ABSTRACT


IRL FEMINISM: BRIDGING PHYSICAL AND DIGITAL SPACES
TO EMPOWER MILLENNIAL ACTIVISTS


by Alison L. Place

Millennial women were sold a promise of equality that society was not prepared to deliver. Raised to believe they could do and be anything, they followed their passions and pursued their dreams. Now, as they collectively move into adulthood, they are encountering both overt and normalized forms of discrimination that shatter the narrative of equality they once believed. Frustrated, bewildered and unprepared to fight a battle they believed was already won by generations of women before them, young women today are turning to feminism in a new way. They seek a community of peers with whom to bring issues of inequality to light and resources to take action against injustice. This research examines millennials in Cincinnati, Ohio and emerging forms of protest against gender inequality. Traditional methods for civic action are combined with modern digital tools to produce a contemporary model for social activism that appeals to the unique values and aspirations of the millennial generation. By bridging their physical and digital worlds, young activists can connect locally with peers to empower each other and gain tools for identifying and eliminating gender hierarchy in their lives and their communities.

IRL FEMINISM: BRIDGING PHYSICAL AND DIGITAL SPACES
TO EMPOWER MILLENNIAL ACTIVISTS

A Thesis

Submitted to the

Faculty of Miami University

in partial fulfillment of

the requirements for the degree of

Master of Fine Arts

by

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Miami University

Oxford, Ohio

2017

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This thesis titled


IRL FEMINISM: BRIDGING PHYSICAL AND DIGITAL SPACES
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by



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has been approved for publication by


the College of Creative Arts

and

the Department of Art



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# Dedication

This thesis is dedicated to my father, Daniel Allan Place, who taught me that I could do anything, and gave me the courage to prove him right.

# Acknowledgements

First and foremost, I wish to thank my research participants, whose bravery and optimism continually inspired me throughout this year of research to press on in pursuit of envisioning a future of equality.

This thesis came to exist thanks to the educators and mentors who have had a profound impact on my graduate education: Helen Armstrong, Noel Cunningham, Gaile Pohlhaus, James Coyle, Glenn Platt, Peg Faimon, James Porter, Robert Mullenix and my adviser, Dennis Cheatham.

My graduate education would not have been possible without the incredible support of family, friends and colleagues: Susan Place, Jill Krisl, Emily Hager, Brett Hornberger, Samantha Bohnert and the communications team in Miami University Advancement.

Last, but certainly not least, this and every achievement I earn is met with a tremendous debt of gratitude for the unwavering support and continued inspiration of my partner in work, in life, and in love, Richard Earl Jones. Thank you.

Chapter 1: Introduction

## Introduction

Advancements toward gender equality in the United States can largely be attributed to feminism and the resulting activism that has aimed to swing the pendulum of equality towards women. But pundits say the U.S. has been in a "post-feminist" era for decades (Crossley, 2017). Despite persistent issues of inequality in society that remain, progress has slowed and momentum has dwindled. The revolution has stalled (Crossley, 2017). To explore the cause, this research study examines the impact of the youngest group of adults and the largest generation in the United States, millennials.

It is said that millennial women are "some of the most feminist in history" (Filopivic, 2017, p. 6). As little girls, they grew up hearing that they could be whatever they want. But that promise remains unfulfilled, and millennials are becoming increasingly aware of it. However, awareness of gender inequality in society does not necessarily make them feminists. The term carries a long history of negative stereotypes and confusion about its ideology, and many are reluctant to identify with it. To find out why the gender revolution has stalled, this research study explores how millennials view feminism and social activism, and what motivates them to identify with an ideology or cause.

Through the lens of feminist research theories, this study examines millennials in Cincinnati, Ohio using a mixed-methods approach. Through qualitative and quantitative research, and feminist design methodologies, I explore their unique views and experiences on the subjects of feminism and gender equality, and how contemporary tools and platforms can be exploited to assist them in identifying and eliminating gender hierarchy in their lives and their communities.

## Statement of the Problem

There is no question that the women's rights movement in the United States has been a success, if one that came in fits and starts. Less than one hundred years after women gained the right to vote, they are graduating from college at higher rates than men, getting married later, having fewer children and living longer (Filipovic, 2017, p. 6). Rights to abortion and birth control have allowed them to delay childbirth and pursue careers, and they are making inroads into many traditionally male careers (Catalyst, 2017). But they still haven't caught up.

Men earn more than women for doing the same work in nearly every profession (ACLU, 2017). In 1970, women made 59 cents on the dollar to men; forty years later that number had risen only to 77 cents on the dollar (Sandberg, 2010). That wage gap is deeply exacerbated for women of color, and widens as women age, especially when they have kids.

# The gender wage gap by race



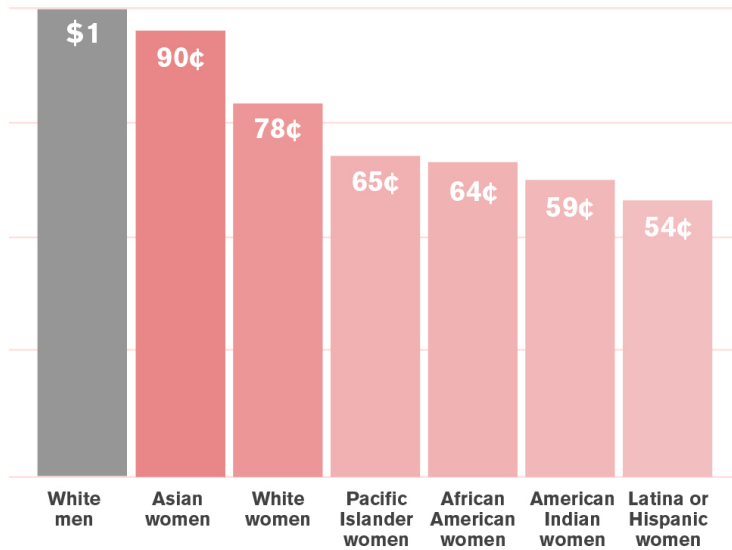| | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| $1 | 90¢ | 78¢ | 65¢ | 64¢ | 59¢ | 54¢ |
| White men | Asian women | White women | Pacific Islander women | African American women | American Indian women | Latina or Hispanic women |

*Figure 1.1: The gender wage gap by race.*

Women in positions of leadership are also noticeably underrepresented across many domains. Despite being 51% of the population, women hold 14% of executive officer positions (for women of color, that number is 4%), 17% of board seats, and 18% of elected congressional positions (Sandberg, 2015, p. 6). Only 21 of Fortune 500 CEOs are women (Sandberg, 2015, p. 7). Women are still subject to disproportionately high rates of gender-based violence and harassment, and nearly one in four women will be a victim of sexual assault in her lifetime (ACLU, 2017). Roles are not equal in the home, either. Even many "egalitarian" heterosexual relationships still involve the female partner doing the majority of the care work, whether that's for her husband, their children or an aging parent (Quadlin, 2016).
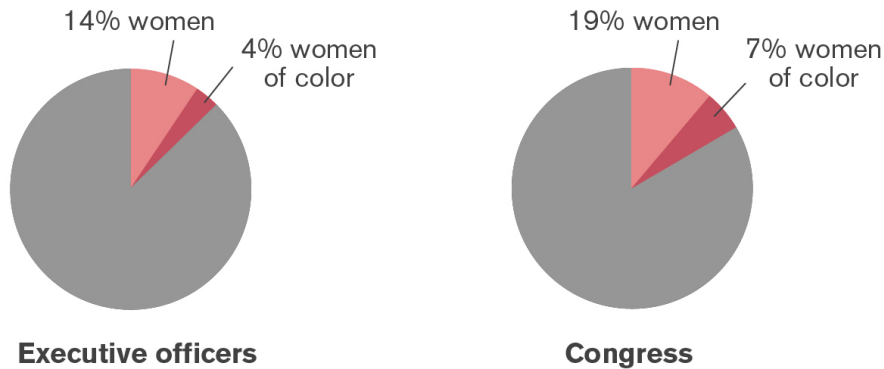
# Women in positions of leadership



*Figure 1.2: Women in positions of leadership*

Significant progress remains to be seen in the battle for gender equality, and there is work to be done. This begs the questions, how to address the problems and who to do the work? The women's movement has largely been backed by the ideology of feminism, a movement that aims to achieve equality for all people. Feminism has been used to bring significant issues of inequality to light and energize advocates to take action for social change, and was particularly instrumental in the women's movement and civil rights movement of the 1960s. But for several decades, pundits have asserted that we are living in a post-feminist era, and the gender revolution has stalled (Crossley, 2017). Researcher Allison Dahl Crossley writes in *Finding Feminism*, "Women experience deep cultural tensions with their advancement in society, combined with stagnancy in the institutions of work and family. This ensures the persistence of inequality and the stall of the revolution" (2017, p.16).

To theorize about the future state of the feminism, we must look to current and future allies of the movement, especially young adults. Millennials are now the largest population in the United States today, but current research on their views of feminism is mixed at best. Some argue that they reject feminism due to negative stereotypes that are associated with feminists, the radical nature of its history and ideology, or they simply don't see a need for it anymore. Some see a more recent revival. There is significant knowledge to be gained about this group of people and how they currently or could potentially engage with feminism. In order to advance an agenda of gender equality, it will be imperative for the feminist movement to evolve in order to appeal to and partner with this generation.

**Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study is to understand how millennials in Cincinnati, Ohio, view feminism and social activism, and to design a culturally relevant intervention that can be used to empower activists with the aim of advancing an agenda of gender equality.

**Research Questions**

This study aims to answer the following questions:

1. What are millennials' views on feminism and social activism?

2. In what ways can barriers be reduced for millennials in Cincinnati to engage with feminism and take action for gender equality?

**Significance of the Study**

This study holds significant implications for contemporary models for feminism and social activism, particularly among younger generations. In 2016, millennials passed baby boomers to become the largest generation in the U.S (Hendrickson, 2016). By understanding their views on social issues and developing a corresponding model for activism, stakeholders in social and political movements can learn how to engage millennials in new and deeper ways. The methodology of this study also provides a potential model for prototyping and testing artificial intelligence technology, which can be applied to future studies in a wide variety of domains.

**Definition of Terms**

Millennial – a person in the United States born between 1983 and 2000. At the time of this research, millennials are people between the ages of 18 and 34.

Feminism – the advocacy of women's rights on the basis of the equality of the sexes.

Artificial intelligence – the theory and development of computer systems able to perform tasks that normally require human intelligence, such as visual perception, speech recognition, decision-making, and translation between languages.

Activism – efforts to promote, impede, or direct social, political, economic, or environmental reform with the desire to make improvements in society

**List of Abbreviations**

AI – artificial intelligence
BLM – Black Lives Matter
CR – consciousness raising
IRL – in real life
VR – virtual reality


**Assumptions, Limitations, and Delimitations**

Assumptions made regarding this research are that participants have answered all questions honestly and thoroughly, and that participants had a sincere interest in participating in the research and did not have any other motives.

Limitations of the research include sample sizes that were limited by time constraints and the length of the study; diversity of respondents due to small sample size and lack of access; methodology constraints due to limited responsiveness of participants; and limited prototyping capabilities due to limited time and lack of funding.

Delimitations of this research include millennials between the ages of 18 and 34 who live in Cincinnati, Ohio. This location was chosen due to access to participants. Although research participants spanned diverse backgrounds and genders, more women were included than men in order to elevate the voices and experiences of those marginalized by gender inequality.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

**Conceptual or Theoretical Framework**

This study was conducted through the lens of feminist standpoint theory which asserts that knowledge is socially situated, and research should begin with those who are marginalized. Mainstream theories of research have assumed the universality of a male-centered experience and used it as the yardstick of un-biased research (Sarikakis, 2009). In contrast, feminist standpoint theory calls on researchers to consider how social investigation should be approached so that it can redress the gaps in knowledge deriving from gender imbalances. While traditional epistemologies assume that a universal and abstract account of knowledge and scientific enquiry is possible, feminist research theories claim that such analyses are only properly understood in the social contexts in which they arise, and in terms of the biases and prejudices those contexts generate (Harding, 2004).

This research was also designed under the guidance of the 10 tenets of feminist research as defined by Shulamit Reinharz in *Feminist methods in social research* (1992). Demonstrations of how these principles are applied to this research follow each tenet.

*1. Feminism is a perspective, not a research method.*

Feminism is employed in this research as a lens through which traditional qualitative and quantitative research methods are implemented, such as surveys and interviews.

*2. Feminists use a multiplicity of research methods.*

Multiple research methods are employed, both traditional and experimental, to gather a wide variety of data and to support varying points of view.

*3. Feminist research involves an ongoing criticism of nonfeminist scholarship.*

This study aims to challenge and be in conversation with current epistemologies of millennials, feminism and social activism.

*4. Feminist research is guided by feminist theory.*

Feminist writer Jane Flax defines feminist theory as a "systematic, analytic approach to [one's] everyday experience" with a goal to understand the power differential between men and women, and to create a foundation of action to overcome oppression (Flax, 1999). This research is based on this definition, presuming that all marginalized people do theory in order to explain and understand their everyday experiences of oppression, thus it is imperative that research subjects maintain agency over their story and the ability to tell it in their own words.

*5. Feminist research may be transdisciplinary.*

This research is in dialogue with several disciplines, including philosophy, political science, social science, media ethics, artificial intelligence and interactive design.

*6. Feminist research aims to create social change.*

This research is designed with the goal of creating an intervention that both upholds feminist values and fosters action for social change.

*7. Feminist research strives to represent human diversity.*

Traditional sample techniques have been shown to generate a majority of white middle-class male respondents (Sarikakis, 2009). To decrease this tendency, snowball sampling (a sampling technique in which respondents are asked to identify other respondents) was used to increase sample diversity.

*8. Feminist research frequently includes the researcher as a research subject and tool.*

This research is designed to acknowledge the positioning of myself, the researcher, as a person engaged in the research process, and to break down barriers of authority between the researcher and respondents by attempting to incorporate ways for the respondents to be co-researchers.

*9. Feminist research frequently attempts to develop special relations with the people studied (in interactive research).*

In this study, subjects are integrated in the research process as active participants through methods of participatory and co-design.

*10. Feminist research frequently defines a special relation with the reader.*

In-depth interviews generated data about women's lived experience. During these in-depth interviews, stories that were similar to those told by respondents were shared by me, the researcher, when appropriate. Because the questions were open-ended, respondents sometimes seemed unsure about their meaning. At those times, a personal story was provided as an example response to the question. This disclosure on my part tended to allow deeper responses on the part of my co-researchers. This interviewing technique minimizes the "perceived authority of the interviewer, and promotes an intersubjective, conversation style" (Sarikakis, 2009).

Through the lens of feminist standpoint theory and the tenets of feminist research, this study has been designed to elevate the collective voices of women and to preserve and strengthen their agency over their experiences. The outcome of this research has also been developed to advance the agenda of feminism through participatory and interactive design.

**Review of Research**

Feminism is a divisive ideology that has long been the site of controversy and conflict. A review of the literature reveals that this tumult still persists today, and the resulting stigma has had a significant impact on its effectiveness. Conflicting and varying views on the movement for gender equality abound, especially regarding millennials. The following review of the literature will address current discourse in four areas: feminism today, feminism and digital media, feminism and millennials, and the current political context.

**Feminism today**

Since the earliest recorded feminist texts written in the 17th century, the meaning of feminism has continually shifted with history. In its most basic dictionary definition, feminism is described as the advocacy of women's rights on the basis of the equality of the sexes. But the interpretation and application of this advocacy has evolved over time and is often fiercely debated among different social spheres. bell hooks, one of the most influential feminist theorists of our time, once wrote, "A central problem within feminist discourse has been our inability to either arrive at a consensus of opinion about what feminism is or accept definition(s) that could serve as points of unification. Without agreed-upon definition(s), we lack a sound foundation on which to construct theory or engage in overall meaningful praxis" (1984, p. 18). This lack of foundation is arguably a defining characteristic of the movement, but not necessarily to its detriment. A tenet of one feminist manifesto is "to acknowledge that, although feminists may have disparate values, we share the same goal of equality, and of supporting one another in our efforts to gain the power to make our own choices" (Baumgardner & Richards, 2000, p. 426). Some view feminism as a strict doctrine of rules, while others view it as a conversation, or an opportunity to listen to the experiences of socially marginalized people.

Throughout history, the so-called "waves" of feminism have marked major shifts in values and relevant issues of the movement over time. Since the first wave of suffragists who fought for voting and property rights in the 1920s, every few decades the movement enters a period of abeyance, then is reorganized and renewed to focus on a timely issue. Second-wave feminists in the 1960s coined the phrase "the personal is political," highlighting the impact of sexism and patriarchy on every aspect of women's private lives while fighting for equality in the workplace and in the home. Betty Friedan famously wrote of the plight of the American housewife in *The Feminine Mystique* (1963), calling attention to deeply ingrained social structures of dominance. But the second wave was harshly criticized for treating women as one large homogenous group, and suffered from what many called "white feminism." Historically, women of color and lower class women have felt marginalized by feminism and the brand of equality that it claimed to seek.

Third-wave feminism in the 1990s was a rally cry in response to significant political backlash against feminism by conservatives (Faludi, 1991), which resulted in more women being elected to political office than ever before in 1992, dubbed the "Year of the Woman." The third wave was also largely influenced by queer theory and the notion that gender and sexuality are fluid,

but was critiqued for its focus on individual emancipation and lack of wide-reaching change (Munro, 2013).

Today, feminist values vary widely and address an invariably broad set of issues, including immigrant rights, transgender rights, media sexism, body acceptance, genital mutilation, sexual violence/rape culture and reproductive justice. In response to past criticisms that it is a movement for white women, feminism has embraced "intersectionality," seeking to become more inclusive by bringing awareness to the intersecting axes of oppression affecting women of different races, sexual orientations, economic backgrounds, and abilities.

However, despite this inclusionary narrative, the movement is still seen as divided, and not necessarily growing in numbers. Why has the movement stalled? Allison Dahl Crossley, a researcher who looks at gender issues writes of three interconnected impediments to feminist organizing in her 2017 book *Finding Feminism*:

> First, if gender inequality is not recognized as a social problem, when a woman does experience sexism she may interpret it as an individual problem rather than systemic problem. Second, when the injustice of gender inequality and the need for redress are overlooked, the matter of gender equality lacks immediacy. Feminists may seem dull and outdated or as though they are overreacting. Third, as a result, feminist organizations and communities may be challenged in building membership or finding allies who are critical to the support of a movement and the cultivation of new feminists. At the same time, the feminist mobilization that is happening is disregarded and undervalued. (p. 5)

There is evidence that feminism has a problem with building membership. Some studies suggest that young women are reluctant to identify with feminism (Panetta, 2016). Some view the movement as made up of outdated issues, while others question the need for feminism at all (Panetta, 2016), despite the U.S. being ranked 45th in the world for gender equality (World Economic Forum, 2016). This has left feminists of older generations puzzled, stamping out their attempts to recruit young followers.

Some feminists feel the movement cannot gain traction today because it is divided along political lines, to the exclusion of conservative women, particularly those who do not support abortion rights (Mitchell, 2017). While many republican women consider themselves feminists, they criticize the political movement because mainstream feminism is nearly synonymous with pro-choice values, leaving no room for dissent within the community. There is also a divide that stems from criticism against feminists who practice "white feminism," overlooking the unique axes of oppression at which many women are situated, particularly non-white and lower class women.

Others argue that feminism has stalled because the word "feminist" simply got a bad rap, whether from the misguided messaging of its past or the hate speech touted by its proponents. Women don't want to be associated with a radical movement that is either viewed as historically racist or synonymous with lesbianism (hooks, 1984). Some women of color have adopted the term "womanist" in response to the view that "feminist" is a word for upper middle-class white women (Stebner, 2016). Another disincentive is the backlash women experience for speaking out

against oppression, including being called a "man-hater," "feminazi," "witch," or, even worse, threatened with violence (Bates, 2017). Most women today are more familiar with the negative perceptions of feminism than its positive effects as a movement, and many remain unclear on what its goals are.

But the goals are not easily agreed upon, nor are they clearly identified. Today, the goals seem fuzzier than ever. After more than a century of feminist resistance, many of the larger political battles have been won, and many of the "glass ceilings" broken (though certainly not all). Resisting oppression against women looks different today than in past waves because sexism itself looks different today as well. Rather than the overt, institutionally sanctioned discrimination experienced by past generations, sexism today is more subtle. It is microaggressions that come up in conversations, being overlooked for a promotion or a raise at work, or an imbalance of family and housework duties despite both spouses working outside the home. It's difficult to speak up against misogyny today, as opponents downplay it as a "thing of the past," and even harder to eradicate because it is normalized. "It is vital to resist those who mock and criticize us for tackling 'minor' manifestations of prejudice, because these are the things that normalize and ingrain the treatment of women as second-class citizens, opening the door for everything else, from workplace discrimination to sexual violence" (Bates, 2017).

Feminist values always have and likely always will vary within the movement as a whole, but most will agree that feminism seeks social equality and freedom for all human beings—the freedom to celebrate your femininity or rejection thereof, the freedom to work or have children or do both, the freedom to dress as you please and to love yourself and your body (Stebner, 2016). Some feminists assert that the movement cannot be one-size-fits-all. In *Feminism Unfinished,* three feminist philosophers write, "In a diverse country like the United States, we cannot expect different groups of women to have identical agendas. We cannot expect poor women feeding their families on food stamps to have the same priorities as female lawyers hoping to become partners in law firms" (Cobble, p. xv).

How equality is manifested and realized will always be debated within the feminist community, but a shared mindset of resistance is what unites them. Feminist philosopher bell hooks writes, "The foundation of the future feminist struggle must be solidly based on a recognition of the need to eradicate the underlying cultural basis and causes of sexism and other forms of group oppression. Without challenging and changing these philosophical structures, no feminist reforms will have long range impact" (1984, p. 240).


**Feminism and digital media**

The rise of the internet has provided a platform for activism and political organizing so significant and far-reaching that some argue it constitutes a revival of feminism that could be considered the fourth wave (Munro, 2013). The explosion of feminist blogs, online organizing (such as online petitions), and social media campaigns has transformed the ways in which advocacy and action take place within the feminist movement. Digital platforms offer great potential for broadly disseminating feminist ideas, shaping new modes of discourse about gender and sexism, connecting to different constituencies, and allowing creative modes of protest to

emerge. Some have called feminist blogs the "21st century version of consciousness raising" (Martin & Valenti, 2012, p. 3). Consciousness-raising groups were said to be the backbone of second-wave feminism; now instead of a living room of 8-10 women, it's an online network of thousands or more.

So far, however, this collective power has been exercised in mostly ad-hoc, reactive (as opposed to proactive) ways and is not linked to larger organizational movement efforts or leveraged for the greatest impact (Martin & Valenti, 2012). The potential, however, is vast: at least 89 percent of women online use social networking sites, and 69 percent of them do so every day (Rainie, Purcell & Smith, 2011).

The nature of blogs and social media—self-publishing platforms that allow others to comment— fosters connection amongst feminists by creating an intentional space to share personal opinions, experiences of injustice and ideas for progress. Feminists have been carving out online spaces since the early days of the internet; from alternative media powerhouses like Jezebel and Feministe, to online zines like Rookie Magazine, a feminist zine for teenagers. These digital spaces bring a whole new meaning to the phrase "making the personal political" by connecting personal stories of individual women to larger narratives of inequality. The capacity for storytelling and relationship-building online allows young women a new entry point to share their personal experiences with each other and to feel like they're a part of a community.

Digital feminism is also viewed as engaging substantively with issues of privilege, difference, and access, with much more nuance than traditional feminism. "The internet provides a space where feminists can learn from each other about why things that some feminists see as harmless can be hurtful and offensive to others. Most feminists know about intersectionality, but far from all of us know every way in which intersectional oppression works" (Thelandersson, 2014, p. 529). By bringing together diverse feminist constituencies, digital platforms enable new kinds of intersectional conversations.

The internet hasn't merely provided a tool for community-building; it is also a powerful tool for activism (Martin & Valenti, 2012). Compared to the weeks or months of prep time it takes to gather crowds for a rally or march, online feminists can mobilize within minutes. For example, in May 2014, Twitter exploded with a wave of posts under the hashtag #YesAllWomen, a campaign drawing attention to the ubiquity of sexism, misogyny, and violence against women. Users posted individual stories of discrimination, harassment, and fear, underscoring the fact that "yes, all women" are subject to sexual violence. This campaign not only revealed the pervasive, structural nature of sexual violence, but it also connected personal stories of individual women to larger narratives of inequality (Dixon, 2014).

The internet has also allowed for the creation of a "call-out" culture, in which sexism or misogyny can be called out and challenged (Munro, 2013, p.). This has allowed discrimination to be easily and widely publicized through social media, especially the experiences of women of color and lower class women who have been traditionally marginalized by the mainstream media. This phenomenon was demonstrated prominently after the fall of Hollywood mogul Harvey Weinstein, who was fired for decades of sexual abuse against women. Calling for the ousting of other perpetrators of sexual harassment, women all over the internet, and even some

men, rallied behind the hashtag #MeToo, sharing their personal stories of abuse and naming the names of their abusers via social media and anonymous Google Docs. Especially for victims of sexual abuse, the internet has provided an unprecedented platform for making personal accounts of oppression more salient. "Utilizing the digital to make visible the global scale of gender oppression and to link feminist protest movements across national borders, these actions exemplify central aspects of digital feminist activism today" (Baer, 2015).

This and other forms of digital feminist activism that depart from conventional modes of protest are seen as a "redoing" of feminism in a neoliberal age (Baer, 2015, p. 18). However, while the concept of "hashtag feminism" has created a virtual space for vulnerable populations such as minorities and homosexuals, it has also made them vulnerable to online abuse. Identifying such online communities as safe spaces for expressing feminism views and politics "presents dire consequences which lead to online harassment and hate speech" (Dixon, 2014). Studies suggest feminist and other nonmainstream online forums are especially vulnerable, in that they must balance inclusive ideals against the need for protection and safety, a tension that can be exploited by disruptive elements to generate intragroup conflict. "While some participants find that challenging prejudice online can be an empowering act of resistance, others find that it diverts energy and attention away from the goals of the group" (Herring, 2002, p. 372).

Finally, there is a case to be made that the internet is making feminism "cool again" (Martin & Valenti, 2012). Using a technique called "culture jamming"—disrupting mainstream political and cultural narratives using crowdsourced creativity and playfulness (AKA memes)—feminist bloggers use pop culture to draw attention to contemporary forms of misogyny (for example, Mitt Romney's "binders full of women"). Young people online are transformed from passive pop culture consumers into engagers and makers. "Humor, pop culture, fashion, and the punchy, sassy writing, tweeting and memes that online feminists deploy have become the most effective way to engage young people about the seriousness of injustice using the new internet culture to speak back to pop culture" (Martin & Valenti, 2012, p. 13).

Power has shifted in women's favor thanks in large part to the Internet. From hashtag resistance and anti-sexism memes on Twitter, to grassroots body positive campaigns on Instagram, it has allowed them to reframe conversations and reclaim imagery and language that have been used against them. "Girls are using the Internet in a whole new way. They're using it to express their thoughts or show their bodies in a positive way—it's inspiring to women everywhere." (Stebner, 2016).


**Feminism and millennials**

In her book *H-Spot: The Feminist Pursuit of Happiness*, Jill Filipovic writes, "Millennial women are some of the most feminist in history. Little girls grow up hearing that they can be whatever they want. But that promise remains unfulfilled because, still, we haven't caught up" (2017, p. 6). Indeed, the ubiquitous narrative that "girls can do anything" is directly at odds with the well-documented pervasiveness of gender inequality (Crossley, 2017, p.4), and as those little girls grow up, they are beginning to take notice.

But young women today are still reluctant to identify with feminism (Maurer, 2016). They either reject the word entirely, or are considered "fence-sitters: those who embrace a number of feminist principles yet rejected others and fail to classify themselves as either feminists or non-feminists" (Aronson, 2013, p. 912). One study found that, although few young people self-identify as feminists, when read the dictionary definition of feminism, a vast majority of them said they do (Maurer, 2016). This is the paradoxical dilemma of "post-feminism"— some young women are convinced that society has achieved equality, while others continue to fight for equal rights. They are seen as having benefited from the women's movement but at the same time do not push for further political change. Each generation of women finds the preceding generation's feminism to be "passé" or even "irrelevant"—their fight is not ours, so to speak (Maurer, 2016).

Millennials, born between 1983 and 2000, are now the largest generation in the U.S. at 31 percent of the adult population (Hendrickson, 2016). They're less religious, more educated, more socially liberal and more politically independent than any other previous generation. To them, same-sex marriage is not a divisive or controversial issue. Raised by baby boomers, they've been taught individualistic values and to question authority. They are also less trusting than previous generations. They're the most racially diverse generation by far—43 percent of them are non-white (Hendrickson & Galston, 2016). They're generally optimistic and they value adaptability to change.

They're also digital natives—they're the first generation to not have to adapt to the internet because they grew up with it. A study suggested that growing up hyper-connected to each other and the mobile web will make millennials nimble, quick-acting multitaskers, but some predicted that the impact of networked living will "drive them to thirst for instant gratification, settle for quick choices, and lack patience" (Anderson, 2012).

But they do have strong views on equality: 75 percent of millennial women believe that more needs to be done to support equality in the workplace; 60 percent of them believe that men earn more than them, and 51 percent believe society favors men (Pew, 2013). Despite acknowledging unequal aspects of society, only 59 percent of young American women support feminism (while 35 percent of their male counterparts do) and only 27 percent affirmatively identify as feminist (Panetta, 2016). The rest simply don't see the need for it. Among millennials, 40 percent of conservatives, 26 percent of moderates, and 16 percent of liberals think that men and women are treated equally.

When it comes to supporting feminism, differences in education matter; the greatest rates of support for feminism occur in respondent populations with access to higher education. Ethnicity matters too; respondents of color have stronger rates of belief in gender inequity than whites. Approximately 30 percent of white respondents believe that men and women are treated equally, compared to 16 percent of black respondents, 26 percent of Hispanics, and 25 percent of people of other ethnicities. Overall, when it comes to equality, millennials appear to be conflicted. "They display far more belief in a glass ceiling and conditions of gender inequity than attachment to the movement which aims to remedy these challenges" (Panetta, 2016).

Qualitative research reveals that negative stereotypes about feminists continue to abound among college students, who perceive feminists to be man-haters, extremists, and/or lesbians. Some

argue this era of "post-feminism" has completely stalled the revolution, due in large part to the tension between feminism as a philosophy and feminism as it is lived and experienced differently by individuals (Maurer, 2016). In short, feminism has a marketing problem. Some young women don't see it as culturally relevant today. Says one millennial, "feminism … seems to be made up of outdated issues. It's thought of as their mothers' movement, one fighting for tired, stale ideas catering to the white, cis, and, straight" (Love, 2016). The internet has played a role in this too. Social media has become a breeding ground for feminist hatred where like-minded internet trolls have hijacked the image of feminism online and portrayed it in a negative, man-hating light.

As millennial women come of age in the "lean in" era (Sandberg, 2013), to some "feminist" has come to mean "careerist" — competing with men in the workplace on men's terms. This is a leftover narrative from second wave liberal feminism in which stay-at-home mothers were shamed for giving up their careers. This sentiment echoes throughout the media to this day, despite being contrary to contemporary feminist values that support women having a choice (Cummins, 2016). Young women are conflicted by a simultaneous desire for independence and a yearning for traditional heterosexual relationships (Crossley, 2010). Millennials men are also more conflicted than past generations about gender roles in their relationships and in the home. A study found that the number of men aged 18-25 who support egalitarian family arrangements is lower than it has been in 20 years, which is attributed to "young people witnessing the difficulties experienced by parents in two-earner families (Coontz, 2017).

Others argue that millennials don't hold strong feminist values because, having been born long after the women's movement in the 1960s, they've never experienced institutional or legally sanctioned sexism.

> Ironically, it is the very triumphs of second-wave equity feminism that lead young women to believe feminism has nothing to do with them. They have never faced a world in which employment ads were neatly divided into high-paying 'Help Wanted: Male' and low-paying 'Help Wanted: Female' categories, where women were forbidden entry into top-tier colleges like Harvard and Yale, where birth control was difficult to get and abortion was illegal. (Cummins, 2016)

Indeed, past generations of feminists appear to be simultaneously frustrated and baffled by millennials' views of equality. The chasm between generations and the contradictions in their values is demonstrated in this editorial by a baby boomer mother writing about her millennial daughter:

> A lot has changed for her generation, but some things only look as if they've changed. My generation freed women from soul-suppressing girdles. Her generation proudly buys knee-to-chest Spanx. My generation liberated women from the 10 p.m. curfew and the good-night kiss at the door. Hers lives with the expectation of intimacy before love. My generation demanded respect as equals in the workplace, and the right to not have to dress like a man to succeed. Her generation wears tiny skirts to business meetings and wrestles with the consequences of the conflicting messages they send with their self-respect perched on 4-inch heels. My generation championed the right of women to be proud of our beautiful, natural curves. And yet almost every single member of my

daughter's generation still sobs in the swimsuit department dressing room. (Guisewhite, 2017)

But some feminists argue that it is not surprising, and is even understandable, that millennials do not identify with feminism today, and they're not the first group of young people to resist doing so. Women and gender studies professor Lisa Maria Hogeland theorizes that young women have always shied away from feminism because of fear—fear of complexity, fear of thinking, fear of ideas. "Feminism requires an expansion of empathy, interest, intelligence, and responsibility across differences, histories, cultures, ethnicities, sexual identities, otherness. To stand opposed to your culture, to be critical of institutions, behaviors and discourses—when it is so clearly not in your immediate interest to do so—asks a lot of any person" (Hogeland, 2000).

## Feminism and the current political context

On Nov. 8, 2016, the first female candidate for president of the United States lost an election she was widely predicted to win. Moreover, she lost to a man with no political experience, and was recorded on tape bragging about sexually assaulting women. Almost no poll could predict it. Throughout her campaign, Hillary Clinton pronounced that the arc of history was bending toward women. On election day, Donald J. Trump obliterated that narrative. A pastor warming up the crowd at a post-election Trump rally in Louisiana promised that with Trump in office, the White House would be a place "where men know who men are, women know who women are" (Goldberg, 2016). The year 2016 went from being the year of shattering the glass ceiling to the year of bursting the feminist bubble (Goldberg, 2016).



Figure 2.1: The Women's March in Cincinnati, Ohio, on Jan. 21, 2017.

Two months later on Jan. 21, 2017, the day after Trump's inauguration, some five million people took to the streets in Washington D.C., and in satellite demonstrations all over the world, for one of the largest mass demonstrations in American history—the Women's March on Washington. The march became a surprising unified front of the left in the midst of post-election outrage (Hess, 2017).

In spite of feminism's historically divisive stigma, it was clear something had happened—somewhere between Hillary Clinton's first and second runs for president, feminism became fashionable. Online platforms like Jezebel and Feministe had previously existed, but by Barack Obama's second term this model had thrived and multiplied into all corners of the internet, including sports, movies and pop culture. When Clinton lost in 2016, the so-called "pop feminism" suffered a crisis. 53 percent of white women voted for Trump, while 94 percent of black women and 68 percent of Hispanic women who voted chose Hillary Clinton, revealing the long-simmering fractures between different groups of women that have long plagued the feminist movement for centuries. Current activists say now is the time for white feminists to reach across the aisle and unify the fractures of people marginalized by the current administration.

Tina Brown, founder of The Daily Beast, said "the greatest gift that President Trump may end up bestowing on the women of America could be to purge trivial umbrage from feminist discourse and force renewed energy on big priorities." Issues at risk during a Trump presidency include support for victims of domestic violence, criminal justice reform, immigrant protection, L.G.B.T. rights and economic inequality, as well as equal pay and reproductive rights. Some question whether a movement embracing such wide-ranging goals can channel its support into sustained political action (other recent movements, like Black Lives Matter and Occupy Wall Street, have offered insight into and prominence for their issues, but they haven't delivered major policy shifts) (Gade, 2017).

There is evidence that digital media will play an integral role in the resistance. In the two weekends after Trump's inauguration, two major protests spurred through social media networks erupted in response to executive orders from the White House, putting a halt to the policies he attempted to implement. "Though nameless and decentralized, the movement isn't chaotic. Because it was hatched on social networks and is dispatched by mobile phones, it appears to be organizationally sophisticated and ferociously savvy about conquering the media." And there's money too—in one of those weekends alone, the ACLU raised more than $20 million (Manjoo, 2017).

As the largest generation, the role of millennials in this political climate will be key. In the 2016 election, a slight majority of them voted for Hillary Clinton (55 percent), but their third party vote was the highest of any age group in the election, especially in battleground states (15-20 percent). Most non-white millennials voted for Clinton, but 33 percent of white female millennials voted for Trump. Most important than their political leanings, however, is that only about 24 million of millennials voted—about half the number of eligible millennial voters, which is well below the national voter turnout of 58 percent (Hendrickson, 2016).

Millennials' views of politics and activism present a major hurdle in passing the torch of a social movement to them. In *Running From Office, Why Young Americans Are Turned Off to Politics* (2015), Jennifer Lawless writes that two decades of dysfunction in Washington has taken a toll on millennials who have come to know politics through this spectacle. Having grown up in a time of partisan warfare and political gridlock, "they see politics as pointless and unpleasant" and "political leaders as corrupt and selfish" (p. 4). Whether Democrat or Republican, most millennials (83 percent) show no faith in Congress to address important issues (Harvard Public Opinion Project, 2015). Instead, 70 percent put more faith in themselves to create the kind of change they want to see, with one-third believing they could make a big impact and another one-third a moderate impact (Achieve, 2016).

In a 2016 study on millennials and activism, researchers found that millennials remain passionately interested in improving their world. "For millennials, taking consistent positive actions every day or week is a lifestyle and a fundamental part of their identity. Members of this generation no longer see themselves as 'activists' like their parents, but rather as everyday changemakers" (Achieve, 2016). Thus, millennials are already changing how change is made in society. This shift in behavior will have significant implications for social and political activism in the long term.

Chapter 3: Methodology

**Introduction**

This research was designed under the guidance of the 10 tenets of feminist research as defined by Shulamit Reinharz in *Feminist methods in social research* (1992) (see *Theoretical Framework*). Feminist research theory calls for a multiplicity of research methods, an emphasis on human diversity and a minimization of the authority of the researcher. In grounding my research in these principles, I aimed to create a research study that would elevate the voices of women as agents of their own experiences and to create a space for uninhibited sharing of views.

**Research Design**

This research study was designed using a mixed-methods approach to gather two types of insights: broad, general views of feminism and gender equality through surveys and quantitative data; and specific, personal views and experiences through interviews and qualitative data. A mixed-methods approach was employed to allow for both open- and closed-ended questions. As a researcher, I was able to make pragmatic assumptions in order to collect quantitative data, but could also allow for emerging themes to come forth in qualitative data.

The methods were designed using a sequential procedure, in which the quantitative data collected were used to inform the collection of qualitative data. Specifically, quantitative methods were used to test a broad theory of views on feminism, and were followed by qualitative methods to explore specific experiences of gender equality with individuals.

**Methods of Inquiry**

*Survey*

The survey instrument was designed for exploratory research to gather broad views of feminism and gender equality from a general audience, not limited to a particular age group or location. Questions covered three areas: gender equality, feminism and demographic information. The survey consisted of 25 questions total and took an average of 6 minutes to complete; most questions were multiple choice, with three opportunities for open-ended, qualitative responses (see *Appendix I*). The survey was created using the online survey tool Typeform and was shared via email, social media and flyers. Sampling for the survey relied heavily on snowball sampling, in which community leaders or persons of influence were asked to complete the survey and share it with their network. The survey garnered 394 responses between July 13 and July 28, 2017. Despite concerted efforts to maximize human diversity, respondents leaned heavily white and college educated, but did cover a wide range of ages, genders and political affiliations.

*Interviews*

One-on-one interviews were conducted between August 29 and October 3, 2017, with 10 millennials in the Cincinnati area to gain personal insights in regards to inequality and gender. The survey data collected was used to inform the questions for the interviews, which allowed the interviews to focus less on categorical social views and more on personal experiences. Interviews were conducted in person or via phone and lasted 60-80 minutes. Participants were recruited from a list of survey respondents who expressed interest in participating in one-on-one interviews as part of the study. This allowed the participant being interviewed to have background knowledge of the study before their interview, and facilitated the conversation about the subject matter. Participants were mostly female, liberal and educated, but represented a variety of experiences, including a stay-at-home mom, a business owner, a physician, a college student and a male feminist. Because participants self-selected to take part in interviews and had prior knowledge of the subject matter of the study, they tended to be people with favorable views of feminism and interest in pursuing social and political action regarding gender equality. Interview questions were designed to be conversational and approachable, allowing for both parties to share personal experiences, with the aim to minimize the perceived authority of the researcher (s*ee Appendix II*). The nature of the interviews was also intentionally informal, allowing the respondents to be co-researchers by guiding the conversation and suggesting new areas of inquiry.

*Case studies/observational research*

Observational research was conducted with three women's/activist groups in the Cincinnati area. Two groups, a college feminist group and a mothers' processing group, were observed at meetings in person, and a third political activist group's activity was observed online via blogs and social media platforms. Group members were mostly women and spanned a wide range of ages. This method of inquiry was used to ascertain practical information about the use of activist groups in Cincinnati, including common practices, collective goals, meeting structure and communication methods.

**Data Analysis**

The data collected in this study was analyzed by myself, the lead researcher. Aggregation and summation tools such as Microsoft Excel were used to calculate quantitative results from the survey. Qualitative responses from the survey and interviews were transcribed and coded by hand. Transcriptions were read three times to generate a total of 79 themes, 22 of which were selected as key themes. Survey data was parsed to compare millennials' responses with non-millennials, as well as male versus female and non-binary, and white versus non-white.

# Chapter 4: Results and Findings

**Introduction**

The results of this study revealed many findings in regards to respondents' views on feminism and gender equality, some conclusive and some open to interpretation. Quantitative data provided a broad overview of their general views, while qualitative data provided insight into personal experiences and anecdotal perspectives. Several themes emerged that point to millennials' values and ideals in regards to social activism, which hold significant implications for possible design interventions.

**Results**

*Survey*

Survey data revealed that the vast majority of respondents, regardless of age group, believe that all genders should be equal in the United Sates, and that more work must be done to achieve equality. Millennials feel slightly stronger about this than respondents of other generations.
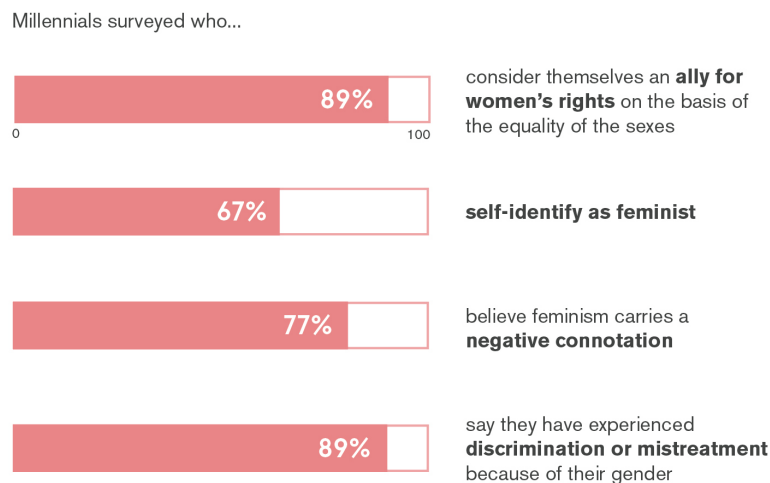
Millennials surveyed who...

| | |
|---|---|
| **89%** | consider themselves an **ally for women's rights** on the basis of the equality of the sexes |
| **67%** | **self-identify as feminist** |
| **77%** | believe feminism carries a **negative connotation** |
| **89%** | say they have experienced **discrimination or mistreatment** because of their gender |

*Figure 4.1: Survey results of millennials.*

However, feminism continues to be a divisive word that both millennials and older generations hesitate to identify with. Consistent with other studies, survey data revealed that, while a strong majority of respondents consider themselves an ally for women's rights on the basis of the equality of the sexes (the definition of feminism), far fewer respondents self-identify as a feminist. On these questions, millennials' responses generally mirrored those of other generations, but a slightly higher percentage of millennials self-identify as feminists than other generations. Of the respondents who did not self-identify as feminist, a higher percentage of

millennials were "not sure" about self-identifying, whereas those of other generations answered "no."

When asked to briefly define feminism in their own words, qualitative responses revealed a myriad of perspectives. Most responses communicated a meaning of equality, but there were nuances in how that idea was conveyed. Many respondents defined feminism as equality between men and women, whereas others defined it with more intersectional nuance, such as equality between all genders, races, sexual orientations and abilities. Some defined the word by specific issues of inequality, such as a woman's right to be paid equally or for a woman's body to not be sexualized by society or the media. Some specified that feminism is not merely a set of values, but it is "being a social justice warrior for women." Although the vast majority of respondents defined feminism with positive or neutral language, several respondents defined feminism by its negative stereotypes, such as women's desire to dominate or be superior to men. Several others answered candidly that they did not know how to define feminism.

The variances among these qualitative responses were consistent across all generations. For example, many millennials defined feminism using the most contemporary iteration that embraces an intersectional framework, but so did many older respondents. Negative portrayals of feminism were also consistent across age groups. What we can learn from these responses is that both nuanced and outdated views, negative perceptions and blatant confusion about feminism are present and consistent with the quantitative data in this and other studies.

Select survey responses:
- "Empowering women"
- "Feminism is the idea that everyone is treated fairly and equally."
- "Feminism is a term I use to describe the continuous fight towards gender equality. It's understanding that as a woman I may have privilege in other forms but I do not have male privilege. It's understanding that I can do and be anything a man can do or be and should be equally compensated for it. It's fighting media for portraying women as sex symbols put on this Earth to serve man. It's fighting to nurse in public without be shamed. It's fighting to dress in what I want without being catcalled. Its teaching my son's that it's okay to have feelings and emotions and that aggression is not okay. It's teaching my daughter to love her body from day one and to know her worth from day one. It's a lot of things to me."
- "Beauty comes in all shapes, sizes, colors, styles, talents, beliefs, quirks... feminism is representing all, advocating for all, and educating all on these different forms of beauty."
- "Feminism is a social, political, and ideological movement for greater equality and equity for people of all genders, races, sexualities, religions, ethnicities, and abilities"
- "Unity of all sexes, whether you are female, male whatever. It's about unity and equal rights. Not I am woman hear me roar bullshit."
- "I feel that there are too many different opinions on feminism and too many types of feminists....I think that it would be about equality....yet feel that many think it means we're superior...."
- "It's about equality. People get hung up on the word because it has a feminine connotation but it isn't just about women. It's about men, too. It's the fight for everyone to stand together, to be treated with fairness and respect regardless of genitals or gender."

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- "Feminism was women fighting to be treated as equal to men. However, now it is nothing more than women demanding to be treated the same as men but see themselves as MORE important instead of equal to."
- "unfortunately, it's a lot of trendy females at this time, I believe there are some 'true' feminist that actually just want to be equal, and not one up, or super angry."
- "I have no idea because I always see different definitions from different people."
- "Women can do anything men can do and shouldn't be treated or paid differently based on gender."
- "Feminism is simply about supporting a woman's right to be equal to a man."

Despite similar views on feminism, millennials have a different view of their own generation than the way older generations view millennials. While 60% of all respondents believe that feminism is viewed favorably by millennials, 74% of millennial respondents believe so. This could indicate that millennials view their generation as more socially progressive or radical than other generations perceive them to be.

Despite their slightly higher tendency to self-identify as feminists, findings from the study revealed that millennials are about 10 percent more likely than other generations to say that feminism carries a negative connotation in general and is portrayed negatively online. This suggests that most millennials who choose to identify with feminism are doing so despite acknowledging the stigma that it carries, especially online.

When asked how respondents came to their beliefs about gender equality, and whether they experienced a shift in their beliefs over time, millennials and those of other generations answered similarly. A vast majority of both groups credited their own personal experiences and the influence of their friends for their beliefs on gender equality. Also consistent across generations was the number of respondents, slightly less than half, who noted that their beliefs on gender equality had changed in their lifetime. Of that group, qualitative responses showed a tremendous variety of reasons for their shift in beliefs. A vast majority of respondents shared that their views of equality had expanded and their views on feminism had warmed. Many credited their college education for revealing issues of gender inequality to them of which they were previously unaware, while many others pointed to their experience of entering the workplace and encountering issues of discrimination they did not expect. Several respondents shared that their views of gender equality evolved to include an intersectional view or support of LGBTQ rights. As one respondent wrote, "The definition of gender has changed, therefore my views have changed." A few respondents, however, noted shift in the opposite direction, whether due to being turned off by the infighting and stigmatism associated with feminism, or due to their belief that feminism is merely a "political tool."

Select survey responses:
- "When I was young, I was naive to fact that women were treated differently than men, especially in the work place. As I have become older, I have seen more instances of inequality and have therefore changed my opinion."
- "When I learned more about my own white privilege in the experience of people of color I think I understood more around the intersectionality."
- "Feminism became uglier"

- "As a child I was ignorant of gender basis. As a teen I began to become aware of some difference in treatment. As an adult I've had better opportunities to learn about this thanks to the advances in technology that make information more available from books, to historical documents, to current events, and so on. I am better receptive since I am not as isolated and due to many of my own experiences, including being a victim of domestic violence and the family courts."
- "Until my early teens I did not know what feminism was and assumed there was no need for it; life experience and a little reading cured me of that in a hurry"
- "I took a gender studies class and realized I wasn't imagining that if sucked to be a girl
- My feminism was not intersectional at one time; I have expanded my feminism as the result of being educated by my peers"
- "I feel the discourse has become more divisive and aggressive."
- "I now see feminism and being a woman as meaning that I can be whatever I want. I used to hate feminists my mother's age because they were saying we are still not equal. I was told in school growing up that women are now equal. Well it turns out that we are not. We can be different but still equal, but I am not sure we will ever get there."

Of those who had experienced gender-based discrimination...

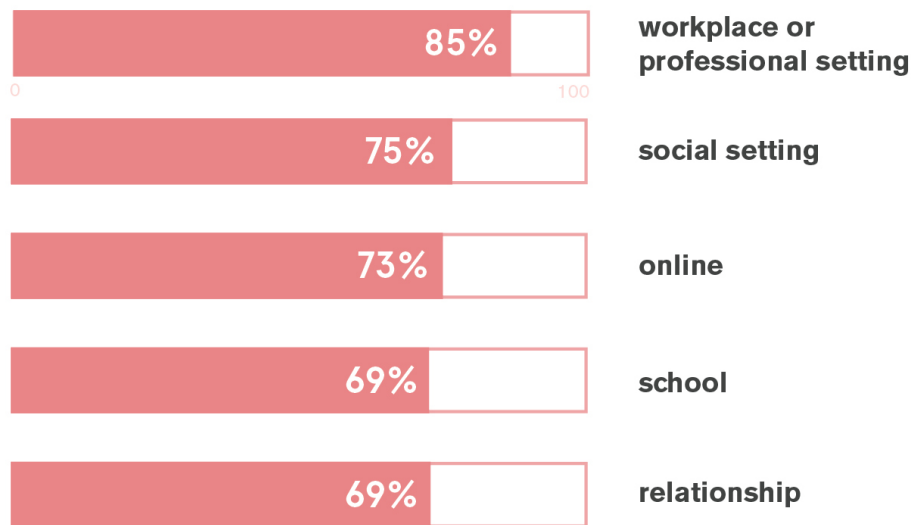| | |
|---|---|
| 85% | **workplace or professional setting** |
| 75% | **social setting** |
| 73% | **online** |
| 69% | **school** |
| 69% | **relationship** |

*Figure 4.2: Millennials who report having experienced gender-based discrimination.*

A majority of respondents (68%) reported experiencing discrimination or mistreatment because of their gender, but millennials reported experiencing this at a higher rate than other respondents (89%). Of this group, 85% said they have been discriminated against in a workplace or in a professional setting, 75% in a social setting, 73% online and 69% in a school setting or relationship. Among all respondents, the vast majority believed the top critical issue of gender equality was violence against women. Other important issues to respondents included equal pay, equal access to healthcare, reproductive rights and sexism in the workplace. Among millennials specifically, the top critical issue of gender equality was equal access to healthcare. Other top

issues for this age group included equal pay, reproductive rights and sexism in the workplace. What we can take away from this is that gender inequality persists in many aspects of millennials' lives today, but does not necessarily cause them to self-identify as feminist.

The final qualitative response in the survey simply asked respondents for any additional comments they would like to provide, and revealed insightful views.

Select survey responses:
- "It feels like feminism (just as, say, body positivity) have become commodified by corporations or big-business and used as a way to sell products or appeal to the masses in a watered-down, ineffectual ("white-feminist") manner. If that makes sense."
- "I struggled with answering questions on how feminism is viewed in this country and social media because I believe and have seen it portrayed in both positive and negative lights. Sometimes you see one view point more often than the other, but it depends greatly on who you are talking to and where you are looking."
- "What I believe feminism should be and what has become are two different things in my opinion. I do not publically identify as a feminism based on the popular views and societal implications. I do however believe in the equally of the sexes."
- "The negative stigma needs to be removed from the "feminist" movement. Feminists seem to be considered lesbians and "man haters". In reality, I think it needs to be seen and discussed more as equality. I simply believe that feminism has gained a negative connotation in today's society. Something needs to change"
- "Feminism, like other minority activism categories, suffers greatly from extremism as opposed to views that should be generally agreeable.  The loudest most inappropriate voices ruin the message for the majority that is a valid message."

*Interviews*

Qualitative responses from interview participants corroborated the findings of the survey and provided more nuanced perspectives on why feminism is viewed so divisively today, as well as methods for advancing its agenda. Although interviewees self-identified as feminist, they acknowledged the stigma associated with using the word "feminist;" several shared personal stories about backlash they had experienced, both in person and online, for "outing" themselves as a feminist. Still, all of them felt strongly about using the word "feminist" to describe their social views and continuing to educate people about its meaning. For most participants, their current views on gender and feminism had little to do with how they were raised, and more to do with their education and personal experiences, especially in workplaces.

Participants expressed deep frustration with the current state of gender equality in the U.S., especially in the face of the current political climate. All participants expressed profound disappointment at the results of the 2016 election and the tumultuous political environment that has ensued. Several themes emerged related to their reactions to this disappointment: a sudden spike in interest in activism following the election; a renewed readiness and willingness to broach controversial and taboo subjects in conversations with others; and, most notably, a

realization on the part of all participants that, in the long and arduous fight for equality, we are "much worse off than [they] thought." The latter theme in particular was deeply embedded in each conversation, and at times felt as though it was the rationale that caused participants to take part in this research. The intersection of these themes pinpoints a significant phenomenon among millennials today: they are newly frustrated by current circumstances and issues that they thought were resolved, and they are seeking avenues to effect social and political change as a result.

Conversations with participants also revealed multiple existing sites for resistance in the Cincinnati area. Several participants touted Cincinnati as a place where people are "passionate" about issues and "show up" to make a difference. One mother and business owner spoke of the importance of showing up for marches and protests in the city; she attended the satellite women's march in downtown Cincinnati in January, and helped organize a counter-protest to anti-LGBTQ protestors at the Westboro Baptist Church in August. She even brings her kids. Another young woman spoke of volunteering for women's organizations and mentoring women who have been victims of domestic violence who are seeking employment in her field of business. Another mother said she meets with a small "processing" group of other like-minded mothers once a month to drink wine and unpack the complexities of current news and politics. Most participants readily offered examples of actions that can be taken to effect change, but also acknowledged that there is no single solution or action that can be taken. For example, protests and marches are great for visibility of a cause, but further action must be taken to follow up.

It is significant to note that none of the participants pointed to social media or the internet as a site for resistance. Many of them said that the internet plays a crucial role in resistance as a resource for education and a tool for organizing, but all of them agree that online spaces are either echo chambers or "people yelling at each other"—either way, no one is listening. When it comes to communication about social issues, they all spoke of the importance of having face-to-face conversations with other people, regardless of their views, and connecting with them through shared humanity. One participant said she would be happy to strike up a conversation with a person with opposite ideological views as her if they could connect through something as simple as shared taste in purses. Another participant expressed gratitude for the deep and supportive bond that is fostered by her processing group, and the importance of their face-to-face meetings.

Select interview statements:
- "Our parents raised us to not think this problem existed."
- "Screw the big government. You're going to get a lot more done if you do it on a local level."
- "People can be educated by the people around them. We need to be willing to have that conversation. We need to be willing to address it. … Most of the time, just a simple conversation is enough to really change some people's perceptions about gender equality."
- "Cincinnati is one of those towns that is very large but it has a small town feel where everyone kind of knows everybody. I think that alone can invoke change because it can bring people together who aren't afraid to talk to each other."

- "If we can create spaces where we can have these discussions without excluding people who aren't cis female and without excluding men who identify as feminists too."


**Findings Summary**

The following themes emerged in exploring the answers to the two research questions:
- What are millennials' views on feminism and social activism?
- In what ways can barriers be reduced for millennials in Cincinnati to engage with feminism and take action for gender equality?


*Gender Equality and Feminism*

**Millennials believe that all genders should be equal, but equality has not been achieved.**
Despite being raised to believe in gender equality, millennials are aware that this battle has not been won, and there is work yet to be done.

**"We're much worse off than I thought we were."**
Millennials were raised on a narrative of equality. They thought society had solved this issue. They didn't realize how many issues of inequality have persisted, and many are just now noticing. They say they were naïve, and now they are deeply frustrated.

**It is possible, even common, for views on equality to evolve over time and be shaped by various influences.** People who become more aware of discrimination or issues of inequality are capable of changing their mind. It can be uncomfortable and many resist it, but people can let go of long held beliefs. The most powerful influencer in changing one's mind is for them personally experience discrimination, or be closely connected to someone who has been discriminated against.

**Millennials were raised to believe they could do/be whatever they wanted.**
Millennials were raised by baby boomers and after school specials which instilled in them values of equality, respect and global humanity. Little girls grew up with narratives of "girl power" and "choice." They were raised to believe gender inequality didn't exist.

**Feminism carries a negative connotation.**
Long-held stereotypes about feminists persist, including "feminazis," "bra burners" and "man haters." These stereotypes and feminism's negative portrayal are especially common in online communities.

**Many are confused about what feminism means.**
People who have not been educated about feminism are often confused by its meaning. Some continue to view it as an outdated movement for cis-female, straight white women. Some view it as a radical ideology that seeks female domination and superiority.

**People who have not experienced discrimination personally are far less likely to believe it actually happens or to validate those who experience it.** People must experience discrimination personally, or have a personal connection to the issue to understand the significance of its effects.

**Workplace discrimination**
The most common form of discrimination that millennials experience is discrimination in the workplace. From sexual harassment to hostility towards female leaders, the further along in their careers they get, the more they experience and the more seriously they view this issue.

**Sexism today is not institutional. It's normalized.**
Many of the issues of inequality that millennials are normalized in society. They are microaggressions that can be hard to pinpoint or talk about, and they are often less likely to be validated by others who have not experienced the same issue. Many end up being told it's "all in their head" or that they are "overreacting."

*Education*

**Never stop educating yourself.**
Issues of gender equality are complex and deeply rooted. Some form of education, whether formal (such as a gender studies course) or informal (such as a conversation with a neighbor), is required to understand the problem, especially if a person has not personally experienced discrimination or does not know that they have. Even people who believe in gender equality still need more information.

**The internet is a great resource for education.**
Despite being a site for vitriol and misinformation, the internet can still be a tremendous resource for education about current and historical issues of gender equality. Finding trusted and vetted sources is key.

*Politics*

**Millennials were deeply impacted by the 2016 presidential election.**
Some spurred into action and some spun their wheels feeling helpless and perplexed. Regardless of their politics or who they voted for, millennials know this election was a momentous turning point in U.S. history and it is an important political backdrop for any type of activism.

**Don't rely on government to solve everything (or anything).**
It is with some hesitation and caveats that millennials say it is important to vote. They willingly perform their civic duties, but they have little faith in the political system to bring about positive and lasting change. They are jaded by national politics and are turned off by seemingly pervasive corruption and abuse of power.

*Taking Action*

**Sharing matters.**
It is important to share your story and vent your frustrations to trusted ally who listens fully and validates your experiences.

**Action is required.**
People must take action on behalf of their views, not just talk about them. There is work to be done, and they must do the work. It is important to "show up."

**Action is lacking.**
Millennials believe in gender equality but they are not taking action to challenges forces that prevent it. Many are interested, but don't know what to do.

**Connection does not take place online.**
Social media is not an effective location for resistance, dialogue or connection. Most online communities are echo chambers or full of vitriol. However, social media is valued as a tool for organizing.

**Activism IRL (in real life)**
Activism must be peer-to-peer, face-to-face interaction, where people can connect to others through shared personal experiences and compassion.

**Groups are greater than the sum of their parts.**
A designated group that is open to all types of people is a powerful space to offer support and build community.

**Start local.**
National issues are too big to tackle. Address issues in your own backyard.

**Cincinnati is ready.**
People in Cincinnati are passionate about social issues and are willing to work for them.

Chapter 5: Phenomena Research Conclusions and Discussion

**Introduction**

Emerging themes from the research indicate that millennials' views about feminism are mixed, but they are aware of pervasive issues of gender inequality and they are interested in seeking ways to effect social change. They particularly value interpersonal connection and locally focused activism. These conclusions present opportunities for a design intervention that considers their unique values and provides tools for effecting social change.

**Conclusions**

To say that millennials are passive beneficiaries of the achievements of the women's movement with little sense of the issues of inequality that persist today does not give them enough credit. However, it would be realistic to say that most of them, until their teens or 20s, could not conceive of the discrimination and oppression they would eventually encounter or witness as adults. They were raised by baby boomer parents, primarily, whose worldviews were shaped by the civil rights movement in the 1960s. Little girls grew up immersed in narratives of "girl power" and "dream big." They wanted to believe the battle was over and the fight was won, and for much of their lives they operated as though it was. But that belief is being dismantled as they grow older and become aware of the complex systems of oppression in which they live. There is evidence that their views are shifting, especially as they grow older and the stakes grow higher. Young women are becoming mothers and are encountering the meager options for maternity leave in the U.S., or the challenge of being a working mother who earns less than a man who does her same job. They are starting businesses and encountering hostility toward their leadership or undermining of their authority. They are reconciling their naiveté with the reality of the world around them. They are paying attention, and they are frustrated.

Still, findings revealed that millennials' views on feminism are decidedly mixed. The vast majority of them believe in advocating for gender equality, but the ideologies and actions through which they believe it will be achieved remains unclear. More than half of millennial respondents self-identified as feminist, but what about the rest? In general, it appears millennials who do not self-identify as feminist are not necessarily turned off by feminism, but many of them are still hesitant to identify with it as an ideology. To say this is due only to the negative stereotypes that persist about feminism would be an oversimplification, although millennials are decidedly aware of them. Beyond that, they are reluctant to identify with an ideology that is inherently radical and loud. Many of them would prefer to quietly usher society toward equality rather than forcefully swing the pendulum toward women. They want to believe that the radical nature of feminism is unnecessary.

But there is evidence that this is shifting. Many are turning to feminism in a new way, especially in the wake of the 2016 election. Watching a sexist, belligerent man who bragged openly about sexually assaulting women defeat the first woman presidential candidate spun the world on its head for many millennials. They came away from the election with one collective narrative about

gender equality in the United States: "We are much worse off than I realized." Advocates for women's rights reacted with outrage to the election of Donald Trump as president and vowed to take action in resistance to his policies and influence. They continually fear an impending assault on women's rights, from equal pay to reproductive rights. So-called millennial "fence-sitters" (Maurer, 2016) are now taking a stance when faced with the realization of what is at stake. Even the quiet ones are prepared to get loud.

This turning point leaves many millennials unsure of what to do next. As one participant noted, "It's easy to go from feeling complacent to feeling helpless." Maybe they marched with other women in their community and around the country the day after Trump's inauguration, or maybe they called their representatives incessantly when their access to healthcare through the Affordable Care Act was being threatened. They know it's important to do more than just complain on the internet, but those who are seeking avenues for activism feel paralyzed when they can't find them.

Online activism would appear to be an obvious place to start, but many see divisive political discourse on social media and are turned off by it. They view online activism as vitriol with very limited means of effecting change because the dialogue either exists in an echo chamber or between people "just yelling at each other," as one participant said. They do value online platforms as resources for education, organizing and bringing visibility to issues, such as hashtag activism. But when communicating with other people about social and political issues, they don't value digital spaces as sites for authentic connection or as effective means of discussion. Instead, they value personal connection and face to face conversation in which people can connect through shared humanity and practice empathy. In fact, empathy came to be an underlying theme in every participants' views—the earnest skill of tapping into one's own experiences in order to connect with an experience someone is relating to them. Regardless of political views and backgrounds, millennials see interpersonal connection between friends, neighbors and community members as a meaningful site for activism. Sharing personal stories can be powerful, and putting a face to an abstract issue can help people to understand it in a new way. Said one participant, "People can be educated by the people around them. We need to be willing to have that conversation. We need to be willing to address it. … Most of the time, just a simple conversation is enough to really change some people's perceptions about gender equality."

In addition to reaching out to those with opposing viewpoints, millennials also place great value on connecting with likeminded individuals, especially in a group setting. A shared sense of belonging is important to them. Particularly for those who have experienced discrimination, a safe space for sharing their experiences where they feel validated and their privacy is respected is paramount. One of the greatest frustrations expressed by respondents who said they have experienced discrimination is the ease with which their trauma is brushed off as insignificant or nonexistent by others. A woman business owner who says she is continually regarded with less authority than her equal male business partner was told it was all in her head. A mother who railed against a system that does not legally entitle her to paid maternity leave was told she was overreacting. For many millennials, the sexism that they experience is not necessarily overt. It takes the form of subtle words and actions, like microaggressions, or a systemic issue that is hard to articulate, or, what's even more tricky, behavior that is completely normalized in society. These kinds of experiences are difficult to grapple with and even more difficult to understand if

one has not experienced them personally. To explain and justify their experience to someone who is uninformed requires a tremendous amount of emotional labor, a burden that typically falls on marginalized populations. Therefore, it is important for marginalized people to have a location for articulating their experiences and sensemaking that allows them to feel supported and validated.

Another site that millennials value for activism is the physical site that is nearest them—their local community. Millennials are some of the biggest proponents and customers of the "locavore" movement (Salzman, 2015). The mantras "eat local" and "shop local" are as ubiquitous to them as Instagram filters. In an age where instant communication to any corner of the globe lives neatly in their pockets, a physical connection with a local community can feel like a novelty, and they deeply value that sense of place. Therefore, when it comes to effecting positive change on social or political issues, they believe in starting small. As one participant said, "Screw the big government. You're going to get a lot more done if you do it on a local level." This is an antidote to feeling overwhelmed by systemic issues that permeate the national culture: start in your own backyard.

The phenomena that have emerged from this research indicate a need for a design intervention that addresses both millennials' frustration about the current state of gender equality and their desire to do something about it. It should give consideration to relevant factors such as their frustration with online discourse, and speak to their values of face-to-face connection and local impact. The intervention should be an accessible and adaptable concept that could serve both committed feminists and "fence-sitters," and could provide users with tools and resources to evolve from advocates into activists.

**Discussion**

The findings of this research hold significant implications for feminism and social activism, both presently and in the future. Millennials are now the largest generation in the United States, and their impact is significant. To understand the nuances of how they perceive social issues and what they value when taking action for social change will profoundly influence current and future sociopolitical movements. A model for activism built on their unique principles such as face-to-face connection and local impact could shape the ways that millennials organize for social causes. It could also shape the ways that millennials are communicated to by other entities, from the ways in which candidates appeal to voters, to the ways in which nonprofit organizations solicit volunteers and raise funds.

These findings could also contribute to current discourse on the shifting perceptions of and behavior towards millennials. The stereotype of the lazy, job-hopping, selfie-obsessed narcissist who has no savings and no aim has been repeatedly debunked (Norton, 2017). As the millennial generation moves fully into adulthood (the youngest ones are now turning 18), this tired stereotype is being replaced with realistic observations that acknowledge their collective impact and draw insights from their nuanced views and lifestyles. They are a massive and diverse collection of people and their views and actions will continue to profoundly shape our society.

**Suggestions for Future Research**

This study demonstrates several opportunities for future research. Most significantly, the findings could be expounded upon by replicating the study with a much larger sample size. This would ensure accuracy of the findings as well as human diversity of the participants. Further research would necessitate a strong emphasis on people of color and those from varying socioeconomic backgrounds. This would also allow for a comparison of views between people of different ethnicities, for example, and the nuances of their unique experiences.

This study could also be replicated in other cities across Ohio, the Midwest or the United States to build a larger knowledge base about current views feminism, social activism and millennials as they relate to location and surroundings.

Findings of this study also suggest opportunities for conducting research on millennials' perceptions of, or participation in, parallel social movements such as Black Lives Matter.

**Recommendations for Possible Design Interventions**

The findings of this study indicate multiple opportunities for design interventions that address millennials' frustration and provide a means for activism. One possible design intervention could address factors of education around feminism and issues of gender equality. This could take the form of an informational campaign or a digital resource, and would provide statistics and perspectives with the aim to dispel myths and draw attention to pertinent issues. Another possible design intervention could utilize virtual reality as a tool for empathy with the aim of calling attention to and reframing phenomena of sexism and discrimination that have become normalized in society. A more experimental design intervention could draw attention to inequality by envisioning a society where the script of dominance was flipped—where 80 percent of scientists are women, 94 percent of CEOs are women, and all other domains currently dominated by white males would be dominated by women and people of color. Through critical design and irony, connections could be drawn between the state of gender equality and the experiences of non-dominantly situated people.

# Chapter 6: Design Intervention

## Introduction

The findings of the primary research led me to explore design concepts related to fostering empathy and community among millennials, and exploiting available and accessible forms of technology to do so. Research into past and existing models for activism, as well as emerging technologies for political resistance, led me to develop a concept for a contemporary consciousness raising (CR) group. By combining traditional models for CR groups with contemporary tools for connection and aggregation, a modern-day iteration can combine synchronous and asynchronous activity to foster deeper connections and serve participants' needs. This model engages principles of participatory design to create the scaffolding of a system in which users form their group and determine its purpose according to their values, allowing them to connect with others in their community and focus their collective impact. This intervention addresses the emotional and practical needs of millennials who seek to engage in social activism.

## Rationale for Intervention Design

Consciousness raising is a tool that the women's movement adopted from the civil rights movement in the 1960s and 1970s as a means to draw conclusions about the political root of women's personal experiences of discrimination. In these groups of 8-10 women, they learned to understand that their challenges in life were not specific to their individual lives, but were a result of broader structural inequalities that perpetuate the subordination of women and people of color (Crossley, 2017, p. 8). They were instrumental in shaping feminist culture and a shared dialogue among women. Feminist writer Loretta Ross describes her experience:

> We may have formally called it "consciousness raising," but in essence we were telling each other stories to reclaim ourselves and our humanity. We created a feminist culture with these stories, not through narratives of logic and structure, but by creating verbal snapshots of the lived experiences of women. (Crossley, 2017, p. 8)

Themes that emerged from the primary research support the rationale for a contemporary CR group as an intervention. Two types of needs that must be addressed were identified from the findings of the primary research: emotional needs and practical needs, specifically as they relate to inequality and activism. The concept for a contemporary consciousness raising (CR) group aims to provide a platform for addressing both of these needs. Participants in the primary research emphasized the importance of connection and sharing, both interpersonally and on a community level. A CR group offers a space for deep and long-lasting connection, where participants would be emotionally supported. In addition, the CR group provides a safe space for revealing sensitive or traumatic experiences, and honors privacy in a way that online communities cannot. Primary research also revealed themes of seeking education about issues and taking action locally. A CR group can assist participants in learning about current and local

issues and organizing for a cause. It can also employ current technology to aggregate resources and information for organizing.

Two domains of oppression that must be addressed also emerged from the findings: the individual domain and the systemic, or institutional, domain. Marginalized people experience oppression in many forms, but without the support of a community, they can be led to believe their experiences are isolated and limited to their situation. This phenomenon was the premise for traditional CR groups. Second wave feminists coined the term "the personal is political" to draw the connection between individuals' experiences of oppression and the dominant system that oppresses them. A CR group is a space where marginalized people can articulate their experiences and draw those connections.

CR groups were a powerful model for organizing and activism during the women's movement and played a significant role in the progress that was achieved during the second wave of feminism. Although the landscape of gender inequality in society is drastically different today, the patriarchal systems that perpetuate inequality are not. Therefore, I propose that this form of activism is relevant, even necessary, today and could combine with modern digital tools to empower millennial women as it did women and people of color of past generations.

## Design Form and Operation

The contemporary CR group is a conceptual model that entails a digital platform, a templated meeting structure and an intelligent voice-activated assistant. These three functions combine to provide the scaffolding for an experience that participants would operate within and build upon in order to shape their group and make it their own. This model bridges digital and physical spaces to deepen connection between members and to provide them with tools and resources for synchronous and asynchronous activity.



**Digital platform**          **Meeting structure**          **Voice-activated assistant**

*Figure 6.1: The three components of the contemporary consciousness raising group*

Suggested group size is 6-8 people and incorporates principles of group-centered leadership, in which all members are equals as both leaders and members. Although this model caters to the experiences of women, it is important to note that groups should not be limited to any particular gender. The model for this group mimics the model for intersectional feminism which aims to

join with allies of any gender, race or socioeconomic background. It would be left to the discretion of each individual group, but men, transgender, non-binary people and any person who identifies as a woman should be welcome. Groups would be encouraged to meet on an ongoing monthly basis.

The inception of a group begins with creating a doctrine of values that unifies the members and fosters a shared ideology. These values will guide the actions and evolution of the group. The group then identifies shared goals, both interpersonal and collective. For instance, a group could identify a shared goal for each member to gain inspiration and motivation to use in their lives, as well as a shared goal to influence the outcome of a local election. Finally, group members create a composite list of the issues that matter most to them. This list can be used to build discussion topics, compile resources and drive outcomes.
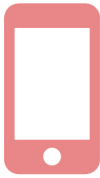


**Digital platform**

*Figure 6.2: The digital platform*

A digital platform provides a space to form the group and perform asynchronous group activities. Group members initiate access to their shared platform using each other's email addresses or phone numbers, which then establishes a private digital space for the operation of their group. Through a web browser and a mobile application, the digital platform can be accessed anywhere at any time to allow group members to remotely schedule and plan meetings, propose topics for discussion and find information and resources. The main purpose of the platform is to make the group meetings more efficient by streamlining administrative tasks to direct focus on the content of the meetings.

Functions of digital platform:
- Form a group
- Establish group identity (doctrine of values, statement of goals)
- Scheduling tool, calendar syncing and integration
- Asynchronous chat
- Location for gathering/sharing resources (articles, books, etc.)
- Access to recordings and transcriptions of past meetings
- Local events calendar (marches, speakers, volunteering opportunities)
- Share content to social networks (doctrine of values, discussion)
- Meeting/agenda planning

**Meeting structure**

*Figure 6.3: The meeting structure*

A templated meeting structure would be suggested for groups to implement, but the agenda would be open to their interpretation. Components of the meeting draw inspiration from CR groups of the past, which followed a rigorous structure that typically involved four steps: self-revelation or "testifying," active listening, discussion linking problems to larger social forces, and connecting discussions to other theories of oppression (Crossley, 2017, p. 8). Testifying is the act of sharing a personal experience with the group regarding a certain topic. In traditional CR groups, before the meeting, one or more prompts for testifying would be decided upon by the group, then at the meeting each woman would have a chance to testify about her experience regarding that topic (National Women's Liberation, 2017). Examples of testifying questions are "What would change in my life if I had guaranteed health care?" and "What do I want my maternity leave to look like?"

In the contemporary model, testifying can take several forms. Participants have the option to engage in active/non-reactive listening (open sharing), one-on-one testifying (self-selected prompts) or group testifying (group-selected prompts). Prompts can be suggested and collectively decided upon before the meeting via the digital platform. Traditional CR groups used timers to limit each person's speaking time, which was necessitated by the large group sizes; to limit speaking time in the contemporary model would be left to the discretion of the individual groups.

The National Women's Liberation group offers suggestions and insights for CR groups, including distinctions about what CR is not: CR is not about giving advice; CR is not group therapy; CR is not about confessions; CR is not spreading gossip. "In CR, we're using a scientific approach to get at political causes of our conditions and to seek collective solutions. We don't share our experiences in order to improve ourselves or to become well-adjusted—it's the world, not us, that needs adjusting" (National Women's Liberation, 2017).

*Figure 6.4: The voice-activated assistant*

Both synchronous meetings and asynchronous activities are augmented through the implementation of an intelligent group assistant, or voice-activated assistant, to which groups have the option to designate a name. Advanced artificial intelligence technology and qualitative software allow the voice-activated assistant to play crucial roles in the group, including scheduler, researcher, aggregator, secretary, timer, recorder, transcriber and information synthesizer. Traditional CR groups typically involved designating many of these roles to group members, meaning not everyone was participating in the group in the same way. This offloading of roles and tasks supports the model of group-centered leadership, allowing all members to participate equally.

Functions of voice-activated assistant:
- Take attendance by recognizing voices
- Keep meeting on task with agenda
- Ensure equal speaking time with timer
- Record meetings and create transcription and podcast-style synthesis for reviewing after the meeting or for members who were absent
- Synthesize ideas and create meeting summaries
- Answer questions (e.g. "When was Supreme Court Roe v. Wade ruling?")
- Aggregate related content from the internet, especially regarding group's chosen issues (articles, news, social media posts, election/candidate information)
- Aggregate local events and news
- Call/email local representatives regarding legislation
- Provide services for group members with different abilities, such as screen reading for visual impairments or transcription for auditory impairments.

**Design Intervention Development Process**

This intervention was shaped by several modes of thinking and existing research. That the CR group fosters face-to-face connection was inspired by themes from my primary research, but also by the research of Sherry Turkle who studies technology and relationships. Her work highlights the paradox of digital communication in that it connects us to more people but sacrifices the quality of the connection we experience. She says, "Human relationships are rich and they're

messy and they're demanding. And we clean them up with technology. And when we do, one of the things that can happen is that we sacrifice conversation for mere connection" (Turkle, 2012). In order to maintain our connection to each other, it's imperative to focus on the ways technology can lead us back to our real lives, our own bodies, our own communities, our own politics, our own planet. The CR group builds upon this principle by using digital communication to foster regular and sustain face-to-face connection.

The design of the CR group was inspired by existing research about group dynamics. Social psychologists and researchers define a "group" by a wide variety of markers, but this intervention is modeled after the research of Kurt Lewin who defines a group by the interdependence among its members. Lewin writes, "it is not similarity or dissimilarity of individuals that constitutes a group, but interdependence of fate" (Smith, 2008). The CR group is designed to foster connection and shared values among people from all walks of life, who may not have remotely similar experiences. Their shared goal of eliminating gender hierarchy in their lives and their community is what binds them together as a group.

The CR group is also modeled after other contemporary social movements, such as Black Lives Matter (BLM), the coalition that came together in 2014 in response to police violence against black people. BLM does not have an official leader as other social movements traditionally have. It operates under the model of group-centered leadership, which asserts that when people on the ground make decisions, articulate experiences and come up with answers, the results are more likely to meet real needs and the effort will be more sustainable (Ransby, 2017). Ella Baker, NAACP field secretary, says the BLM model works because models with leaders who teach following as the only way of fighting weaken the movement in the long run. "Strong people don't need strong leaders" (Ransby, 2017). The CR group is designed to enable group-centered leadership, in which all participants are equally responsible for acting as both leaders and rank and file members, and have equal buy-in to the goals of the group.

The use of AI in the CR group design draws inspiration from Resistbot, an intelligent assistant that turns users' text messages into faxes or emails that are sent on their behalf to their representatives in Congress, streamlining and expediting the process of civic action. It also provides users with legislation news and voting information specific to their district. The use of an intelligent assistant for civic action holds profound implications for "hacking" democracy, making traditional civic processes more accessible and more usable. Millennials, especially, are already familiar with the technology, having used bots such as Siri and Alexa, and they are willing to invest in artificial intelligence as a mode of digital action. The use of AI in the design of the CR group is intended to exploit the uses and benefits of AI technology, especially in support of civic action.


**Research Design**

The prototype for the CR group was tested using a combined focus group and design charrette. The test employed a mixed methods approach, gathering qualitative data through participant activities and discussions, and quantitative data to measure outcomes using a survey tool. As in the phenomena research, feminist research principles shaped the design of the of prototype test

research. Snowball sampling was used to ensure human diversity of participants, the setting of the test was informal and comfortable, and my authority as the researcher was minimized.

Participants began by completing a short survey to measure their feelings in regards to four areas: connection, belonging, validation and empowerment. These four sentiments were used as metrics to determine the effectiveness of the group. They responded by indicating to what extent they agree with the following statements:

- I feel connected to my community.
- I feel like I belong to a group.
- I feel validated in my personal experiences.
- I feel motivated and empowered to take action regarding social/political issues.

The structure of the test group followed steps that would be taken to create and implement a CR group, including writing a doctrine of values, identifying shared goals and compiling key issues. Participants then took part in a sharing exercise called non-reactive listening in which they paired off and took turns sharing openly in response to two pre-determined prompts. The participant who was not sharing was asked to not react in any way, whether by speaking, nodding, making faces or changing their body language. This exercise brings attention to natural tendencies to avoid listening by interrupting or formulating a response, and challenges participants to self-reflect on empathy and the ways in which they practice it in interpersonal communication.

Participants then participated in a test of the voice-activated assistant prototype by operating a testifying session in which the bot was the facilitator and timer. The bot led the group activity by calling on participants to respond to a prompt, then alerted them when they had reached their time limit. The bot's statement were simulated using the text-to-speech function on a laptop computer.

After these activities, participants were asked to discuss and brainstorm methods for implementing the group into their lives, and what functions it should provide in order to serve them best. They had the opportunity to design the group as they would want it.

Finally, they returned to the survey tool and responded again, indicating their feelings regarding the same four areas after having participated in the test group. This was used to measure the effectiveness of the test in fostering connection, belonging, validation and empowerment.


**Research Question**

How can a contemporary model for consciousness raising groups provide tools and platforms for millennials in Cincinnati, Ohio to be activists for gender equality and social change?

## Setting and Sample

Participants were recruited via text message and email using snowball sampling. The prototype test took place at a community space in downtown Cincinnati. The nature of the test was intentionally informal and lighthearted.

## Participants

The test group was comprised of five millennial women who live in Cincinnati, Ohio. They ranged in age from 24 to 32. All participants knew at least one other participant personally, but none of them knew everyone. Human diversity was mixed, with three white women and two women of color. One woman was a mother and she brought her infant son with her (with strong approval from the researcher).



*Figure 6.5: Prototype test group*

## Data Collection

Data was collected in two ways; qualitatively through activities and discussions, and quantitatively through a survey. The test was recorded on video and transcribed.

*Test group*

Participants took part in three activities to create and implement a test CR group, and a brainstorm discussion about the design of the group. In the forming of their group, participants collectively agreed upon the following:

Test group doctrine of values:
- Commit to showing up
- Listening
- Open dialogue
- Acceptance/no judgment
- Respect
- Transparency
- Empathy
- Nonviolence
- Collaboration
- Tolerance

Test group goals:
- To reduce competition and increase collaboration among women
- To educate each other
- To hold space for an open dialogue in the community

Test group key issues:
- Pre- and post-natal care for all women
- Equal access to education
- Sexual safety for all
- Quality and affordable child care for all
- Accessible and affordable mental health support for all



*Figure 6.6: Prototype test group values, goals and issues*

In discussing the design and structure of their group, participants determined the following:
- They are open to the option of publicizing values or other group info, e.g. on social media, but they understand that it "raises the stakes" for letting outsiders view and/or comment.

- They are open to forming a group with both friends and strangers. Shared values are more important than who the people are. But, it is important that all members feel comfortable with each other.
- They would like to require each member to be bound to an agreement to uphold the group's values. The values and expectations must be simple and clear.
- They are open to all genders participating, because men may share the same values but not necessarily the same experiences. It would support an environment that allows opposing points of view, and teach members how to be inclusive.
- They are open to the option of naming the group, but it would not be imperative.
- They would meet once a month in person.
- It would be imperative that the time be treated as sacred, and not devolve into gossip or commitment wane over time.

In self-reflecting on the sharing/listening activity, participants said:
- "I don't like talking for that long with no back and forth."
- "I'm a reactionary person so I want to give her validation for what she's saying but it feels like I'm not evening listening."
- "The whole time I was looking down at the floor because it felt so awkward I was afraid to make eye contact."
- "I wanted to react but I also liked the challenge of not reacting. I don't know if I felt more present or not non-reacting. When I was talking, I wanted the reaction, I wanted the feedback. But it was also nice to be able to talk about whatever I want. There are people you can talk to and no matter what they won't hear a thing you say, they take over. Sometimes it's nice to have that opportunity to talk."
- "I read a book about empathy that said our generation tends to not be an active listener. So if you're telling me about your story, immediately I will unconsciously think, oh that happened to me too, I was there that day, so the conversation stays kind of shallow and you can't get very deep into one topic because you both want to share what you have to say. So ever since I read that I've been trying to actually listen."

In testing the voice-activated assistant with a testifying session, responses and reactions included:
- They would give it a gender neutral name – "Chris"
- The bot would be useful to ask questions, like finding out about laws that exist
- The bot would be useful as a moderator during discussions, especially when things get intense (could make a joke)
- The bot would be useful as an objective listener to synthesize ideas in group discussions, as opposed to the subjective/selective themes that a human might hear

In brainstorming other potential functions of the digital platform, participants desired the following:
- Calendar functions (Doodle poll for scheduling, export directly to google calendar or seamlessly integrate calendar into app)
- Messaging function
- Send reminders for meetings

- Agenda function (shared doc for planning agenda, space to propose discussion topics for next meeting)
- Google alerts for relevant issues (based on goals/issues chosen by the group) or local issues that would be pertinent
- Meeting minutes that are recorded, synthesize the highlights into a summary and edited to be listened to like a podcast if someone missed a meeting (something they can listen to at work)
- Privacy of group's data would be critical
- Post-meeting forum for post-mortem / reflection / reaction (open space for sharing anything that was not shared with during the meeting, if someone wasn't comfortable doing so)
- An app that is easy to use

*Survey*

The survey tool was used to measure the effectiveness of the group in fostering connection, belonging, validation and empowerment. The survey revealed the following results:

**Connection – increased by 12%**
"I feel connected to my community."

**Belonging – increased by 8%**
"I feel like I belong to a group."

**Validation – increased by 8%**
"I feel validated in my experiences."

**Empowerment – increased by 20%**
"I feel motivated and empowered to take action regarding social/political issues that are important to me."
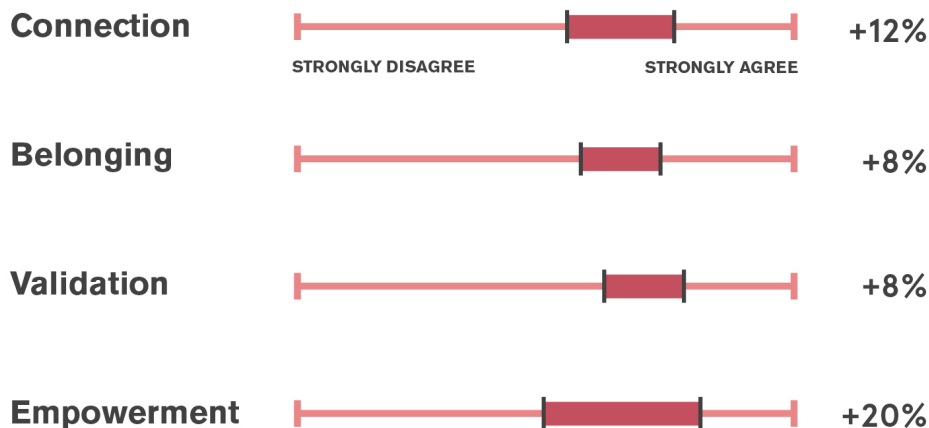


*Figure 6.7: Prototype test results*

*Overall responses*

- "The most important thing I got out of my experience today was listening to powerful women share."
- "I loved the listening exercise. While it was awkward and uncomfortable it felt like a way for people to express thoughts without judgement, but to a human. Curious how I could apply this at work."
- "I think this is a timely topic and could give many lonely or disconnected people an outlet."
- "I really liked hearing other people's ideas and what issues were important. Nice to hear different perspectives."
- "The most important thing I got out of today was to actively listen to new people."
- "What I wish had was a list of topics to actually use the group, like a real after test experience."
- "The most important thing I got out of my experience today was a place to speak openly and help realize my opinions and voice."
- "Let's continue this!"

**Data Analysis**

Test group data was analyzed by myself through transcription of dialogue, coding of themes and quantifying survey results.

**Summary of Findings**

The findings of the test group indicate that the prototype was successful. The four measured outcomes indicate that the CR group effectively increased participants' feelings of connection, belonging, validation and empowerment. The latter was especially impacted by the prototype test; before the test, participants rated their feelings of empowerment the lowest of all four measures, and after the test they rated it the highest of the four.

The following themes emerged from test group:

*Commitment*
The success of the group would require everyone to commit to showing up, respect others' time, and treat the meeting time as sacred.

*Values*
Participants stressed the importance of shared values and mutual respect.

*Sharing/Listening*
Participants were positively impacted by the connection they felt through the act of openly sharing or hearing the powerful stories shared by others.

*AI as helper*

Participants were very open to the assistance of AI. They view it as an objective group member, and were excited about the many ways it could make things easier for the group.

*Equality*

Participants stressed the importance of equality among group members, i.e. shared responsibility, and no leader.

## Conclusions

*Research question: How can a contemporary model for consciousness raising groups provide tools and platforms for millennials to be activists for gender equality and social change?*

The outcome of the test group indicated that as a conceptual model, contemporary CR groups are an effective means for providing tools and platforms for millennials to engage in activism for gender equality. The CR group test slightly increased participants' feelings of connection, belonging, validation and empowerment. The latter was especially impacted by the CR test group, indicating the prototype is particularly effective in causing participants to feel motivated and empowered to take action regarding important issues. Emerging themes from the qualitative data show that the conceptual model was well received overall by test group participants, and that they deeply valued the opportunities it provided them for connection and thoughtful dialogue. They also responded positively to the structure of the group, placing great value on the principles of equality and shared responsibility. This indicates that group-centered leadership demonstrates significant potential as a model for organizing and social activism.

## Discussion

The prototype of the contemporary CR group demonstrates significant implications for the design of groups that are civically or socially oriented. Through group-centered leadership and activities that foster connection and validation, participants can be empowered to draw from individual experiences to effect change in their lives and in their communities.

The voice-activated assistant prototype also has significant implications for future methods of prototyping and testing artificial intelligence technology. By simulating the interaction between bots and participants, researchers can make iterative changes to the prototype in real time and learn how users interact with AI and why.

## Suggestions for Future Research, Testing, and Design

Many opportunities are presented for refining and iterating on the contemporary CR group prototype. Varying results and insights could be gained from testing groups comprised of different types of people: e.g., a group of all friends, a group of all strangers, a group of mixed

genders, a group of non-cisgender people. Findings could also be enhanced by testing different sized groups, including a larger group with upwards of 10 people, and a smaller group with as few as 3 people. Additionally, in order to fully vet this concept as an effective tool for all marginalized people, it will be imperative to test the prototype by operating it through a wide variety of intersectional lenses of race, class, gender, sexual orientation, education and ability.

Further design and testing is needed to measure the effectiveness of the digital platform specifically, especially the group-formation functions. A second iteration of the prototype could be created to test various way that groups could form. By adding a networked function to the digital platform, users could be connected to random members of their community in order to form a group, using selection tools such as shared values or similar availability.

Chapter 7: Design Research Conclusions and Discussion

**Introduction**

This research project revealed complex and nuanced insights into the lives of millennials and the current state of the feminist movement. The findings can be applied to various domains of knowledge, such as social science and feminist theory, to understand the contemporary feminist practices of the millennial generation. Both the methodologies used in this study and the designed intervention offer implications for future research, particularly for design research.

**Summary of Project Findings**

The findings of this research project revealed the following:

- The vast majority of millennials advocate for gender equality, despite many of them not self-identifying as feminist.
- Millennials' views on feminism are mixed but there is evidence that this is currently shifting and more millennials are evolving to self-identify as feminist.
- Millennials were raised to believe that all genders are equal, which impeded them from seeing systemic and pervasive issues of inequality for part of their lives. Now they are becoming aware of the systems of oppression in which they operate and realizing the current state of gender equality is much worse than they realized.
- Millennial women are deeply frustrated by the dissonance between their values and the current state of gender equality in society. They deeply value connections with and support of other women who share their experiences.
- Millennials experience discrimination on the basis of their gender at a rate that is similar to other generations. They experience it mostly in work/professional environments and in social settings.
- The 2016 presidential election was a catalyst for organizing and discourse, but many feel frustrated and helpless, unsure of what how to take action for causes they believe in.
- Millennials are interested in taking action for equality when they have tools and resources to do so.
- Millennials are turned off by vitriol and political discourse online. They do not see social media as an effective site for discussion or connection.
- Millennials seek meaningful face-to-face connection to others and to their community.
- Millennials do not have faith in their government to resolve social issues or foster equality.
- Millennials value group settings that foster belonging and collective actions.
- Contemporary iterations of consciousness raising groups are an effective tool to increase millennials feelings of connection, belonging, validation and empowerment. They can be a tool for engaging millennials in activism for social and political issues.

- Traditional methods for consciousness raising are applicable today, particularly the practices of open sharing/active listening, and connecting individual circumstances with systemic causes.
- Methods for fostering connection should bridge digital and physical spaces to be more accessible, applicable and sustainable.
- Synchronous and asynchronous functions for CR groups are imperative to accommodate modern habits and expectations.
- Group-centered leadership fosters a dynamic of equity and shared responsibility that is more sustainable than traditional leadership models.
- Shared values and interpersonal connection foster effective group dynamics, regardless of similarities or differences between members

## Conclusions

If it's true that the gender revolution has been stalled for decades, this research highlights an opportunity for its revival, and indicates that it may already be underway. Millennials feel strongly about gender equality and, when equipped with tools for activism and a community of support, they will take action to advocate for it. The momentum of organizing and resistance that resulted from reaction to the 2016 presidential election is significant, but more work will be required to focus efforts on the agenda of gender equality and to sustain those efforts over time. Contemporary CR groups with group-centered leadership provide millennials with a clear method for focusing their efforts and engaging in social activism. By designing a model for activism that provides them with a space for connection and tools for organizing, they are empowered to identify and eliminate gender hierarchy in their lives and their communities.

## Discussion

My intention with this research is to be in dialogue with other domains of inquiry, such as social science and feminist philosophy. The findings of this study offer insights for other research projects regarding millennials and feminist thought. Specifically, they provide a more nuanced view of contemporary feminist practices and could contribute to a broader understanding of younger generations of feminists.

This study holds significant implications for feminist research methodologies and how they shape design research studies. By creating relationships with research participants and minimizing the authority of my role as the researcher, participants were more comfortable to discuss deeply held values or share traumatizing experiences, which led to more robust qualitative data. This methodology also holds significance for designers and design researchers. Feminist principles align considerably with people-centered and user-centered design principles, particularly in regards to users with different abilities. By applying this methodology to designing outcomes or testing prototypes, designers can gain more nuanced data that allows them to more accurately understand the experiences of different kinds of people, identify their needs and create work that serves them better.

This study could also impact future research for designing and prototyping group experiences. Results of this research indicate methods for fostering connection and belonging in groups, and tools for measuring such outcomes.

Finally, it is my sincere hope that the findings of this study provide resources, actionable insights and encouragement for any person who feels marginalized or deeply disconcerted by their current social circumstances or national political climate. When observing and analyzing systems of oppression, my feminist philosophy professor taught me the importance of simultaneously holding space for epistemological despair and radical hope. Through the outcomes of this research, it is my intention to offer both.


**Suggestions for Future Research**

Further research is necessary to replicate the findings of this study with a larger and more diverse sample size. This would offer more nuanced views of specific groups within the millennial generation, especially the youngest millennials, the oldest millennials, trans people, people of color and people of varying socioeconomic backgrounds.

This study could also be replicated to examine engagement with other social causes and movements, such as Black Lives Matter or immigrants' rights, and to prototype methods of recruitment and engagement of followers.

Further design and testing is needed to fully develop the digital platform and the AI software. As AI technology advances, more research will be necessary to test new functions of the voice-activated assistant and new roles that it could play in activist groups and organizing for social causes.

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Appendices

**Appendix I: Survey Questions**

1. Do you believe all genders are treated equally in the United States today?
    a. Yes
    b. No
    c. Not sure
2. Do you believe the current state of gender equality in the U.S. needs to change?
    a. Yes
    b. No
    c. Not sure
3. Do you consider yourself an ally for women's rights on the basis of the equality of the sexes?
    a. Yes
    b. No
    c. Not sure
4. In your own words, what is feminism?
    a. (open-ended response)
5. Do you consider yourself a feminist?
    a. Yes
    b. No
    c. Not sure
6. In the U.S. today, do you believe the word "feminism" carries positive or negative connotations?
    a. Positive
    b. Negative
    c. Not sure
7. How do you believe feminism is viewed by your generation today?
    a. Favorably
    b. Not favorably
    c. Not sure
8. How do you believe feminism is viewed by millennials (those born between 1983 and 2000) today?
    a. Favorably
    b. Not favorably
    c. Not sure
9. How do you believe feminism is portrayed on social media today?
    a. Favorably
    b. Not favorably
    c. Not sure
10. What/whom has influenced your personal views on gender equality? Check all that apply.
    a. Family Friends
    b. Personal experiences
    c. Others' experiences

d.　School/classes
　　e.　Politics/history
　　f.　TV/film
　　g.　Books/magazines
　　h.　Social media
　　i.　Other
11. In your lifetime, have you ever changed your views on feminism and/or gender equality?
　　a.　Yes
　　b.　No
　　c.　Not sure
12. If yes, why and how did your views change? If no, please skip this question.
　　a.　(open-ended response)
13. Have you ever experienced discrimination or mistreatment based on your gender?
　　a.　Yes
　　b.　No
　　c.　Not sure
14. If yes, in what setting(s) have you experienced discrimination? (If no, please skip this question.)
　　a.　Home/family
　　b.　Work/professional
　　c.　School Relationship
　　d.　Friendship
　　e.　Social setting
　　f.　Online/social media
　　g.　Other
15. Which of these issues are important to you? Select all that apply.
　　a.　Women's rights
　　b.　LGBTQ rights
　　c.　Women of color's rights
　　d.　Equal pay for women
　　e.　Division of domestic labor
　　f.　Sexism in the workplace
　　g.　Sexism on social media
　　h.　Violence against women
　　i.　Reproductive rights (e.g. abortion, birth control)
　　j.　Equal access to healthcare
　　k.　Other
16. What are your political views?
　　a.　Liberal
　　b.　Moderate
　　c.　Conservative
17. What is your gender?
　　a.　Female
　　b.　Male
　　c.　Non-binary
　　d.　Other

e. Prefer not to answer
18. What is your age?
    a. 18-24
    b. 25-34
    c. 35-44
    d. 45-54
    e. 55-64
    f. 65 or older
19. Which generation do you consider yourself to be a part of?
    a. Gen Z
    b. Gen Y/Millennial
    c. Gen X
    d. Baby boomer
    e. GI/Greatest generation
    f. Silent generation
    g. Other
20. What state do you live in?
21. What is your ethnicity?
    a. White
    b. Hispanic or Latino
    c. Asian
    d. Black or African American
    e. American Indian or Alaska Native
    f. Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander
    g. Other
    h. Prefer not to answer
22. What is your marital status?
    a. Single
    b. Married
    c. Domestic Partnership
    d. Divorced
    e. Separated
    f. Widowed
    g. Other
23. How many children (under the age of 18) live in your household?
    a. 0
    b. 1-2
    c. 3-4
    d. 5 or more
24. What is your level of education?
    a. Some high school
    b. High school diploma
    c. Some college
    d. Associates degree
    e. Bachelor's degree
    f. Professional or doctorate degree

      g.  Master's degree

      h.  Other

25. Do you have any additional comments?

      a.  (open-ended response)

26. Thank you for participating in this survey. If you are interested in participating in focus groups or interviews for this study, please provide your email address. (optional)

**Appendix II: Interview questions**

1. What is your age?
2. What gender do you identify with?
3. What is your marital status?
4. Do you have kids? How many? What are their genders?
5. What is your occupation?
6. What are your political views?
7. What are your views on gender equality?
8. What were your parents' gender roles like when you were growing up? What influence did that have on you?
9. What are your peers' views on gender equality? Is it an important issue to them? Why or why not?
10. What does feminism mean to you?
11. Do you self-identify as a feminist? Why or why not?
12. What things do you associate with feminism?
13. How is feminism portrayed on the internet/social media?
14. Do you think we need feminism today? Why or why not?
15. Do you believe all genders are equal in the US today? Why or why not? If not, what still needs to be done?
16. What does sexism look like today?
17. Talk about a time in your life when you experienced discrimination because of your gender.
18. What's the hardest thing about being [your gender] in society today?
19. What can Millennials do to continue the fight for gender equality today?
20. What can the feminist movement do to engage Millennials in advocating for gender equality?
21. What was your reaction to the 2016 presidential election?
22. What effect do you believe the election had on gender equality and feminism?

**Appendix III: Prototype test group agenda/questions**

1.  Introduction
    a.  About this research study
    b.  Questions we hope to answer today (fill out first part of survey – see attached)
        i.  What makes us feel connected to our community?
        ii. What makes us feel like we belong to a group?
        iii. What makes us feel validated in our experiences?
        iv. What makes us feel motivated/empowered to effect change?

2.  Ice breaker
    a.  Tell us about yourself
    b.  If you ruled the world, what's the first law that you would enact?

3.  Open group discussion
    a.  What are your views regarding feminism and gender equality?
    b.  What makes you feel motivated/empowered to do something about it?
    c.  What does social activism in Cincinnati look like today?
    d.  Now let's form our group (post-its on the wall)
        i.  NAME – What will you name your group?
        ii. VALUES – Write a doctrine of values for your group
        iii. GOALS – What do you hope to get out of it? What do you hope to accomplish as a group?
        iv. STRUCTURE – How often will you meet? How will the meetings be structured?

4.  Sharing + nonreactive listening
    a.  Pair off – 5 minutes per partner, then switch
        i.  Share something that's frustrating you in life where you feel stuck
        ii. Share something in your life that makes you feel energized and inspired
    b.  De-brief

5.  Break

6.  Group brainstorm about platform functions
    a.  What would you need it to do to serve your group?
    b.  How would you share your doctrine of values?
    c.  How would you publicize/report your goals and accomplishments (if at all?)
    d.  How would you track your group's progress?

7.  Group test of AI prototype (type to speech response)
    a.  Name your bot
    b.  Prompts to test with bot
        i.  Find a rally to attend
        ii. Find out a mayoral candidate's stance on an issue
        iii. Find out what you missed at the last meeting

           iv.   Schedule your next meeting

8. Wrap up discussion
    a. How could this be of use to you in your life?
    b. What more would you expect from it that you didn't get today?
    c. Fill out survey (see attached)

**Appendix IV: Prototype test group survey**

Consider the following statements in regards to what you experienced today. Rate how you feel before the focus group starts and how you feel after the focus group ends.

**I feel connected to my community.**

Before: Strongly disagree     Disagree     Neutral     Agree     Strongly Agree

After:   Strongly disagree     Disagree     Neutral     Agree     Strongly Agree

**I feel like I belong to a group.**

Before: Strongly disagree     Disagree     Neutral     Agree     Strongly Agree

After:   Strongly disagree     Disagree     Neutral     Agree     Strongly Agree

**I feel validated in my personal experiences.**

Before: Strongly disagree     Disagree     Neutral     Agree     Strongly Agree

After:   Strongly disagree     Disagree     Neutral     Agree     Strongly Agree

**I feel motivated and empowered to take action regarding social/political issues.**

Before: Strongly disagree     Disagree     Neutral     Agree     Strongly Agree

After:   Strongly disagree     Disagree     Neutral     Agree     Strongly Agree

**The most important thing I got out of my experience today was:**

**What I wish had been different about my experience today was:**

**Additional comments:**

**Appendix V: Consent Forms**

**Focus Group Participant Consent**

This study examines Millennials' views on feminism. You are not required to participate in this study; it is entirely voluntary. If you decline to participate in the study, you will not incur penalty or loss of benefits of any kind.

If you choose to participate, here are some important things to know about your involvement in the study:

- You must be at least 18 years of age to participate.
- The researcher will request to meet with you and a small group of people in person for a focus group lasting approximately 90 minutes. The discussion will be audio-recorded.
- The researcher will request basic demographic information about you, but your confidentiality is protected. The researcher will not use your name or any identifying information about you in their reports about the study.
- You may discontinue participation at any time or decline to answer specific questions without penalty or loss of benefits of any kind.
- If you are participating in a focus group, all participants' identities and responses are to remain confidential and you agree to not share them outside the focus group.

You have rights as a participant in this study. If you have questions about the study, please contact the lead researcher, Ali Place, at (513) 503-2672 or ali.place@miamioh.edu.

Miami University's Research Ethics & Integrity Program has reviewed and approved this study. For questions or concerns about your rights as a research subject please contact the Research Compliance Office at Miami University: (513) 529-3600 or humansubjects@miamioh.edu.


I _____ agree to participate in this study for purposes outlined above. I give my permission to be interviewed and for that interview to be audio-recorded.



Signature _____ Date _____


**Survey Participant Consent**

This study examines Millennials' views on feminism. You are not required to participate in this study; it is entirely voluntary. If you decline to participate in the study, you will not incur penalty or loss of benefits of any kind.

If you choose to participate, here are some important things to know about your involvement in the study:

- You must be at least 18 years of age to participate.
- The researcher will request basic demographic information about you, but your confidentiality is protected. The researcher will not use your name or any identifying information about you in their reports about the study.
- You may discontinue participation at any time or decline to answer specific questions without penalty or loss of benefits of any kind.

You have rights as a participant in this study. If you have questions about the study, please contact the lead researcher, Ali Place, at (513) 503-2672 or ali.place@miamioh.edu.

Miami University's Research Ethics & Integrity Program has reviewed and approved this study. For questions or concerns about your rights as a research subject please contact the Research Compliance Office at Miami University: (513) 529-3600 or humansubjects@miamioh.edu.

**By completing the survey, you indicate that you are at least 18 years of age and agree to participate in this study.**

## Appendix VI: Recruitment



## Survey Recruitment

*Email*

Dear Prospective Participants:

My name is Ali Place and I am an MFA candidate in the Experience Design graduate program at Miami University. I am conducting research for my thesis that addresses millennials' views on feminism today. I am writing to invite you to participate in a research study on your views of feminism and gender equality. This research project seeks to understand how feminism is viewed today and the barriers that exist for millennials to identify with it as a political and social ideology.

Participation in this study will consist of completing online surveys lasting approximately 5-10 minutes in duration. Survey questions will include demographic information; political views and views on gender equality.

There are no anticipated risks or inconveniences to participation in this study. Participation is voluntary and you may withdraw participation at any time, without consequence. If you would like to participate, please click the link below:

[link]

If you have questions or concerns you may email me ali.place@miamioh.edu. You may also contact the Research Compliance Office at Miami University: (513) 529-3600 or humansubjects@miamioh.edu regarding issues related to research compliance.

Sincerely,

Ali Place

This study has been approved by the Miami University Institutional Review Board, approval #02526e.

Please take 5-10 minutes to share your views on feminism and gender equality with me in this survey as part of my graduate research. Thank you for your time! [link]

**Interview / Focus Group Recruitment**

*Email:*

Dear Prospective Participants:

My name is Ali Place and I am an MFA candidate in the Experience Design graduate program at Miami University. I am conducting research for my thesis that addresses millennials' views on feminism today. I am writing to invite you to participate in a research study on your views of feminism and gender equality. This research project seeks to understand how feminism is viewed today and the barriers that exist for millennials to identify with it as a political and social ideology.

Participation in this study will consist of a one-on-one interview with me that will last approximately one hour, OR a focus group with 3-5 other people that will last approximately one hour. Questions will include demographic information, political views and views on gender equality.

There are no anticipated risks or inconveniences to participation in this study. Participation is voluntary and you may withdraw participation at any time, without consequence. If you would like to participate, please contact me at ali.place@miamioh.edu or 513-503-2672.

If you have questions or concerns you may email me ali.place@miamioh.edu. You may also contact the Research Compliance Office at Miami University: (513) 529-3600 or humansubjects@miamioh.edu regarding issues related to research compliance.

Sincerely,

Ali Place

This study has been approved by the Miami University Institutional Review Board, approval #02526e.

*Social media post:*

As part of my graduate thesis, I am conducting research on millennials and their views on feminism. If you are 18 years of age or older, please consider participating in a one-hour

interview with me OR a focus group with 3-5 other people to share your views. Please contact me for more information. Thank you for your consideration.

**Appendix VII: IRB Approval**

May 22, 2017

To:     Alison Place and Dennis Cheatham (placeal@miamioh.edu; cheathdn@miamioh.edu)

Re:     *Feminism and Millennials*

**Project reference number is:  02526e**
*(please refer to this ID number in all correspondence to compliance administration)*

The project noted above and as described in your application for registering Human Subjects (HS)  research has been screened to determine if it is regulated research or meets the criteria of one of the categories of research that can be exempt from approval of an Institutional Review Board (per 45 CFR 46).  The determination for your research is indicated below.

The research described in the application is regulated human subjects research, however, the description meets the criteria of at least one exempt category included in 45 CFR 46 and associated guidance.
**The Applicable Exempt Category(ies) is/are:  2**

Research may proceed upon receipt of this certification and compliance with any conditions described in the accompanying email message.  When research is deemed exempt from IRB review, it is the responsibility of the researcher listed above to ensure that all future persons not listed on the filed application who i) will aid in collecting data or, ii)  will have access to data with subject identifying information, meet the training requirements (CITI Online Training).

If you are considering any changes in this research that may alter the level of risk or wish to include a vulnerable population (e.g. subjects <18 years of age) that was not previously specified in the application, you must consult the Research Ethics & Integrity Program before implementing these changes.

Exemption certification is not transferrable; this certificate only applies to the researcher specified above. All research exempted from IRB review is subject to post-certification monitoring and audit by the compliance office.

Best of luck with your research,
Jennifer Sutton
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Jennifer Sutton, MPA, CIP
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Phone: 513-529-0454