Feminism on Campus: Why Students Do and Don’t Identify As Feminists

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Summary:

Introduction

Feminism began as women’s reaction to the system of patriarchy; a male-dominated, male-identified, male-centered hierarchical system. The unequal distribution of power, rewards and resources continues to form the base for oppressing women. College age students are the next generation that will make a difference in our society, but this project revealed through interviews of URI students that many students do not understand or care about the issues of feminism or identify as feminists. Literature reviews corroborated the interview findings. The research explored where the resistance towards identifying as a feminist may come from among college students. The findings suggest that to bring out a change in our society and for equality to exist politically, socially and economically, we must educate college students on feminism and what it means to be a feminist.

Methods

To further grasp the historical resistance towards feminism I read and analyzed Backlash by Susan Faludi. I then watched the Makers documentaries on feminist history and reviewed feminist theories that were introduced to me in previous GWS courses. This foundation helped me define the research problem. From here I used the URI library online catalog to research new theorists and studies to help explain the resistance towards feminism from college students. After analyzing and comparing my research materials I was able to conclude 13 solutions for URI to implement to address feminism on campus. From this research, I also created 10
interview questions to help understand how URI students felt about feminism. At random I interviewed 30 students. The purpose of this was to compare results from randomly selected students to primed GWS students who are familiar with feminism. I then used the same questions to interview 21 GWS students enrolled in GWS 320. From these results, I became able to astatine where the resistance towards identifying as a feminist may come from among URI students.

Discussion

To achieve an equal society, college students must have an understanding of feminism and feminist issues since they are the next generation of leaders, but most do not care, are uninterested and resist identifying. In order to change society’s negative view of feminism and to attract more people to the movement, we must start small with college campuses, to advocate for education of feminism. People will not support an idea that they do not fully understand and connect with. More GWS students identify as a feminist, this could be due to the fact that they understand the meaning of feminism and can personally relate to it through discussions in their courses. Students not affiliated with GWS on campus hesitate or resist identifying because of their lack of understanding of what it means to be a feminist. It is recommended for future studies to survey and analyze a greater number of participants to further evaluate the influence feminism has on some and where other’s resistance comes from.