Perceptions of Feminism on a University Campus

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Introduction

• There are several existing frameworks of feminism in which different individuals identify with.
  • Lorber identifies existing epistemological frameworks for feminism including Varieties of Feminism, Gender Reform Feminisms, Gender Resistance Feminism, and Gender Rebellion Feminism.
  • It seems that few feminist frameworks are portrayed in the media and there may be confusion regarding what feminism really is.

Research Question:
• The present research is interested in how college students perceive feminism, their opinions regarding feminist ideas, and where college students identify themselves in terms of “being a feminist.”

Method

Participants
• 20 college males and 21 college females participated in this study.

Setting
• Research was conducted on the University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire Campus in classrooms, dormitories, and campus buildings.

Procedure
• Structured interviews were conducted either face to face or via telephone with students around campus in which a series of questions regarding perceptions of feminism were asked.
  • A thematic analysis was then used to analyze responses.
  • Responses were categorized based on there similarities.

Results

• Figure 1 shows the percentage of students that have been enrolled in a course that states feminist ideas.
  • Males and females are separated in order to visualize the comparison between sexes.
  • 32% of all participants had been enrolled
  • 15% of males had been enrolled
  • 48% of females had been enrolled

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Results (cont.)

• Figure 2 shows the percentage of students that identified themselves as feminists.
  • Few participants either strongly identified as a feminist or strongly identified as not being a feminist.

• Figure 3 shows general ways in which participants defined feminism.
  • The majority thought feminism is equality between males and females or female empowerment.

• Figure 4 shows the percentage of participants that agreed with feminist ideas.
  • 73% of all participants agreed with feminist ideas
  • 60% of males agreed with feminist ideas
  • 86% of females agreed with feminist ideas

Discussion

• Few participants had an accurate definition of feminism.
  • The lack of understanding feminist ideas could be due to the few enrollments in courses that display feminist ideas.

• Those that did enroll in courses that display feminist ideas seemed to have a better understanding of feminist teachings.

• Although most participants agreed with feminist ideas, few identified themselves as a feminist.
  • Suggesting a stigma attached to “feminist.”

• These results could be used by the Women’s Studies department to better educate students on the ideas of feminism and to encourage students to enroll in WMNS courses.

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