying themselves as feminists despite embracing equal rights and inclusion. However, a rejection of a feminist identity is not uncommon among heterosexual men as well. While men continue to play a vital role in the feminist movement, they are much less likely than women to identify as feminists (Breen & Karpinski, 2008; Henderson-King & Zhermer, 2003). In addition, this focus group was a small group of men (n = 3) and most of them expressed the sentiment that as gay men they feel marginalized not only by society at large but potentially by feminists, whom they believe would see them primarily as competition rather than as co-advocates. In notable contrast, the group of university-employed gay men were quite comfortable with self-identification as feminists, which may relate to either their comfort in identifying as gay men in their academic environment, or alternately to their identity as social justice advocates, which each made clear during the focus group.

Perceptions Toward Feminism in Schema-Relevant Terms

One of the researchers' central questions was to consider how Bem's (1981) gender schema and Ridgeway's (2009) formulation of that theory into individual, interactional, and institutional levels might help analyze the perception of LGBTQ constituencies toward feminism, both on campus and in the surrounding community, specifically regarding the question of whether these LGBTQ individuals believe feminism to be a movement advocating equal

rights for all marginalized people. Using Bem's (1981) gender schema, the research team found that those participants who have been informed about feminism categorize incoming information about social inequality in line with feminist theory, and those without this introduction to feminism analyzed the same information and reject feminism. It is interesting to note that all the study participants were members of the LGBTQ community, so existing at the margins of society is part of their lived experience, but that the group of community-based gay men was the only group not to acknowledge women's experience as marginalized individuals.

The research team considered whether education plays a role in differing perceptions of feminism. Studies suggest that feminists are more likely to be highly educated; this effect appears to increase as students advance in higher education (Breen & Karpinski, 2008). The members of the focus groups differed in education level and the hypothesis that a positive association with feminism increases with additional education does hold but there does not appear to be a strong correlation. The LGBTQ students are in the process of obtaining a college degree and so are uniform in their level of education. The university-employed gay men have the highest levels of education, including three participants with graduate degrees and one with a college degree. The transgender group includes one participant with a graduate degree, two with college degrees, and three with some college education. The group of gay men from the community include two participants with college degrees and one with some college education.

Given the sophistication of the feminist discourse in both university-employed gay men's group and the community transgender group, it seems a reasonable assumption that college environment and academic ideas have impacted the positive conception of feminism among these constituencies. Student development theory is founded on the equation $B = f (P \times E)$, meaning that behavior (B) is a function (f) of the interaction of a person (P) with their environment (E) (Evans et al., 1998). The negative view of feminism by the community gay men may be related to the differing lengths of time each group spent in academia. None of the community gay men have graduate degrees; in contrast, 75% of the university-employed gay men did.

With a working definition of feminism as advocating for equal rights for all, the researchers noted a correlation with Chickering and Reisser's theory that college educations includes the process of what the theorists term developing integrity; that is, a progression from more rigid, moralistic thinking to "a more humanized value system in which the interests of

others are balanced with one's own interests" (Evans et al., 1998, p. 40). From this perspective, the community gay men's strong concern with equality could relate at least in part to student development while in college, as all participants had a least some college education. However, Yoder, Tobias, and Snell (2011) found in a study of 220 Midwestern American college women that self-labeling as a feminist was strongly correlated with activism while not self-labeling correlated with non-activism. Zucker's (2004) research found three distinct groups of women in relation to feminism: women who label themselves feminists and endorse three cardinal beliefs related to feminism; women who reject the feminist label but endorse the three cardinal beliefs; and women who reject both the label and at least one of the cardinal beliefs. The three cardinal beliefs relate to perceptions of unequal treatment, advocating for equal pay, and valuing women's unpaid labor. From this definition of feminism, it appears that the admittedly small focus group of community gay men would largely fall outside a feminism defined by agreement with all three of these cardinal beliefs, since the gay men do not perceive unequal treatment for women, although they did address unequal pay and unpaid labor. They did address the need for equal treatment for all; in addition, they consider the issue of equal pay from a womanist perspective, perceiving race as a greater issue for equal pay than gender in their workplaces.

Some of the difference between the groups toward feminism can be understood in schema-relevant terms in terms of familiarity with feminist theory. The LGBTQ students on campus described learning about feminism at college and the university-employed gay men claim feminist theory as part of their intellectual and academic development. The community-based transgender individuals were impressively conversant with feminist theory. In contrast, the community-based gay men were unfamiliar with feminist theory and singular in their negative perception of feminism. Breen and Karpinski (2008) identify a correlation between exposure to feminist ideals and positive perceptions of feminism in a review of literature. In their own study of 385 participants, they found gender feminism, with its strong correlation to social justice issues, to be the strongest indicator of pro-feminist beliefs; that is, those who believe that feminism fights for equal rights for all were the most likely to identify as feminists or to express positive association with feminism. This finding confirmed the center's practices, as it both disseminates feminist ideals and supports LGBTQ students and community members.

Campus Women's Centers as a Nexus for LGBTQ Support

Identity centers, such as women's centers, are one way that university diversity goals,

including those related to LGBTQ students, can be incorporated into institutional practices (Kasper, 2004). Diversity initiatives have become omnipresent within higher education institutions (Morrish & O'Mara, 2011); however, Ibarra (2000) noted that universities lack clear plans for achieving diversity and inclusion goals. Though women's centers are thought to specifically serve the gender equity needs of woman-identified students, this line of thinking excludes understandings of how gender oppression can affect all genders, as well as the multiple identities of women as they intersect with race, ethnicity, class, ability, nationality, sexual orientation, and other axes of oppression (Kasper, 2004; Marine, 2011). Furthermore, women's centers that specifically take on a feminist lens serve broader diversity issues that intersect with gender more explicitly (Marine, 2011; Nicolazzo & Harris, 2014).

As part of this role in disseminating information about feminism and social justice issues, contemporary women's center programing can continue to expand to encompass LGBTQ community concerns (Marine, 2011). Emerging as they did from different strands of the feminist movement, women's centers have competing views of feminism (Nicolazzo & Harris, 2014), yet in general women's centers offer support, information, resources, and programing to promote gender equity (Kasper, 2004). Women's centers and their programing can serve as a space for constituencies to learn about feminism and try on feminist activism (Clark-Taylor, Mitchell, & Rich, 2014; Kasper, 2004), an important element in advancing positive views of feminism, according to the findings of this focus group research. Over the years the emphasis in women's centers has grown to include women's multiple identities and other "barriers to human liberation" (Kasper, 2004, p. 185). Grace and Hill (2004) noted that integrating LGBTQ knowledge into the larger knowledge of universities helps institutions to resist heteronormativity and to transform campus culture to embrace all LGBTQ individuals. In an interesting parallel, Coleman (2016) asserted that establishing LGBT centers as a safe space at Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HCBUs) are a "means to foster a sexual discourse of resistance to hetero-patriarchy" (p. 1).

Conclusion

This study reinforces the proposition that utilizing and expressing a feminist vision of social justice and advocacy can serve to support diversity and inclusion, including LGBTQ rights, on university campuses and in their surrounding communities. Along with Marine (2011), the team found that most of the LGBTQ groups in this study associate feminist beliefs with

broader diversity issues, specifically equality for all genders. Furthermore, the researchers see a connection between familiarity with feminist concepts and an understanding of feminism as a more expansive, social justice-oriented movement, rather than a movement focused solely on women's rights. In agreement with Bengiveno (2000), these results support the role of women's centers in educating their communities about feminism.

This study points to a connection between identity and feminism. When feminism is integrated into identity, as with the college students, transgender community members, and university-employed gay men, it appeared to form an overarching system for understanding self, relationships with others, and society. However, the criticism of the group of community gay men that feminism is solely equated with equity for women, often to the detriment of men, particularly men of color, and to the benefit of largely White and middle-to-upper class women, mirrors the criticism of a variety of feminists, including the transgender focus group. Feminists have incorporated these criticisms into both in theory and action, but this study reinforces the ongoing need for awareness of these issues and affirmative action within the feminist movement. In terms of intersecting identities, including gender identity and sexual orientation, in general our LGBTQ respondents found feminism to be inclusive and positive, but in terms of race our LGBTQ participants found feminism to be somewhat less inclusive and/or relevant, reinforcing the continued need for awareness about race and intersectionality within the feminist movement and within our center.

The use of gender-schema to analyze the results of these focus group discussions supports the importance of education about feminism, as increased familiarity with feminist concepts predisposed individuals to a positive perception of it, a connection which is useful considering the increased activism associated with self-labeling as feminist. Of course, important social activism takes place outside the rubric of feminism; that this article is a focused view on LGBTQ perceptions of feminism does not discount other social justice movements. Whether the argument is framed within feminist ideology or outside its conceptual schema, in the larger discourse of these times the need for education about tolerance, inclusion, and equality is profound.

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