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Feminist Attitudes, Behaviors, and Culture Shaping Women's Center Practice

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Abstract

The present article contributes to the growing research on women's centers to extend and encourage the role of feminism in women's center within higher education. We provide a brief history of feminism and women's centers in higher education to illuminate the connections between previous research and our women's center research on community perceptions of feminisms.

Keywords

Feminism, women's centers, higher education

FEMINIST ATTITUDES, BEHAVIORS, AND CULTURE SHAPING WOMEN'S CENTER PRACTICE

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The present article contributes to the growing research on women's centers to extend and encourage the role of feminism in women's center within higher education. We provide a brief history of feminism and women's centers in higher education to illuminate the connections between previous research and our women's center research on community perceptions of feminisms.

This essay contributes to growing research on women's centers in higher education with a specific focus on intergenerational community perceptions of feminism and the role of feminism in informing women's center practices. We provide a brief history of feminism and women's centers in higher education to illuminate the connections between previous research and our women's center research on community perceptions of feminism across generations. Our writing draws from an umbrella research project that we conducted at a mid-sized, private research university to develop the strategic plan for their women's center, which engaged an intergenerational group of university and community constituencies. We include six focus groups extracted from 22 focus groups comprised of 175 participants. In this study we seek to answer the specific question of how one university's women's center community perceived and used feminism to inform their choices about individual, interpersonal, and institutional-level relationships with a specific focus on attitudes, behaviors, and culture regarding these relationships. Our findings use a gender schema (Bem 355) framework that focuses on attitudes, behaviors, and cultures as they relate to

intrapersonal, interpersonal, and institutional relationships (Ridgway 145). The need for and benefit of an intersectional and intergenerational feminist approach in women's centers is underexamined. This research fills a gap in current research to date. In this way, we shed light on ways a diverse and intergenerational group of students, staff, faculty, alumni, and community members perceive the role of a campus women's center and its impact on their perception of feminism in their lives.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The purpose of women's centers is to remove barriers to intellectual growth by supporting education equity, violence prevention, and leadership development (Kasper 189). Women's centers are non-conventional spaces: spaces created outside of the traditional classroom environment (Iannello 70-77). Because of this, women's centers can create transformative change on college campuses and in the lives of individuals (e.g., students, faculty, staff, and community members). Transformative change disrupts the norms and culture of the historical patriarchal institution, allowing opportunities for learning and growth (Davie 21-24). However, since many types of women's centers exist, their missions focus on myriad initiatives and serve differing populations (e.g., college students compared to community members). No matter the structure, women's centers are largely committed to accelerating change in the higher education environment (Willinger 47). For this study, we view intergenerational (involvement from several generations) and intersectional (addressing the interconnected nature of social categories) approaches as critical elements of activism, advocacy, and allyship in women's center practices. Research has not explored the context of intergenerational and intersectional feminism and their impact on women's centers. Therefore, the information we gained from this study aids us in our understanding of the essence of women's centers and their critical function in higher education.

First Wave Feminism

The origins of campus women's centers sparked when women fought for equitable treatment and access to higher education through co-education in universities, including the institution that was the focus of this study. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, often regarded as the first wave of feminism, the number of women enrolling in college increased, and this increase impacted the development of women's programs and services on college campuses. During this period, women won the right to vote, allowing for many women to have more voice in government than they ever previously had. World War I and II took many women outside of the household into jobs typically held by men, but after the wars, Americans expected most women to leave outside-of-home employment and return to their roles as wives and mothers (Eisenmann 140). In the 1940s-1960s, marriage and fertility rates spiked, causing the 'baby boom,' and the white American middle class was born. Enrollment in college increased from 27% of high school graduates in 1948 to close to 40% in 1950 (Eisenmann 137).

Women-only colleges helped with the increased demand for women's college education, but this also further divided women from men, making it harder for women to access public life and work dominated by white men. Despite this divide, many women's colleges created educational and professional opportunities equal to those of men as single-sex colleges took hold in the East and co-education cropped up in the West. From approximately 1870 through 1920, seven high-caliber women's colleges, the Seven Sisters colleges (a consortium colleges for women that included Mount Holyoke, Vassar, Smith, Wellesley, Bryn Mawr, Barnard, and Radcliffe), sprouted up in the East with the goal to provide college education equivalent to that of the Ivy League college education from which women were excluded (Chamberlain). Characteristic of this period, and framed as the first wave of feminism, women fought for and gained political and educational rights, including greater access to co-education.

This initial first wave of feminism is not considered as radical as its subsequent waves, although in its own time women's thoughts and behaviors were radical (Eisenmann 133-141; Walters 41). Concepts such

as intersectionality, theorized by Kimberle Crenshaw (140) to recognize ways marginality synergizes when multiple categories of social identity overlap, had not been named during the period of first wave feminism. Similarly, negative associations of assigning specific gender roles, such as naming only men as providers and women as caretakers and mothers, were not yet prominent to most Western feminist record. The word sexist did not enter mainstream feminist discourse until the 1960s, and for most, the only way to be considered a woman was through one's biology. Moreover, during the early and mid-1900s, white and middle and upper class women dominated feminist perspectives, leaving out voices of un-Western women, women of color, and those of low socio-economic status (Perkins 265; Walters 105).

Second Wave Feminism

The second wave of feminism, ranging from 1965-1975, marked shifts in identity culture in the United States. Women's life experiences were changing as the age of a woman's first marriage, divorce rates, and birth control access increased, which decreased birth rates and accelerated participation in employment outside of the home (Chamberlain 15-34, 61-82). However, white women's careers and educational pursuits landed largely in pink collar fields of social science, education, and health, whereas most white men dominated white collar work in the sciences, politics, and business. A phenomenon still true today, women constituted more of the part-time workforce because of the need to balance out-of-home work with domestic and childcare responsibilities. Not surprisingly, these gendered labor stratifications meant that women earned significantly less than their male counterparts, which we now understand and document as the gender wage gap. Until the 1970s, most white women's lives were structured around families and childrearing. Conversely, because of racism, women of color experienced many additional educational and labor challenges compared to their white counterparts, and until the 1970s were largely excluded from the dominance of white middle- and upper-class feminist practices (Pasque and Nicholson 7).

Another variable connected to second wave feminist progress and women's college access is reproductive rights. Starting in the mid-1900s,

women's access to birth control increased, allowing for more control over fertility with a say on if or when women decided to have children (Ferree and Hess 18; Wies 256). As women entered the 1960s and 1970s, society's norms and cultural expectations of women began to shift and expand beyond that of marriage and motherhood (Eisenmann 134). As their children aged, many white and middle- and upper-class women continued their formal education by enrolling in college. This notion, called re-entry, was common prior to the mid-1970s, where women returned to college to further their education after an interruption in their educational experiences, typically from childrearing. The number of women entering—and re-entering—higher education increased through the 1970s, and by 1979, women became the majority of enrollment on college campuses (Chamberlain 61-82).

Lack of academic services for women, shifting political climate around feminist issues, and the rising college enrollment for women all contributed to the emergence of women's centers as integral parts of college and university campuses (Chamberlain 83-106). The number of college campus-based women's centers increased dramatically during the 1970s and forward as women re-entered higher education in between their responsibilities of motherhood and financial contribution to their families. During this re-entry, colleges and universities capitalized on providing opportunities for "mature women to complete degrees" (Chamberlain 63). College programs of this period were more vocational-focused, preparing to launch women into the workforce as well as helping them navigate college itself. Reflective of the period, birth control, childcare/childrearing, reproductive justice, and sexual harassment consumed the feminist political agenda, framing the second wave Women's Liberation Movement (Bengiveno 2). Campus-based women's centers developed to protect women and support their rights as well as assist them with tackling the challenges they faced in higher education settings and the outside world (Chamberlain 83-106).

While second wave feminism was building, the Black Womanist feminism movement, also known as Black Feminist Thought, was building steam on the tails of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 (Pasque and Nicholson 7). The work to desegregate schools was an ongoing fight, even with the

1954 desegregation decision from *Brown v. Board of Education* (Thelin 260). Black women began to describe a feminism not just based on gender but also race and class as well as the intersections of all three (Wheeler 118-120). This thought of intersectionality can be considered radical for this period, as most white feminists conceived biological sex differences as the single oppressor as opposed to oppressions resulting from added layers and shifts in power with consideration of multiple and intersecting categories of sex, race, class, sexualities, and other social identities. Pushing back on exclusions common to white first and second wave feminism, The Combahee River Collective, a Black feminist lesbian socialist organization active in Boston from 1974 to 1980, argued that white feminism erased intersecting needs of Black women and especially Black lesbians (Combahee River Collective 15-28).

Third Wave Feminism

On the tails of second wave feminist movements, third wave feminism, beginning in 1990 through early twenty-first century, reconceptualized the word “feminist” with the view that folks can hold traditional or radical feminist views, as long as they are making their own choices (Taylor 9-28); some later generations of feminists criticized this definition as being too broad and not radical enough. However, this period was a time of significant growth in women’s rights as well as gains in professional and political power. The women of this generation were the daughters of the previous second wave feminist generation, and these third wave feminists were more likely to question power and privilege that previous generations of feminists had overlooked (Chamberlain 359-372).

During this third wave, the term intersectionality developed to explore the layers of oppression that women face, as interest grew on how gender, race, and sexual identity are shaped by and impact one’s place in society (Crenshaw 167). The postmodern mindset of multiple realities, roles, and truths became the feminist norm (Pasque and Nicholson 11; Niskodé-Dossett et al. 325-332). Greater numbers of women attended college than ever before, and women were earning degrees to enter the workforce to compete with men for jobs. Although a significant pay gap existed, women—largely cis, white, and middle to upper class—began to hold

senior-level positions that had never been accessible to previous generations. The number of campus women's centers continued to increase with rising numbers of women enrolling in college. Bengiveno challenged women's centers to question "how will women's centers continue to be advocates and bring about institutional change?" while balancing what type of women's center they are: service agencies, political agencies, or a combination of both (4). No matter the type of women's center, one could not assume in this period that a radical women's center would change mindsets and that institutions would conceivably follow.

Fourth Wave Feminism

Around 2012, the fourth wave feminism movement began with emphasis on the empowerment of women, use of digital media, and continued focus on intersectionality of identities and power relations. Compared to previous waves of feminism that centered on liberation, individualism, and social mobility, fourth wave-feminism engages in social justice efforts focused on the prevention of rape, assault, and harassment, coupled with the increase in bodily autonomy and equal pay for equal work. Fourth wave feminism emerged from millennials and Gen Z, who rejected many current feminist theoretical frameworks on power, equity, and equality as not representative to shifting voices and issues important to a diverse range of young people reaching for a new array of social and gender equality measures (Rivers, "Concluding Remarks" 155).

This new wave of feminism relies heavily on emerging social media platforms to share messages of equity and equality, not only advocating for women but also men and non-binary individuals' rights. Through social media activism, concepts such as hashtag feminism campaigns have received national attention: specifically, the hashtag #MeToo, coined by Tarana Burke, facilitated a Twitter-mounted movement in fighting sexual abuse and harassment leading to Burke and other "Silence Breakers" receiving Time's 2017 Person of the Year award (Rivers, "New Media" 107).

Unique to fourth wave feminism is the disruption of binary gender and sex categories, which help make voices of transgender and gender-expansive people prominent and visible within a feminist arena. Sadly,

not all individuals identifying as feminist support the inclusion of transgender people; trans-exclusionary radical feminists (TERFs), also known as gender critical individuals, oppose pro-trans legislation and do not want to include trans women in socially-marked women's spaces, such as bathrooms and locker rooms. As much as we locate TERFs as part of fourth wave feminism, second wave cultural radical feminists—Mary Daly as one—theorized an essentialist, woman-only feminism true to ways that we name and recognize TERFs today (Tong and Botts 44-67). Tracing the waves of feminism through to this fourth wave is salient to ways that we understand the changing role and political landscape shaping the identity and purpose of women's centers today.

Feminism and Women's Centers Today

Presently, over 400 campus-based women's centers exist across the United States, and although each women's center has a unique approach, "...they generally advocate institutional and individual change to improve women's position, status, and training in the academia" (Kunkel 21-22). Many researchers who focus on women's centers advocate for the need for centers to lead the way in "...critical pedagogy, intergroup dialogue, and reflective practice" (Nicolazzo and Harris 1) as well as the requirement that centers be rooted in social justice (Sawyer and Norris 6) and act as the center of feminism on campus (Byrne 48-49). The modern women's center must not just advocate for women as defined by one's biological sex, but women's centers must work to recognize and uplift all voices and life experiences (Sawyer and Norris 29-47), which includes intersectionality and intergenerational populations.

Women's centers are looking to the future and expanding their missions and visions to be more inclusive (Jeffries and Boyd 359). Often women's centers host events that they themselves create or co-sponsor with other campus centers, clubs, offices or community partners (Buckley and Hetherington 23; Buford 31). Jennrish and Kowalski-Braun (208) believe that by sharing the work of programming between two offices, students could learn about intersectionality of their identities. Women's centers often partner with other identity centers such as ones that focus on LGBTQ and multicultural issues to support students 'intersecting

identities of race, ethnicity, and sexuality (Catalano and Jourian 41; Jeffries and Boyd 359).

Recently, some women's centers have expanded their services and programming to include trans individuals and cisgender men. This intentional practice is aimed to be more inclusive to people who identify and do not identify as women (Kupo and Castellon 19; Marine et al. 43). By expanding services and programming to reach trans, gender expansive, and cisgender men as examples, women's centers aim for more support from people of all genders—including those in higher education leadership, which is still dominated by cisgender men (Jeffries and Boyd 359; Kupo and Castellon 19; Marine et al. 43). Also, educational programming on masculinity allows centers to have conversations that advance equity for all genders.

Tied to the evolution and shifting waves of feminism, the modern women's center is not limited to serving the "biologically-defined" woman. Most advocates for women's centers want these centers to address intersectionality as inclusive to multiple identities (Jeffries and Boyd 359; Marine et al. 43). Women's centers emerged and exist to create a sense of community and togetherness on and around college campuses. With this creation, the physical spaces must be considered: gender-inclusive bathrooms, diversity represented in the artwork and literature, and diverse relationships with other offices on campus (Nicolazzo and Harris 2-9). Moreover, the programs and events women's centers host should be inclusive and encourage students, faculty, and staff to reflect on their own identities and lived experiences (Nicolazzo and Harris 2-9).

Conceptual Framework

This paper seeks to add to this body of knowledge by grounding our work in gender schema theory and utilizing community-based participatory research principles (CBPR) (Israel et al. 2001). CBPR enhances researchers' ability to understand a community's priorities and considers each stage in the research process as an opportunity for inclusivity (Wallerstein and Duran S40-S44). Rather than come to a community consortium or entity with an idea, a researcher and/or team will approach the community and ask, "What do you want to know about X?" Data for

this paper comes from an umbrella listening tour, with 22 focus groups and 175 people. The project included students, faculty, staff, alumni, and community members at each step in the project: inception, design, institutional review processes, and dissemination of results through myriad local, state, and national presentations. The authorship for this and other papers was also inclusive of these groups. Gender schema theory was then used to analyze the data through a framework approach.

Gender schema theory asserts it is through schema that we organize our thoughts and experiences by creating categories and groupings based on similarities or differences. Bem (355) notes that gender-linked associations begin with the self and are intrapersonal. We construct the “other” as a result of how we are socialized from a young age and where we begin to learn to associate certain traits with our gender categorization and those of others. Rather than existing on a continuum, people place traits in one gender schema or the other (Bem 355). Bem proposed children self-select traits not from a wide variety of human characteristics, but from their own narrow gender schemas, thus “...cultural myths become self-fulfilling prophecies” (355-356). Organizational structures and the media reinforce these beliefs through interpersonal relationships and institutional rules (Ridgeway 151). In this study, we sought to answer the specific question: How do our women’s center community members perceive feminism to inform their choices about their relationships at the individual, interpersonal, and institutional level with specific focus on their attitudes, behaviors, and culture?

METHODOLOGY

Sample

For this analysis, we utilized a purposeful sample from an umbrella research project with 22 focus groups and 175 people collected between November 2012 and March 2015. We held the focus groups at a northeast midsized research-intensive university. We recruited students, staff, faculty, alumni, and community members through the women’s center strategic planning process by focusing on the current perception on feminism in the greater university community. We selected six focus

groups for this article, which provided an intergenerational group from the campus and community. Group membership ranged from 5 to 13 with a mean of 9.26 people (S.D. 2.9) for a total of 50 participants. Ages ranged from 23 to 89 with a mean of 61.54 (S.D. 17.05). See Table 1.

Table 1. Focus Group Age Distribution

Focus Group	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Standard Deviation
1	74	75	74.60	1.34
2	23	31	26.86	2.96
3	33	80	60.25	14.96
4	47	71	62.75	9.21
5	62	89	73.11	9.19
6	55	78	67.23	6.00

The sample is comprised of almost all women (98%) with one person self-identifying as male. The sample was comprised of 82% white, 8% Black, 4% Asian, and 2% Latino or Hispanic individuals. While ethnicity was asked separately, some identified with Latino or Hispanic as both race and ethnicity. Twenty-two percent (n=11) identified as “other ethnicity” reflective of the high percentage of international students and faculty on campus. The group identified as having achieved high levels of education with 80% as having college or graduate degrees. College students, 10% of the sample, noted some college. 10% noted having a high school GED or some less than a high school degree. Due to small sample sizes, it is impossible to provide cross-group comparisons in a meaningful way.

Data Collection

We conducted focus groups at a time and location the participating organizations chose, and we provided a \$5 gift card to thank participants for their time. Focus group participants answered a series of open-ended

questions on their perceptions of feminism. Prompts included, but were not limited to:

- What does the word feminism mean to you?
- Does feminism inform the decisions you make?
- Does feminism play a role in your relationships?

Prompts also included questions on the history of the center's founding, historic women figures at the university, as well as questions on center programming. The definition of relationships was intentionally left open-ended to allow participants to self-define the term. As a result, participants noted a range of relationships and conceptualizations at the interpersonal and systems level as they related to feminism. Our approach was to explore the data and not conduct a hypothesis-informed study. We wanted our investigation to be guided by exploring the relationships among or between constructs not bound to a particular investigative course. We were open to discovering relationships, concepts, and ideas about the topic that the research team may not have considered prior to collecting the data (Maxwell 76-78 and 124).

Data Analysis

A professional transcriptionist provided Word documents which our research team then coded and analyzed utilizing Bem's (335) gender schema theory framework approach (Pope et al. 2000). A team member created a diagram of Bem's (355) 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. We employed a consensual qualitative research (CQR) approach (Heppner et al. 393) for data 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 through open dialogue. The process places a value on researchers working together collectively as a team to construct a shared understanding of the phenomenon" (Wang and Heppner, as cited in Heppner et al. 394). Two of the authors were involved in the focus group facilitation and three read all the transcripts. We coded the transcripts

using line-by-line coding, with Figure 1 as a guide. We also utilized process notes to consider the room dynamics, participants' tones in dialogue, and to recall disagreements between our participants. The senior author was an auditor, and we reached consensus to resolve coding discrepancies.

FINDINGS

Several themes emerged from the focus group data which we organize categorically as Attitudes/Intrapersonal, Behaviors/Interpersonal, Cultural/Institutional. These findings follow.

Attitudes/Intrapersonal

Consistent to the waves of feminism, one participant declared "...the word feminism has evolved and is continuing to evolve" (Group 5). This comment sums up a common thread on attitudes on feminism within and across the focus groups. Despite this commonality, participants' views varied across groups, often reflecting the generation of feminism with which they were raised. For example, one participant from Group 11 reported an essentialist view of feminist ethos as "expressing your female individuality" or being "feminine." In addition, identity, particularly gender identity, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, and nation of origin had an impact on participants' feminist attitudes.

Several participants equated feminism with different views on independence. For example, some participants described independence as being unmarried (Group 5), owning your own home (Group 7), and raising daughters to make the choice to stay home or not (Group 9). A participant in Group 13 described feminism as being able to "hold my own." In addition, participants described issues of independence as feminist issues that give feminism its ability to bridge or unify women. This was discussed from both an issue and a global perspective (Groups 7, 13). Another participant described feminism as a "coping mechanism" (Group 11) and a way of not taking a "subservient role for nothing or nobody" (Group 11).

One participant from Group 9 described feminism as an opportunity for respecting women, stating: "I would just like to say a respect for women in general and for the gifts and talents and intellectual ability that we do

share, because I think that that was where feminism came from. In the beginning I believe that there was not a healthy respect for those of us who also can contribute to our world.” This thread of feminism as “an opportunity” went across all focus group participants but often incorporated other ways of thinking, including social justice. One participant from Group 5 shared, “socialist movements and various other movements, labor, socialist and outreach to women, so there was a kinship for me intellectually always in terms of social justice and in terms of creating opportunities for people to be all they could be.”

While feminism as an opportunity to respect women was prominent to most focus group respondents, not all participants agreed, some seeing feminism as white, western, and a space of privilege. For example, a participant from Group 13 stated, “For me feminism means a lot of different things and it really depends on who I'm talking to and where that individual is...we would hope that all those stories would bring us together. Unfortunately, we know some of the history hasn't always done that.” Women from an international background shared that many Eastern ways of thinking are not incorporated into feminist ideas in the United States. One participant shared, “I think something that...I noticed in United States, they fall short of what feminism is” (Group 7). Another participant spoke of race as too secondary to feminist attitudes stating, “Being a woman of color, race was for the forefront for me growing up in the 60s and 70s and even now when I look at well some of the issues feminism took us from are second to a lot of my issues” (Group 7).

Behaviors/Interpersonal

Tensions regarding views of feminism were even more pronounced at the behavioral and interpersonal level. For example, some participants discussed personal behaviors of language or having feminist ideals but not having language or behaviors to enact them. One participant particularly noted a lack of “sisterhood” stating it is “very disturbing to see the lack of support women give to other women” (Group 7). In contrast, most focus group participants described feminist behaviors as ones of friendship, sisterhood, authenticity, consciousness raising, educating, mentoring, and citizenship.

Feminism as being authentic, unapologetic, and assertive was another theme that emerged from several focus group participants. For example, one participant declared, "Well I think it makes me more assertive so that I can be me to myself as a woman, and I consider the decisions I make first as a woman and then as within a relationship" (Group 13). This theme crossed over into feminism as a tool for participants to evaluate not only their behaviors but also their relationships with and behaviors of others. In particular, one participant shared that feminism has "helped me take a step back and ... evaluate my friendship with people" (Group 6). Another participant shared, "feminism ... positively influenced the way that I handle situations, so I became more assertive, or I made a conscience effort to not sit back and be quiet if I felt uncomfortable" (Group 6).

This lens to evaluate interpersonal behaviors was tied to feminism as described across all focus groups. Specifically, participants shared examples of activities used to make people more aware of personal, social, political, or consciousness raising issues, noting "feminism to me was a new consciousness" (Group 7). Activities of creating greater awareness of feminism also led participants to see opportunities to educate and mentor others. In particular, participants in Group 5 shared that women's history of social movements from suffrage to civil rights connected and inspired them to "acknowledge, honor, make access for other women." Participants credited this with their development of citizenship, including being inspired to take on "public acts" (Group 6), speak to "public topics" (Group 9), and be more oriented to be "public figures" (Group 9).

Feminism also inspired women to be mentors and educators. One participant shared that "educating young women, making sure they learn about where they're going and what their options are, and you have to start" was a passion of theirs and their way of embodying their feminist attitudes (Group 13). Group 9 seconded the importance of education and mentoring relationships across many identities and life choices, noting the significance of "job mentoring for women at all different stages...so young women graduating from college, mothers going back into the workforce, people trying to step up professionally but just can't figure out how" (Group 6). One data gap that the researchers observed is that participants across all groups did not discuss the ability for feminist ethos to be put

into feminist practice or how advocacy or activism provides an opportunity to translate feminist attitudes into behavioral actions. This data gap is instructive for women's center programing, a variable we examine in the discussion section of the paper below.

Culture/Institutional

Groups 5 and 13 spoke of feminism as a movement and described a large part of that movement as a change, not just in attitudes and behaviors, but in policies and institutions at the organizational level. Groups 6, 7, and 11 all attributed feminism to cultural and institutional advances in society such as rises in career satisfaction for women and a shrinking gap in gender pay inequity. For example, one participant notes "raising women's status with things like equal pay and non-discrimination" was one of feminism's largest accomplishments. In addition to a broad statement of increased rights and access, Groups 11 and 6 noted "access to health care or reproductive care" as a major cultural shift due to feminism. Across all groups, participants noted women's rights broadly with the general consensus that feminism has made enough strides to see a change in the cultural landscape to identify as a feminist. Even with this, Group 6 participants discussed the paradox to claiming a feminist identity. As example, one participant noted, "...when I read in magazines that someone is in the favor of women's rights that does not want to be identified as a feminist, I have a tough time understanding that" (Group 6).

DISCUSSION

In considering data across all focus groups, findings reveal that most participants conceptualized feminism as an evolution of attitudes that included broader gender expectations that allowed individuals greater independence and an opportunity to unify and bridge multiple social issues. Data underscores feminism as both a collectivist, universal, global struggle for change and as a way to cope with social injustices. Yet not all participants agreed upon both the humanistic nature and breadth of feminism's support for intersectional justice. Tensions across attitudes

around feminism revealed that many participants believed feminist attitudes treated race as a second or third place issue to gender. This is confirmed by some participants' beliefs that feminism was a dated term, situated in attitudes of white privilege. Related to this dated terminology, some participants saw feminism as a means to embrace the feminine of gender essentialism without recognizing the identity exclusions inherent to essentialist thinking.

Despite some tensions among focus group respondents' feminist views and understanding, participants overall saw feminism as an ethos with opportunity to engage in broader social justice work. However, it is important to note tensions among participants' feminist views, because they reveal how feminist attitudes do or do not lead to feminist behaviors, or what one participant called "the disappointment of the idea of sisterhood." While many participants noted that feminism allows them to defy gender stereotypes, particularly those ascribed to women, they similarly noted that feminism allows them to be assertive and unapologetic, thus leading them to have more fulfilling friendships and careers. Some used that as an opportunity to work in community with others as mentors and educators for equality. Others found that consciousness raising is where feminism stopped, and feminist attitudes and language did not match feminist behaviors.

Cultural perceptions at both the societal and institutional levels revealed participants' additional tensions about feminism's impact on systems. Participants defined feminism as a movement that permits an authentic full life for women, focusing on women's health, equal pay, and distribution of labor at work. Yet others saw feminism as an expectation of democratic citizenship for justice and equality embodied through a system of community engagement. These variations in perceptions of feminist attitudes and behaviors provide an instructive lens for women's centers in ways that can better inform educational programming and institutional advocacy towards a progressive feminist ethos. We suggest this intergenerational and intersectional approach is helpful to consider when conducting women's center strategic planning.

CONCLUSION

Women's centers are looking to the future to expand their missions and visions to be more inclusive (Jeffries and Boyd). In this essay, we consider community perceptions of feminism and the role of feminism in women's centers within higher education. Drawing from a brief history of feminism and women's centers in higher education and analyzing data across a diverse range of focus group participants, we shed light on ways an intersectional and intergenerational group of students, staff, faculty, alumni, and community members perceive the role of a campus women's center as it impacts their perception of feminism in their lives. Findings from this research support previous research shared in this article in that although each women's center has a unique approach, "...they generally advocate institutional and individual change to improve women's position, status, and training in the academia" (Kunkel 21-22). Undoubtedly, this includes a need for a focus on intersectionality and intergenerational populations with women's centers leading the way as advocates for "...critical pedagogy, intergroup dialogue, and reflective practice" (Nicolazzo and Harris 1). If women's centers seek to be rooted in social justice (Sawyer and Norris 46) and as centers for feminism on campus (Byrne 46) we must continue to work to recognize and uplift all voices and lived experiences (Sawyer and Norris 29-47).

As postscript to this research, we see the COVID-19 pandemic leaving an impact on women in its wake, a phenomenon salient to ongoing and future women's center strategic planning. Women are leaving the workforce in droves, suffering under the burden of balancing work, homeschooling, and family responsibilities. It is possible that post-COVID, women's centers will work within academic settings to help students navigate new learning demands, faculty navigate tenure clock extensions due to time out for carrying additional family responsibilities, and academic settings continue to develop diverse workforces to make campuses thrive.

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