

ANALYSIS OF FEMINIST APPEARANCE

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Dedication

This thesis is dedicated to my husband, Aaron Rapport, who has loved me through everything.

Abstract

In an age when the term *feminist* has evolved to include various strains of the women's movement and is highly inclusive of women and men, people are often quick to disassociate themselves from the term, viewing it as controversial and divisive. The present study investigates whether this dissociation with feminism has to do with a perceived negative appearance stereotype tied to feminists, a stereotype women feel is not representative of their personal appearance.

The purpose of this project is to provide an analysis of feminist appearance and to explore appearance negotiations feminists deal with in their everyday lives. Another goal is to discover if feminists feel their appearance is representative of feminism as a whole and whether they feel their appearance choices conflict with their feminist beliefs.

Drawing from analysis of in-depth interviews conducted with 17 self-identified feminist graduate students, I explore the following overarching research question: "Are there appearance cues tied to feminism, and if so, does the perception of these cues shape society's understanding of the current feminist movement?" Each participant took part in an in-depth interview, consisting of open-ended questions in addition to a four question written pulse survey. Each agreed to be photographed for the purpose of the interview.

Using Marilyn DeLong's "Apparel-Body-Concept" (1998) as a conceptual aesthetic framework to guide my analysis, this study focuses on participants' own perceptions of the interaction of apparel and the human body as they examine images of themselves and

discuss ways they alter their appearance depending on the contexts, environments, and roles in which they find themselves.

I examine modern definitions of feminism, both broad and personal, provided by the participants and I investigate how these definitions affect how the participants have developed their personal appearance and the types of dress and appearance they associate with the feminist movement. I explore whether participants believe this appearance has evolved over time, as the feminist movement has progressed from the suffragist movement in the 1800s to its current form in the 21st century.

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Chapter 1: Statement of Problem

Background of the problem

My interest in feminism and feminist appearance first began during my undergraduate education. For my undergraduate thesis, I looked at the feminist movement through a historical lens and analyzed clothing associated with the movement during its various manifestations and waves. I investigated how feminists used clothing to help their efforts and how clothing was sometimes viewed as a hindrance to their cause.

My research project for my master's thesis at UC Davis involved uncovering the mental image socially conservative women have of feminist appearance. I interviewed women who self-identified as socially conservative in my home state of Texas, and the resulting data revealed a range of views regarding feminist appearance: some viewed feminism as an opposition to femininity, some cited butch stereotypes, while others believed that there was no specific appearance tied to feminism.

This experience increased my curiosity about the appearances and stereotypes attributed to feminists. In an age when I believe the term "feminist" should be highly inclusive of modern women, many of the women I talk with in my daily life seem to want to disassociate themselves from the term. I believe this dissociation has to do with a perceived negative stereotype related to appearance, or simply an appearance stereotype they feel is not representative of their personal appearance.

In a pilot study completed in 2009, I interviewed eight self-identified feminists about their personal style and discussed whether or not having feminist beliefs impacted their appearance. I did a close reading of their responses and pulled out emergent themes. The

pilot study laid the groundwork for this dissertation. I discovered which themes I wanted to explore further during my dissertation research, including new questions that arose which I had not previously considered.

Purpose of Study

The purpose of this study is to analyze feminist appearance and to explore appearance negotiations feminists deal with in their everyday lives. Another aim is to examine perceptions of feminist styles of dress. I have investigated whether there are specific visual cues feminists use to signal to other members of the movement that they have shared feminist beliefs and whether these cues (or different cues) are used to signal feminist beliefs to non-members. Additionally, I wanted to know if feminists look for specific visual symbols to identify other feminists, and if they think others (both within and outside of the feminist movement) perceive them as feminists.

How has a feminist's appearance evolved over time? How does this evolution reflect pre- and post- feminist identities? I am interested in how feminists alter their appearance to fit in various roles and contexts. For example, how do they change their appearance, based on whether they are in a setting surrounded by other feminists or in a setting where they can expect to be surrounded by a variety of individuals with diverse beliefs?

Additionally, how do modern feminists define the word "feminism"? I am interested in how their definitions of feminism affect how they have developed their personal appearance and what types of dress and appearance they associate with the feminist movement. I investigated whether or not my subjects believe this appearance has evolved over time, as the feminist movement has progressed from the suffragist

movement in the 1800s to its current form in the 21st century. This perception could be a stereotype, or it could be a feminist's own personal observation. My goal was to discover if feminists felt their appearance was representative of feminism as a whole and whether they felt their appearance choices conflicted with their feminist beliefs.

When asking feminists about appearance, the topic of conversation flowed between discussions of body image and styles of clothing, both of which are essential elements of perception of one's own image. The data varied according to respondents' personal opinions, but common themes also emerged when reading across the interviews for a broader understanding.

Research Questions and Hypothesis

My central research questions are:

- ▣ “How do self-identified feminists describe their appearance?”
- ▣ “How do feminist beliefs impact the way self-identified feminists like to look?”
- ▣ “How do feminists believe their appearance is tied to feminism?”
- ▣ “How do feminists use their appearance to signal feminism?”
- ▣ “How do respondents vary their feminist appearance based upon different situations and contexts?”

I hypothesized that the more active a self-identified feminist is in the women's movement, as identified in the pulse survey, the higher the probability she will choose to appear as a stereotypical feminist.

Conceptual Framework

Because this study deals with looking at form and analyzing meaning that is attributed to form, I chose Marilyn DeLong's "Apparel-Body-Construct" (ABC) as a conceptual aesthetic framework to guide my research. The ABC is defined as "a visual form that results from the interaction of apparel on the human body; a concept of this physical object based on sensory data" (DeLong, 1998, p. 339). Also, "a construct is defined as the way structural information is perceived and organized by the brain...the interaction of the body with the clothing assembled upon it" (DeLong, 1998, p. 26).

Using the ABC concept to guide my analysis, I focus on participants' own perceptions of the interaction of apparel and the human body as they examine images of themselves and describe what they see. The ABC framework also helps in taking the analysis a step further by taking into account environment and cultural context. I was able to get a sense of similarities and differences between the participants' cultural contexts through in-depth interviews. This is important because one's cultural context, including past experiences, influences perceptions, thinking and behavior, as discussed in the following chapter. The participants in this study discussed ways they alter their appearance depending on the contexts, environments, and roles in which they find themselves.

While feminist appearance has been discussed academically in various manners, an aesthetic framework has not been used to guide the analysis. DeLong's ABC concept provides an original and useful lens with which to examine feminist appearance by looking at the interplay between clothing and the body within a specific social context. Her work draws from the ecological perspective of perception and aesthetic theory, both

of which will be discussed in the following chapter. Additionally, the ABC framework helps to differentiate my study from others that have used identity politics or symbolic interaction, for example, to analyze feminist appearance.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Feminist theory and appearance studies are often not mentioned in the same breath, but they do have a complementary history. In my current project, I am analyzing feminist appearance and seeking to uncover the ways in which feminists use appearance to signal their membership in the feminist movement. In this literature review, I will provide justification for my chosen theoretical framework, DeLong's 1998 Apparel-Body-Construct (ABC), and I will focus on the ways appearance is discussed by textiles and clothing scholars as well as theorists within feminist studies. Next, I will present a brief overview of the feminist movement, including its history and various iterations, followed by a summary of feminist methods used in this research project.

The Apparel-Body-Construct (ABC)

DeLong's The Way We Look: Dress and Aesthetics uses theoretical principles from some key sources on visual perception from the 20th century, including James J. Gibson (1979) and Rudolf Arnheim (1969), and applies these principles in a new way to dress and aesthetics. DeLong pays close attention to the environment and to context, and what it means to perceive and evaluate apparel as it interacts with the human body in a specific context.

As mentioned in my introduction, DeLong's ABC concept provides a useful theoretical framework through which feminist appearance can be analyzed. One reason DeLong's ABC is an appropriate conceptual framework is her discussion of perception. According to DeLong, our perception of what we see in terms of the ABC depends on context and culture. She cites Jack Fredrick Myers when she states "Data are received from three

interrelated sources – our senses, our past experiences and our knowledge or education” (DeLong, 1998, p. 26).

DeLong’s ABC concept stems from the ecological perspective of perception, which focuses on the interaction between the person and the environment. Under the umbrella of the ecological perspective, her work is focused in aesthetic theory, which involves understanding humans’ responses to what we value and how we view and respond to the ABC with evaluation being the end process. She defines aesthetic response as “one’s involvement in looking and the resulting experiences” (DeLong, 1998, p. 339). In this way, the perceiver’s role is active rather than passive.

Additionally, DeLong pays careful attention to cultural context. She cites Richard Lachmann when she defines cultural context as: “A person’s cultural environment that influences perceptions, thinking, and overt behavior (DeLong, 1998, p. 5). Finally, DeLong states that evaluation is an important final step in one’s aesthetic response. Evaluation involves the criteria for making a judgment that includes personal and shared values. All of these concepts relate back to the ecological perspective, which pays close attention to the interaction between the person (in the case of perception, the perceiver) and the environment.

DeLong’s chapter on interpreting the ABC provides a useful guide for analysis of interviews with my respondents. She states, “to interpret means to consider how we perceive and give meaning to a particular apparel-body-construct” (DeLong, 1998, p. 252). She discusses codes, repetition and consistency which contribute to a shared meaning between two or more parties. DeLong’s analysis of interpretation and

perception aids in my own examination of feminist appearance, specifically because I am exploring shared meaning attributed to appearance among feminists.

By examining feminist appearance through aesthetic theory, I am analyzing feminists' interpretations of their own appearance, including their clothing, the way clothing interacts with the body, and how this ABC construct is situated within a specific cultural/environmental context. An example of aesthetic theory at work in this project is evident in the way participants took an active role in analyzing their own photos which were taken for the interviews. They paid close attention to the way the clothing interacted with their bodies. For example, one participant explained how she did not like the way her jeans looked on the lower half of her body, specifically her thigh area. She then went on to discuss why she felt this specific pair of jeans was not appropriate in certain contexts, such as when she is teaching.

The ecological perspective provides an appropriate direction for this study, because it deals with interaction between the person and the environment, and I am interested in how feminist appearance is altered depending on context. Additionally, interplay between the body and clothing works well with my definition of appearance, which is discussed in the following section.

Defining Appearance

When discussing feminist appearance, it is important to note that the subject matter is not limited to clothing. Rather, there are different components that make up one's appearance. According to Robert Hillestad, "appearance, because of visual characteristics and the versatility with which they can be structured to send various

messages, is used frequently as a type of nonverbal communication as the primary focus of attention or in conjunction with other forms of communication” (Hillestad, 2005, p. 63).

Hillestad’s definition of appearance works nicely with DeLong’s ABC concept, because Hillestad also focuses on the interplay between dress and the body. According to Hillestad, there are two components of appearance: the body component and the dress component. He states that “in appearance, the body operates as a vehicle for dress” (Hillestad, 1980, p. 120). Furthermore, Hillestad identifies four main categories of “observable characteristics of the body [that] serve as stimuli during the process of communication” (Hillestad, 2005, p. 63). These categories are body forms (“includ[ing] size, shape, and mass”), body motions (“gait, hand gestures, shoulder shrugs, nods and pelvic movements fall into this category”), body surfaces (“such as the color and texture of skin and hair”), and facial configurations (“pertains to forms, motions, and surfaces that are unique to the face”), (Hillestad, 2005, p. 63).

In his 1980 article, *The Underlying Structure of Appearance*, Hillestad states that “dress is the result of assembling various articles about the body. Since articles vary in terms of the purposes they fulfill, their forms necessarily vary. Forms of dress can be classified as (1) articles of clothing and (2) articles of adornment” (Hillestad, 1980, p. 117-118). He goes on to break down the elements of dress further into three categories: materials (i.e. wool), processes, and techniques (i.e. cleaning the wool and turning it into a fabric suitable for wearing on the body (Hillestad, 1980).

Hillestad's careful attention to the body also complements feminist literature, as well as textiles and clothing scholars who occasionally cross over into feminist theory, (see below) and have made use of discussions of the body. Two of the most influential feminist theorists to write about the body are Judith Butler (*Gender Trouble* (1990), *Undoing Gender* (2004), and *Bodies that Matter* (1993)) and Susan Bordo (*Unbearable Weight* (1993)). In her most famous writing, *Gender Trouble* (1990), Butler argues for the fluidity of gender, rather than the binary gender system most often used in today's society that only has room for male and female. In *Unbearable Weight* (1993) Bordo discusses the modern female body, including women's nearly obsessive relationship with food, dieting, and control issues.

In *Dress and Ethnicity* (1999), Joanne Eicher states that dress is "a coded sensory system of non-verbal communication that aids human interaction in space and time. These codes of dress include visual as well as other sensory modifications (taste, smell, sound, and feel) and supplements (garments, jewelry, and accessories) to the body which set off either or both cognitive and affective processes that result in recognition or lack of recognition by the viewer" (Eicher, 1999, p. 1). In *Dress and Gender* (1993), Eicher and Roach-Higgins state, "we define dress as an assemblage of body modifications and/or supplements displayed by a person in communicating with other human beings" (1993, p. 15).

In chapter 4, I discuss several feminist authors who were mentioned during the interview process with my respondents. The participants discussed these authors when explaining

how their definitions of “feminism” were formed. Often the authors cited were ones assigned in feminist theory courses that the respondents took in graduate school.

Feminist Discussions of Appearance

Many noteworthy scholars have straddled the border between textiles and clothing scholarship and feminist studies, from arguing for the inclusion of the body when considering appearance to stressing the importance of gender and feminist theory when discussing dress.

As mentioned in the previous section, Eicher and Roach-Higgins (1993) state the importance of considering the body in conversations about dress. In a similar idea, Entwistle, in her book, *The Fashioned Body* (2000) says the following: “Fashion is about bodies: it is produced, promoted and worn by bodies. It is the body that fashion speaks to and it is the body that must be dressed in almost all social encounters” (p. 1). Rudd and Lennon (2001) have often dealt with body image in their discussions of textiles and clothing and have argued for the inclusion of body image subject matter in textiles and clothing programs in higher education institutions.

Kaiser and Michelman have written on the relationship between dress and feminism many times. In 1991, Michelman wrote about the “meaningful alliance” between the two fields of study in a special publication from the International Textiles and Apparel Association (Michelman, 1991). In the same publication Kaiser (1991) discussed the commonalities and shared space between the study of gender, feminism, and appearance. Nearly a decade later, Kaiser and Michelman (2000) teamed up as editors for a special

issue of the Clothing and Textiles Research Journal to discuss the connections between feminist theory and clothing and textiles.

Keila Tyner and Jennifer Paff Ogle have also teamed up to write about the connections between feminism and dress several times. In their article in an issue of Clothing & Textiles Research Journal, Tyner and Ogle (2009) look at feminist literature on the dressed female body and explore ways this literature could have an impact on the field of textiles and clothing.

In her doctoral dissertation, “Visualizing Identity: Feminism, the Body, and the Politics of Representation,” Charlotte Kunkel (1995) looks at feminist identity in conjunction with the physical body. She states, “I am interested in meaning and significance that participants attribute to their body and appearance” (Kunkel, p. 83). When Kunkel discusses the formation of a feminist identity, she uses her own term, “bodifying.”

In her book, *Fresh Lipstick*, Linda Scott (2005) discusses feminist appearance and calls into question first and second wave feminists whom she believes ostracized potential members of the feminist movement by demanding that they trade in their makeup and high heels in order to be liberated.

The Meaning of Feminism

It is important to understand the complexities within the feminist movement when discussing meanings that feminists attribute to appearance. “Feminism” is a very difficult term to define. It is often tied to personal beliefs, and therefore can be interpreted differently by any person who feels connected to it. As someone who is

passionate about feminism, I am often engaged in debates regarding the meaning of the term. During these discussions, the phrase, “Well, to *me*, feminism means...” is used over and over. There is simply not one way to define it, and the more one learns about the history of feminism and its various iterations, the harder it can become to define.

Here, I will provide a few definitions of the term “feminism” and provide a brief explanation of what the different waves of the feminist movement entailed, as well as clarify how various strains of feminism differ from each other.

The term “feminist” is relatively new. It “was rarely used before the 20th Century, when it merely meant “qualities of females.” It was first introduced into common usage in the late 1890s to mean: “opinions and principles of advocates of extended recognition of achievements and claims of women” (Rossi, 1973, pp. xii-xiii).

In her doctoral dissertation, Charlotte Kunkel (1995) states, “Feminism...is a political position that denotes the theories and practices of social and economic equality of the sexes” (p. 183). Additionally, she says that a basic definition of feminism is the “common belief in equality for women” (p. 15).

A definition I have used in the past focuses on the eradication of gender scripts. This definition comes from sociologist Joan Ferrante (1995): “In the broadest sense, a feminist is a man or woman who actively opposes gender scripts (learned patterns of behavior expected of males and females) and believes that men’s and women’s self-image, aspirations, and life chances should not be constrained by those scripts” (p. 389).

Olive Banks (1986) echoes my earlier sentiment about the definition of the term “feminism” when she states, “Feminism...is in many ways impossible to define in any

really objective way so that, in the last resort, the choice of entries is, and must be, a very personal one” (p. 2). Deborah Siegel (1997) generally agrees: “We must recognize that there can be no single representative subject of feminism, while, at the same time, we must continue to speak in a collective voice that articulates political demands on behalf of a group called ‘women’” (p. 15). Carisa Showden (2009) agrees that feminism is nearly impossible to define, but argues that one can assume that feminist analyses do have common central categories:

Who is to say (definitively) what feminism is? Any definition I provide with both inevitably and rightly be contested by others within the loose amalgamation of people known as the ‘feminist movement.’ Feminism has always been many movements working for multiple ends. I neither insist on nor defend a narrow definition of feminism here, but I do assume that ‘women’ and ‘gender’ are two of the central categories of feminist analyses (p. 167).

Strains of Feminism

As mentioned above, there are different definitions of feminism. In this section, I describe some of the most prominent types, which are most often mentioned in feminist literature. The respondents in my study identified with a wide variety of *feminisms*, not necessarily limited to the strains described below.

Liberal Feminism is considered to be the most general and mainstream version of feminism. The basic tenets of liberal feminism are often considered to be equal rights and treatment of women and men. It is also considered to be the oldest strain of feminism. In a volume she edited, Elizabeth Weed (2012) explains:

For all the varieties within the movement, it seems safe to say that the ‘second wave’ of feminism in the U.S. was principally inscribed within the liberal system of individual rights and that the various strains of feminism have had to engage in one way or another with the terms of that inscription. It is in this sense that

'liberal feminism' is the mainstream feminism, all the while intersecting in multiple ways with 'other' feminisms -- socialist, Marxist, post-structuralist, black, lesbian, chicana, and so forth -- which themselves overlap (p. xii).

Chris Beasley (1999) echoes this sentiment in his book, What is Feminism? An Introduction to Feminist Theory. He states, "Liberal feminism is the most widely known form of feminist thought and it is often seen as synonymous with feminism *per se*" (p. 51).

Radical Feminism is centered around the "belief that the oppression of women [is] at the root of all other systems of oppression" (Jagger, 1983, p. 84). This particular strain of feminism set an important foundation for feminist theory. Radical feminism began in the late 1960s, arising out of the left-leaning movements focused on civil rights and peace. In contrast to liberal feminism and Marxist feminism, both of which "are rooted in philosophical traditions that are, respectively, 300 and 100 years old," the principles of radical feminism are relatively contemporary (Jagger, 1983, p. 83). Radical feminism "was sparked by the special experiences of a relatively small group of predominantly white, middle-class, college-educated, American women in the late 1960s" (Jagger, 1983, p. 83). "As these women [who participated in left-leaning movements] discussed their experiences and the systematic and widespread nature of their oppression became apparent to all, they came to feel that their primary political task must be to explore, to explain, and to combat the oppression of women" (Jagger, 1983, p. 84).

Cultural Feminism is a strain of the women's movement that grew out of radical feminism as the latter variety was fading. Sometimes these two variations of feminism are conflated and used interchangeably, as cultural feminism is often viewed as the "new

radical feminism.” Cultural feminism encourages women to hold onto the principles and shared understandings stereotypically associated with women, rather than to get rid of signs of femininity to be equal to men. This is the strain of feminism Kaiser describes when she depicts a version of the movement that “speaks of the importance of preserving (and expanding the base of) female culture, acknowledging the importance of aesthetics and creative expression. Liberation, in this sense, consists not of women ‘becoming’ more like men, but rather in the freedom on the part of both males and females to be creative, independent, and fully human” (Kaiser, 1991, p. 215). Cultural feminism encourages women to “value the feminine, re-evaluate the desired traits in society and acknowledge female strengths” (Kunkel, 1995, p. 125).

Marxist/Socialist Feminism: While this particular strain of feminism has waned in its popularity, it is important to understand because of its influence during the early years and the height of the second wave. This version of feminism follows in the tradition of Karl Marx and cites “hierarchical class relations (built on unequally distributed or owned sources of wealth, including monetary and other resources)...as *the* source of coercive power and oppression...Sexual oppression is seen as a dimension of class power” (Beasley, 1999, p. 60). Additionally, Kaiser (1991) remarks “the goal of this strain of thought is to explore means for allowing women access to the control of (male dominated) production” (p. 215). I believe Rosemarie Tong (1989) sums it up best:

‘Women’s work is never done’ is for Marxist feminists more than an aphorism; it is a description of the *nature* of woman’s work. Always on call, a woman forms a conception of herself that she would not have if her role in the family and at the workplace did not keep her socially and economically subordinate to men. Thus, Marxist feminists believe that to understand why women are oppressed in ways

that men are not, we need to analyze the links between women's work status and women's self-image (p. 40).

Postmodern Feminism is a strain focused on challenging the notions, categories, and boundaries set up by earlier varieties of feminism. Rather, feminists who identify with postmodern ideals argue for "openness, plurality, diversity and difference" (Tong, 1989, p. 219). Postmodern feminism is generally considered to be part of the third wave of feminism (discussed in the next section), even though many postmodern feminists would contest that they are not part of any wave. According to Tong (1989), some postmodern feminists "reject any label that ends in 'ism,' including feminism" (p. 223). Rather, postmodern feminists embrace individuality, personal differences, and even contradictions among feminists. With the focus placed on an appreciation of the diversity of the members of the movement, it makes sense that black feminism and queer feminism are sometimes viewed as subsets of postmodern feminism. A discussion of these movements can be found in chapter 4.

One must be careful not to confuse postmodern feminism with *post-feminism*, which "characterizes a group of young, conservative feminists who explicitly define themselves against and criticize feminists of the second wave" (Heywood and Drake 1997, p.1). Heywood and Drake include Naomi Wolf, Katie Roiphe and Rene Denfield in this category. Additionally, Siegel (1997) believes, "when invoked in the popular press, 'postfeminist' most often describes a moment when women's movements are, for whatever reasons, no longer moving, no longer vital, no longer relevant" (p. 75). Angela McRobbie (2004) generally agrees with this sentiment: "Broadly I am arguing that for feminism to be 'taken into account', it has to be understood as having already passed

away” (p. 255). If post-feminists are looking back on feminism and pointing out all that was wrong with the movement, according to these authors, then the movement must be over.

Waves of Feminism

In addition to various strains of feminism, there are also different waves of feminism which signify the period of time associated with each incarnation of the feminist movement – first wave, second wave, and third wave feminists are considered members of each corresponding wave.

First wave feminists are usually associated with the suffrage movement from the late 19th century, although the time frame and the causes they fought for were a bit wider than this association would suggest. According to Leslie Heywood and Jennifer Drake (1997), the first wave of feminism involved “abolition, voting rights, and temperance causes” (p. 23). Olive Banks (1986) has suggested that first wave feminists are “women and men who were active in the women’s movement between 1800 and 1930” (p. 1). The term *first wave* was coined retroactively in the 1970s.

Second Wave feminists “concentrated on the [Equal Rights Amendment] and wage equity, developed ‘gender’ and ‘sexism’ as key categories of analysis, critiqued beauty culture, and often worked in black, gay, and New Left movements” (Heywood and Drake, 1997, p. 23). Simone de Beauvoir (1952), author of The Second Sex, and Betty Friedan (1963), who wrote The Feminine Mystique, are often considered founders of the second wave of feminism. Generally, this wave of the feminist movement is considered

to have taken place during the 1960s and 1970s. The following generations of feminists have often criticized the “second wavers” for focusing on the problems of white upper-class women, and neglecting the struggles of minority and less privileged women.

Third wave feminists allow for much more fluidity and contradiction among members of the movement and view feminism as an open category. “We define feminism’s third wave as a movement that contains elements of second wave critique of beauty culture, sexual abuse, and power structures while it also acknowledges and makes use of the pleasure, danger, and defining power of those structures” (Heywood and Drake 1997, p. 3). According to Heywood and Drake, the third wave generation’s birth dates fall between 1963 and 1974, which roughly aligns with the birth dates of what is considered to be Generation X. There have been critics of third wave feminism for being too accepting of all walks of life, including those women who “claim to be feminists [and] make ‘choices’ that seemingly prop up patriarchy” (Snyder-Hall, 2010, p. 255). In Chapter 6, I will investigate third wave feminism thoroughly, particularly from the perspective of the participants in my study.

There has been some argument for an addition of “*post-third wave*” feminism or “*fourth wave*” feminism in the current feminist literature, but there has not been a consensus for what term should be used to describe the group of feminists who came after the third wave. Indeed, there has not been a consensus that there *should* be a new term for this group. In the edited volume, *We Don’t Need Another Wave: Dispatches from the Next Generation of Feminists*, Lisa Jervis (2000) argues that the wave model and the way it aligns generations of feminists with specific beliefs is unproductive. She aptly states:

Even if some views are more common among one generation than another, at their roots these are ideological disagreements -- but they can't be discussed productively while in disguise as generational. That disguise keeps us distracted from the real work before the movement today. Here's what we all need to recognize so that we can move on: Those in their twenties and thirties who don't see their concerns reflected in the feminism of their elders are ignorant of history; those in their fifties and beyond who think that young women aren't politically active, or active enough, or active around the right issues, don't know where to look (p. 17).

Methods from feminist theory

This project uses a variety of research methods, but primarily a qualitative research method, which is appropriate considering the type of data gathered through interviews during the process. I initially asked my subjects to fill out a brief, four question survey based upon their beliefs. This helped me to benchmark their thinking by asking them to check on a scale of 1 to 9 their current opinion. Secondly, I interviewed each subject using a series of questions as a more intensive probe, to fully understand their thinking. Qualitative research generally allows for the respondents' voices to be heard in a way that quantitative research does not permit. I used feminist-based interviewing methods, "which require openness, emotional engagement, and the development of a potentially long-term, trusting relationship between the interviewer and the subject" (Denzin and Lincoln, 2000, pp. 633-634). My interviews were comprised of the unstructured and open-ended formats often associated with qualitative research and feminist interview methods.

Interviewing within a feminist framework is not without its problems. In Feminist Dilemmas in Qualitative Research, Edwards and Ribbens (1998) discuss the problem of "public knowledge," as it is acquired in interviews: "The central dilemma for us as

researchers is that we are seeking to explore such privately based knowledges and personal understandings, but to then reconstitute them within publicly based disciplinary knowledge” (p. 13).

The question of whether or not it is ethical to use women’s personal stories for public gain has been echoed by many other feminist researchers. Ann Oakley (1981) characterizes interviewing women, at least from a feminist perspective, as a “contradiction in terms” because it involves “objectifying your sister” (p. 41).

Traditional guidelines for interviewing, she suggests, assume that the interview situation is a “one-way hierarchical process between interviewer and subject” (p. 40).

In order to make the interview process as non-exploitative as possible, feminist scholars try to make the interviews non-hierarchical and instead view them as a two-way exchange of ideas. The feminist interview method “transforms [the] interviewer and respondent into coequals who are carrying on a conversation” (Denzin and Lincoln (2000), p. 634). I interviewed feminist graduate students, many of whom were working on their own research projects, so my use of the feminist interview method was most likely expected from my respondents. In addition to its appropriate fit with my subject matter, this is a method I have used in the past and is the method I am most comfortable with.

My methodology is informed by the phenomenological approach, which focuses on group behaviors and the point of view from the group. An interviewer using a phenomenological method listens to participants in the group and interprets their experiences. “Phenomenology (is) focused on the subjectivity of reality, continually

pointing out the need to understand how humans view themselves and the world around them” (Willis, 2007, p. 53). This approach complements the feminist interview method because the focus is placed on the participants’ point of view, thereby giving importance to their voices.

Furthermore, I will be using an interpretive approach, which is based on social phenomenology. In Becoming Critical, Winifred Carr and Stephen Kemmis (1986) explain that the interpretive approach “seek[s] to replace the scientific notions of explanation, prediction and control, with the interpretive notions of understanding, meaning and action” (p. 83). The interpretive approach complements a project using feminist research methods because the approach is also concerned with “order [that] is produced and continually reaffirmed through the everyday interpretations of social actors” (Carr and Kemmis, 1986, p. 85). Similarly, feminist research has traditionally given attention to everyday interpretations, which positivist research often overlooks.

Chapter 3: Procedure

The purpose of this research project is to examine self-identified feminists' appearance preferences and how these preferences relate to feminist beliefs and attitudes. As I mentioned in my introduction, I have several research questions around which this study is centered.

- ▣ “How do self-identified feminists describe their appearance?”

- ▣ “How do feminist beliefs impact the way self-identified feminists like to look?”

- ▣ “How do feminists believe their appearance is tied to feminism?”

- ▣ “How do feminists use their appearance to signal feminism?”

- ▣ “How do respondents vary their feminist appearance based upon different situations and contexts?”

Research Method

This project uses both a quantitative and qualitative research methods, which is appropriate considering the type of data I gathered. The four question pulse survey (described below) allows for a quantitative benchmark of the subject's thinking prior to the more qualitative and in-depth interview. As I stated in my literature review, qualitative research is often used by feminist scholars and allows for the respondents' voices to be heard, particularly when using feminist-based interviewing methods. With this in mind, I used an unstructured and open-ended format during the interview process.

I applied for and received IRB exempt status due to the minimal risk to participants involved in my study.

Participant Selection and Interview Process

My main criterion for selection was that my respondents self-identify as feminists. My respondents were also graduate students enrolled in graduate programs focused on feminist studies. I had a diverse sample in terms of the way my respondents defined feminism, as well as differences in ethnicity, sexual orientation, age, and geographic location.

Participants

I interviewed 18 females from a variety of educational institutions. Nine of the participants were enrolled in the Gender, Women, and Sexuality Studies graduate program at the University of Minnesota. The other nine participants were enrolled in graduate programs in feminist studies at five different universities in the Boston, MA area (Brandeis, Harvard, Northeastern, Simmons, and Boston University). The demographics of the group were somewhat mixed, though the group was largely comprised of Caucasian Americans. Of the 18 participants, thirteen were Caucasian American, one was African American, one was Caucasian Canadian, one was Turkish, one was Japanese, and one was Scottish. The participants from the United States hailed from various parts of the country, including Florida, Maryland, Minnesota, New York, Tennessee, and Texas.

I recruited participants for my study by posting an announcement in list serves for the various universities. Each respondent contacted me via email and we agreed to meet at a time and location convenient for the interviewee.

Of the 18 respondents, one was an outlier who did not self-identify as feminist. She was enrolled in a feminist studies program and wished to be interviewed, but expressed a disconnect with feminist beliefs during the pulse survey and interview. The data collected from her interview and pulse survey is not included in the study results.

The interview format was unstructured, open-ended and conversational in nature. The questions listed below should be considered a general list of points I wanted to cover, and I made sure the respondents discussed each of the points. I did not necessarily ask all of the questions in the specific order listed. Instead I used the questions to guide me through the discussion, and if a respondent jumped ahead to a topic that was further down on the list, I allowed her to do so.

At the beginning of each interview, I took a digital photograph of the participant and used this image to focus upon in the first interview question (see p. 28). I allowed the participant to pose however she wished and was willing to take multiple photographs to ensure the participant had the specific look she wanted to analyze during the interview. I then showed the image displayed on the back of my digital camera to the participant and asked her to describe her appearance in the photograph, including everything from head to toe. I then clarified what I meant by the term “appearance”: observable characteristics of the body, including visual as well as other sensory modifications (taste, smell, touch, feel, sound) and supplements (garments, jewelry, and anything the

participant would normally carry on her person). I also asked the participant to focus on how these modifications and supplements interact with her body and with the surrounding environment. I told each interviewee that we could revisit this definition at any point during the interview.

The photograph worked as a probe and got the participant to think in a very specific, detailed way about her appearance. For example, upon hearing the first question (“Describe your appearance in the photograph. Include everything from head to toe.”), the participant might look at their photo and say “I have brown hair, I’m wearing a t-shirt and jeans, and I have tennis shoes on my feet.” I would then ask her to look at the photo again and ask detailed questions such as “Tell me more about your hair. Is it your natural color? Have you cut it recently? Is this how your hair is normally styled?” These types of questions, along with the photograph helped the participant to understand the degree of specificity I desired from their descriptions. I believe the photograph, along with the probing follow-up questions, helped set the expectation for detailed responses, not only for the first question, but throughout the interview as well.

The first interview question involved the participant looking at a picture of herself and describing her own appearance, and some participants had a bit of trouble getting started. I suggested to these participants that it might be easiest to start at the top of the photograph (head/hair) and work their way down to their feet, being as specific as possible when describing their appearance, as implied by the interview question itself, which asks respondents to “include everything from head to toe.” Some participants went into great detail with their descriptions, discussing whether or not they had washed

their hair the day of the interview or describing their undergarments, for example. For the most part, however, respondents focused on what was visible in the photograph. Additionally, several respondents who seemed at ease during the interview process began this way, and examining one's photograph from head to toe seemed like a way to logically move through the appearance question in an orderly manner, rather than jumping around from one element of the picture to another. This process also helped to ensure that the participants did not leave anything out when describing their appearance. If a participant skipped an element of dress as she was describing her appearance, I would make a note of it and revisit the omitted item when the respondent came to a stopping point. I also made notes to revisit certain elements if the participant made a short declarative statement about a specific component of her appearance and did not give thorough detail (see discussion of using the photograph as a probe, above). Then when the participant came to a stopping point, I would ask her further questions regarding whatever element needed addressing. The probing questions would then prompt the participant to include details that she had neglected to mention the first time around. This type of conversational interview method is in line with feminist interview practices, as noted in Chapter 2 (pp. 20-21).

Before beginning each interview, I conducted a quick, "pulse" survey, consisting of four written questions with corresponding scales. This device allowed me to immediately gauge the respondents' views before I asked detailed interview questions. I provided a copy of the survey to each participant so she could indicate on the scale which number

best corresponded to her opinion. An example of the pulse survey, along with results from the survey can be found in Chapter 4.

When interviewing my respondents, I chose to use the term “appearance” because it is part of everyday language, unlike “dress” or “apparel-body-construct.” However, I made sure to explain what I meant by “appearance” before conducting each interview so that respondents understood what type of description I was asking for. The definition of appearance I used comes from a combination of elements of Hillestad’s definition of appearance, Eicher & Roach-Higgins’ definition of dress, and DeLong’s definitions of the apparel-body-construct. By defining “appearance” for my respondents, they understood that I wanted to know about observable characteristics of the body, including visual as well as other sensory modifications (taste, smell, sound, and feel), and supplements (garments, jewelry, and accessories), while focusing on how these modifications and supplements interact with the body and surrounding environment. Before beginning the interview, I also explained that when I asked about “*feminism*,” I was inquiring about the *group* to which the respondent is a part. When I used the word “*feminist*,” I was asking about the respondent’s *personal* experiences and beliefs.

Interview questions

1. When looking at photo: “Describe your appearance in this photograph. Include everything from head to toe.”
2. “Is your appearance in the photograph the way you like to look every day? If not, how is it different?”
3. “How do you alter your appearance to fit various roles and contexts? For example, do you change your appearance if you are in the GWSS department (in class, teaching a class, meeting with a colleague, etc.), or in another department, or outside of school?”
4. “Would you make changes in your appearance if you could do so? If so, what changes would you make?”

5. “What is your personal definition of feminism? What are the key characteristics or beliefs associated with feminism? How do you practice your feminist beliefs through your appearance?”
6. “Do you associate any particular appearance characteristics with feminism?”
7. “How do you consider your appearance to represent feminism? Do you feel your appearance conflicts with your feminist beliefs? If so, how?”
8. “Are there certain ways you have altered your appearance in order to signal to others your ties to feminism? If so, how? Do you look for these visual signals in other feminists? If so, what are they?”
9. “How do you think other feminists perceive your appearance? How do you think non-feminists perceive your appearance? Do you believe others perceive you as a feminist? How do you know?”
10. “Has your appearance evolved over time? If so, how? In what way does this evolution reflect feminist awareness?”

Data Analysis

The procedure for my data analysis involved multiple steps. First, I analyzed each respondent’s answers separately to look for ways in which feminists think about their appearance. I then used the ABC construct to analyze and interpret their responses. In the analysis of my data, I aimed for as much thick description as possible. According to W. James Potter (1996), “it is through thick description that researchers convey the layers of context that are used by the social actors as they construct meaning” (pp. 154-155).

Thick description is necessary in this research project because I am specifically analyzing how meaning is attributed to visual form within specific contexts.

Some interview questions involved basic analysis of the ABC as a visual form, as in questions 1 and 2, when the respondent was looking at her photo. Because the context of the ABC is less of a concern in the photo, respondents were focused on analyzing their body and visual supplements: clothes and accessories as they interact with the body, body posture, facial expression, hair style, hand position, etc.

As I moved through the interview questions, context and environment became more important to the analysis. For example, question 3 asks specifically about context and appearance changes that the respondent may make based on where she is, who she is with, and what she is doing. Questions 4 and 5 address the respondent's personal preferences regarding her own appearance and how she personally defines feminism. Questions 6 and 7 deal with stereotypes, which DeLong (1998) defines as "a standard image or category invested with specific meaning held in common by members of a group" (p. 344). Question 8 examines how visual cues, possibly from a perceived stereotype, are used by the respondent to signal ties to feminism.

Question 9 asks about perception, both the respondent's self-perception and the way she believes others perceive her based on appearance. Finally, question 10 looks at evolution of appearance, based on feminist awareness. This question also deals with context and group membership.

I examined the interviews first as case studies and did close readings on each of them. Additionally, I used a grounded theory approach in conjunction with situational analysis when analyzing my data. "Grounded theory and situational analysis are both deeply *empirical* approaches to the study of social life through qualitative research and analysis" (Hesse-Biber, 2006, p. 345). This method involves closely reading one's data and letting the emergent patterns drive the theory.

After exploring each interview separately, I looked across the interviews broadly to search for similarities and differences within the emergent patterns. I used the software program NVIVO to code my data. Coding involves "the word (or short set of words) you

apply to the item of data...These are labels that classify items of info as pertinent to a topic, question, answer, or whatever” (Lofland & Lofland, 1995, p. 186). Coding helped to speed up the process of finding patterns and helped to find repetition within the interviews that I otherwise might have missed.

Chapter 4: Pulse Survey

As I stated in Chapter 3, a pulse survey was conducted prior to each interview in order to quickly gauge the participants' views on feminism and appearance. Below is the dialogue I used to begin each survey, along with an example of the survey itself.

"I am going to ask a few quick questions before we get started with the interview. Please check (✓) each corresponding scale, indicating your opinion. Place a check mark (✓) on 1 if 'not at all,' on 9 if 'all the time' or 'significant amount.' If you are neutral, please mark 5."

Table 1. Pulse Survey Tool

1. How much do you think about your appearance?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
Not at all				Neutral	All the time			

2. How much does your appearance reflect your feminist beliefs?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
Not at all				Neutral	Significant Amount			

3. How much do you feel appearance signals feminism?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
Not at all				Neutral	Significant Amount			

4. How important is feminism to you, personally?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
Not at all				Neutral	Significant Amount			

The following four graphs show a visual summary of the data acquired from the pulse survey. I will discuss what the graphs reveal about the participants' views below.

Table 2. Visual Summary of Pulse Survey Question 1

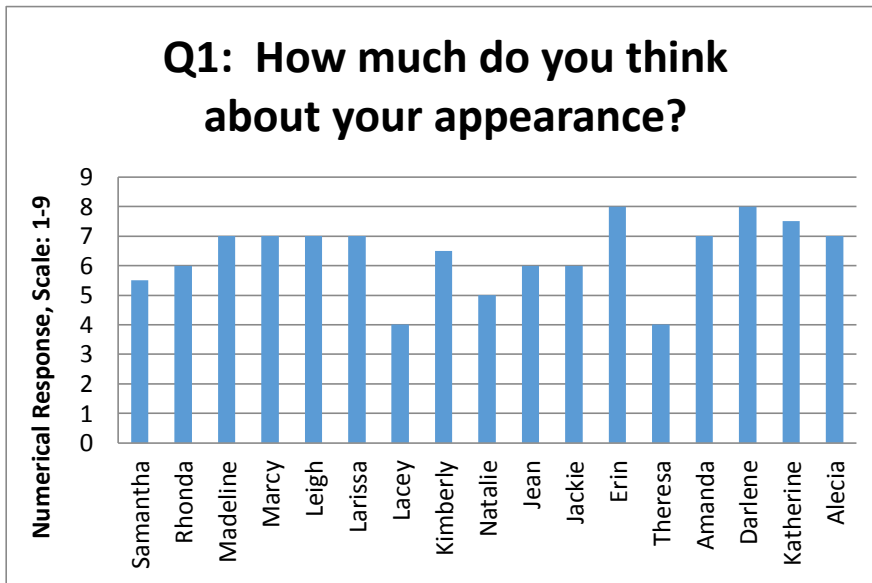


Table 3. Visual Summary of Pulse Survey Question 2

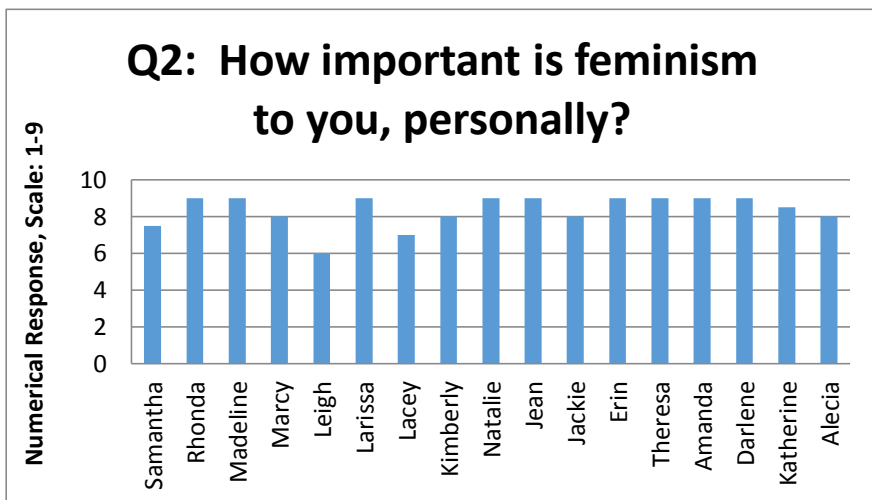


Table 4. Visual Summary of Pulse Survey Question 3

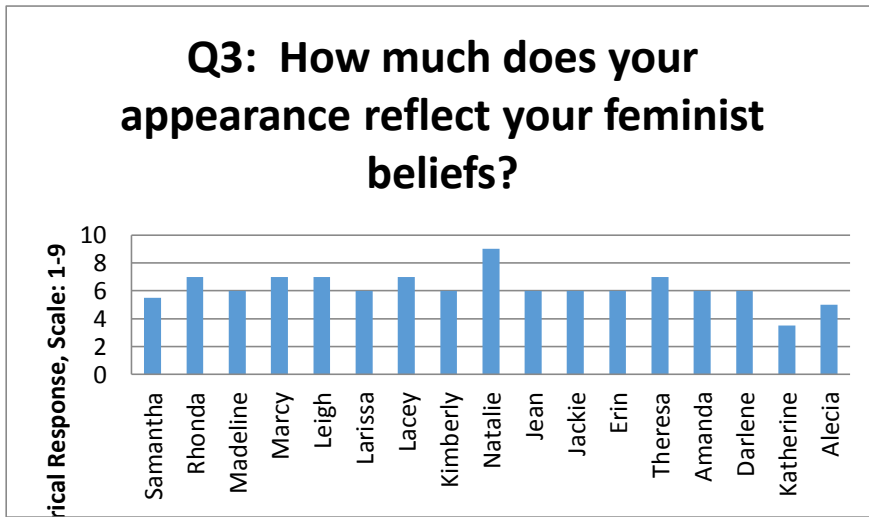
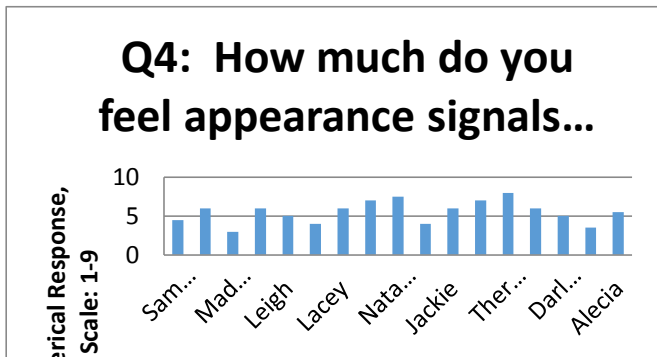


Table 5. Visual Summary of Pulse Survey Question 4

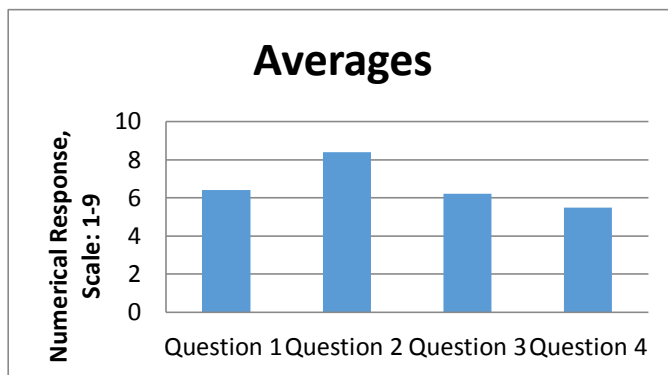


The following chart shows the averages of the scores for each question. All of the averages fall between 5 and 9, showing that average responses to each question are in

between “neutral” and “significant amount.” The answers closest to “significant amount” were those associated with question 2: “How important is feminism to you, personally?”

The question with the lowest average numerical response was question 4: “How much do you feel appearance signals feminism?” This tells me that the majority of the participants in my study feel very strongly aligned with the feminist movement, but they do not necessarily feel that feminism is signaled by appearance cues.

Table 6. Visual Summary of Pulse Survey Average Scores



- 1. How much do you think about your appearance?**
Average numerical response: 6.4
- 2. How important is feminism to you, personally?**
Average numerical response: 8.4
- 3. How much does your appearance reflect your feminist beliefs?**
Average numerical response: 6.2
- 4. How much do you feel appearance signals feminism?**
Average numerical response: 5.5

Level of Activism as shown in Pulse Survey

Hypothesis: the more active a self-identified feminist is in the women's movement, as identified in the pulse survey, the higher the probability she will choose to appear as a stereotypical feminist.

In this section, I will discuss what it means to be "active" in the women's movement. In the hypothesis, I state that the level of activism will be indicated by the pulse survey.

Thus, for this portion of the hypothesis I will focus on question 2 in the pulse survey, which reads "How important is feminism to you, personally?" I will use the numerical answer given on this survey in addition to an analysis of the participants' own discussions of activism during the interview process.

Second, I will deliberate what it means to "choose to appear as a stereotypical feminist."

I will look to the numerical responses given to questions 3 and 4 in the pulse survey for this portion of the hypothesis. Additionally, I will discuss certain stereotypes of feminist appearance.

Activism

What does it mean to be "active" in the women's movement? The 17 participants in my study identified as feminist and indicated that feminism is very important in their lives on the pulse survey completed prior to the interview. On question 2, respondents marked in the range between 6 and 9 on the scale, with 9 as the highest number possible, indicating "feminism is significantly important to me." The numerical answers to question 2 averaged out to be 8.4, indicating that feminism is very important to the respondents in my study. For the purpose of this analysis, I will equate the importance of

feminism in one's life with activism. I will defend this reasoning by exploring the verbal responses to interview questions regarding participants' interpretations of activism, thereby allowing for context.

Many respondents included an activist element in their definitions of feminism, but the specific types of activism varied widely. Sometimes the description of activism was in the form of what is widely considered traditional activism (such as attending marches and rallies), but alternative types of activism (such as teaching and talking to others about feminism) were also highlighted by participants. The latter example of activism hearkens back to the popular practice of consciousness-raising by women's liberation groups in the late 1960s.

- [Feminism is] addressing structural inequalities and making sure genders are equal, but I would expand it a little more, again with the idea of activism. I would say my teaching is activism. I think activism can be talking with your friends. It doesn't necessarily have to be like marching in a parade or something like that.
Erin

Some participants did not use the term "activism," but their definitions of what it means to be a feminist were active in nature. These definitions described actions such as "pushing back" against gender norms and "picking fights," verbally, when one witnesses something that offends their feminist sensibilities.

- I think feminism is a social movement or a social inequality that should be pushed back against. I see society organized around a lot of gender roles, and feminism, I think, is defying structures that are present in a lot of little ways that men and women are told to behave... Gender is sort of encoded in society in all of these ways, and I think feminism is pushing back against that on a number of fronts: Politically, socially, developmentally in how boys and girls are treated when they're growing up. Theresa

- The number one thing is having the courage to talk about [feminism]...maybe it's because I have a renewed sense of confidence in myself, but I'm definitely picking more fights now than I used to...I chewed this guy out on the bus the other day because he said he didn't believe in gay marriage. Amanda
- If I hear someone making a sexist comment, I will call them on it, and sort of be like, 'let's talk about why you're saying that' or just even off-hand remarks and I'll be like 'you know, that's kind of problematic to me because of this,' to sort of just think about and try to bring to light things that happen in every day, like actions or discussions or whatever that work to undermine women, to just call attention to those things... I will always try to say something there is making me uncomfortable...I also feel that it's an obligation that we have to try to not let things slide...even when I was dating, I would just make sure to pay for stuff, or open the door for people if I'm there first or to not let people treat me like "the lady," because that makes me uncomfortable. I don't want my treatment to be differentiated because of my gender. Katherine

One respondent describes how she takes part in different levels of activism throughout her day, whether in the form of trying to impress feminist ideals on her 15 year-old sister, reading and writing about feminist theory, or participating in a protest on the street.

- My sister is 15 now, so I totally understand how she feels about it, and kids that age are like the conformity police... It's just a matter of always talking to [my sister] about stuff that she's encountering and then introducing a kind of feminist-perspective to it...I spend most of my time reading and thinking and writing about feminism, but what I'm always trying to do more and more is to say something when no one else does...and the other day I was protesting, so I go to protests and things like that. Natalie

For some participants, the broad, umbrella definition of feminism is more activist in nature than their personal definition:

- [Feminism] is definitely trying to break down, actively breaking down [patriarchal structures]. It's kind of more activist in nature than my own personal [definition] would be. But of course that's just me speaking, and I've had choice. If I was presented with less choice, maybe I would be more activist...But I guess feminism with an "m" is more activist than my personal definition. [It's] actively

trying to break down structures that oppress women or non-normative sexuality in any way. Leigh

- A lot of work defines feminism, too, as a movement of activism. And for me, I think that's great, and I'm really happy that there are a lot of scholars and activists out there that are working on that, but I'm more of a desk chair activist. I want to be a feminist scholar and I want to be a professor, so when I do studies and I do work, I hope to always include gender analysis and feminist theory into my work. And that's not to say that maybe I won't be an activist as part of that, but just for me now, that's not my central focus. Alecia

For others, there is a sense that activism is not required of all feminists, but that all feminists must believe that it's possible for patriarchal power structures to be challenged.

- I think one can still be a feminist without being an activist. But I think there should be a level of activity there to try and be conscious about the ways in which [women are oppressed]. Marcy
- It would have to be that you felt it *could* be resisted, even if you didn't feel like there was anything that you could do that would have a huge impact or that there was going to be some kind of crumbling of patriarchy in the next few years. Natalie

Participants' Appearance vs. Stereotypical Feminist Appearance

I will now discuss the second part of my hypothesis, which refers to a participant choosing to appear as a stereotypical feminist. I will begin by examining the pulse survey data to questions 3 and 4, and follow up with an analysis of the participants' discussion of stereotypical feminist appearance cues.

Questions 3 and 4 of the pulse survey both refer to appearance cues associated with feminism. Question 3 asks "How much does your appearance reflect your feminist beliefs?" Questions 4 inquires "How much do you feel appearance signals feminism?"

The average of the numerical responses to question 3 was 6.2, which means it was closer

to “neutral” than “a significant amount” on the pulse survey scale. For question 4, the average of the numerical responses was 5.5, which is just above “neutral” on the scale. Question 3 refers to the participant’s personal appearance and its ties to her own feminist beliefs, while question 4 is asking about appearance cues of the wide population of feminists. Because the average answer to question 3 was higher than the average score on question 4, my assumption is that participants feel their own appearance cues are fairly closely aligned with their feminist beliefs, but that the appearance of their fellow feminists does not necessarily signal anything about feminist viewpoints.

During the interviews, I found that most participants had specific ideas of what a stereotypical feminist looks like. These stereotypes can be grouped into three “looks,” including the second wave feminist, the hippie, and most commonly, the “butch” woman. For a thorough discussion of the appearance cues associated with these stereotypes, please see Chapter 7.

When respondents discussed the evolution of their appearance they often described their personal style in the past as having consisted of characteristics associated with at least one of the stereotypes. For example, the following respondent explained how she felt the need to reject all appearance cues associated with femininity when she was a pre-teen.

- I knew that somehow I rejected what I was ‘supposed’ to look like. At 12 or 11 that’s a big part of your consciousness, so I hated pink and I didn’t want long hair, and as soon as I could get piercings, I did. And I wore kind of like punk or alternative clothing...I rejected mainstream appearances because I knew I didn’t adhere to that concept of what it meant to be a woman, but I don’t think I had any kind of intellectual understanding as to why... Rhonda

Often, respondents who had identified with one of the stereotypes in their past went on to describe a process of becoming accepting of a wide variety of appearances. This style evolution often coincided with the evolution of their understanding of feminism. For example, the respondent quoted above goes on to describe how she no longer has a problem with feminine appearance cues. She still tends to avoid overtly feminine cues, such as the color pink, as a personal style preference, but she no longer assumes that a woman displaying feminine appearance characteristics does not have feminist beliefs.

- I've evolved and I feel like there's absolutely nothing wrong with wearing pink. You can be a very ardent feminist and be very feminine, and there's nothing wrong with embracing those things. But what I was really rejecting was the notion of 'this is what it means to be a woman' or 'this is what it means in society to be a woman,' or what you're supposed to be. So now I'm rejecting that in different ways, through activism and education and just my intellectual life, I guess. So I feel like my appearance came, or how I look developed first out of a rejection, and now I understand it more in a better way. Rhonda

I believe the above statement is representative of the overall viewpoint gleaned from both the pulse surveys and the interviews. Feminism is very important to the participants in my study, and these respondents have specific ideas of what stereotypical feminists look like. They also feel that their appearance cues represent feminism, at least to some extent, but they do not necessarily believe their appearance reflects the stereotypical feminist "look." The most definitive answer I came away with after examining all of the data is that my respondents, most of whom have very open and fluid definitions of what it means to be a feminist, do not feel that a woman needs to look a specific way in order to represent the feminist movement.

Chapter 5: Appearance Cues as Described by Participants

In this chapter I will discuss my first research question using data from 17 of the 18 interviews I conducted. One interview will not be included in this analysis due to the fact that the participant did not meet the criteria of the study, as she did not self-identify as a feminist. All of my research questions are outlined in chapter 1 (p. 3), and I have included the question I am analyzing below, along with a supporting interview question that helped me answer the research question. The supporting interview question provides data for the emergent themes which helps address my hypothesis and over-arching research question. Some interview questions relate to more than one research question and often the research questions include data from more than one supporting interview question, so there may be some overlap in Chapters 5, 6, and 7.

Research Question #1: “How do self-identified feminists describe their appearance?”

Supporting interview question:

1. When looking at photo: “Describe your appearance in this photograph. Include everything from head to toe.”

My interview questions were guided by my research questions, which all relate to my overarching research question: “Are there appearance cues tied to feminism, and if so, does the perception of these cues shape society’s understanding of the current feminist movement?” My first research question, “How do self-identified feminists describe their appearance?,” relates to the first interview question: “Describe your appearance in the photograph, including everything from head to toe.” This question reflects the need to

define appearance and understand how participants in my research study describe their own appearance.

The appearance definition I decided to use is a combination of Joanne Eicher's definition of "dress" (1999), Robert Hillestad's definition of appearance (2005) and Marilyn DeLong's "Apparel-Body-Construct" (1998). (See Chapter 2, pp. 8-10 for a thorough discussion of "defining appearance.")

The first interview question was asked as the participant was looking at the photo I had just taken of her. (See Chapter 3, p. 25.) Most participants described their appearance by starting at the head and moving down the picture to their feet, noting different appearance elements in between. The answers to this question provided two kinds of data. Direct data came from the participant's observation of her own self-image. Additionally, indirect data was gleaned from using the photograph as a probe. As stated in chapter 3, the photograph worked as a probe in my interviews and pushed the participant to think in a very specific, detailed way about her appearance.

In the following sections I provide a summary of the appearance categories discussed by participants. Additionally, I include pictures of the participants who gave me permission to use their photos, along with excerpts from their descriptions of their appearance.

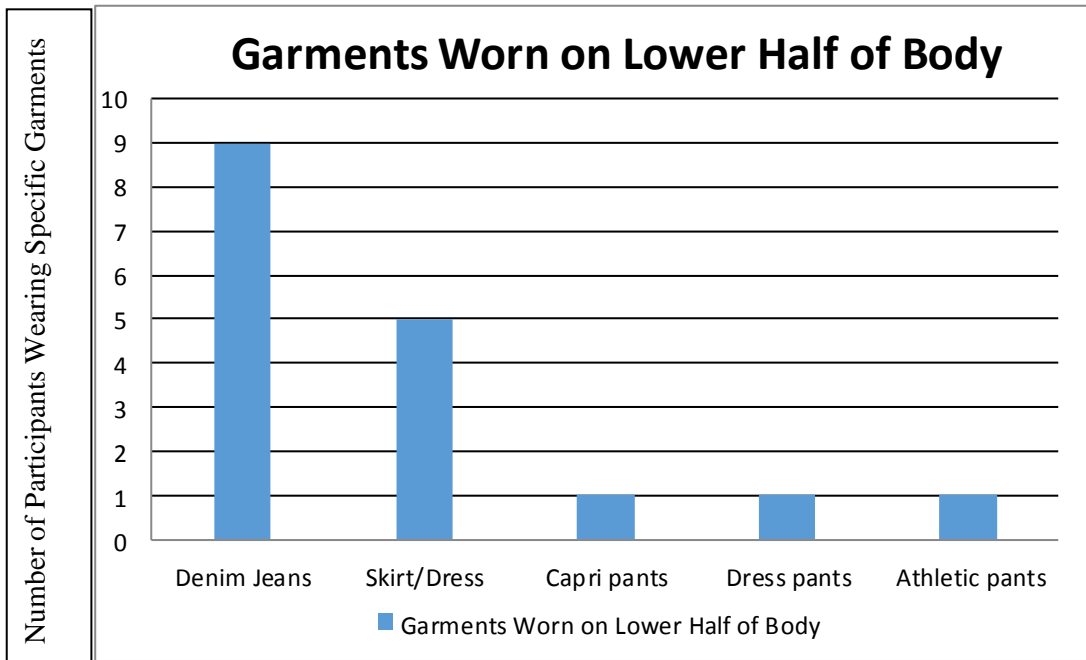
Appearance Categories

I broke down the participants' descriptions of appearance into several categories for easier analysis. First, I will discuss the clothing, footwear and accessories worn by the participants during the interviews. Next, I will focus on the participants' hair, nail polish, tattoos, makeup, body and scent.

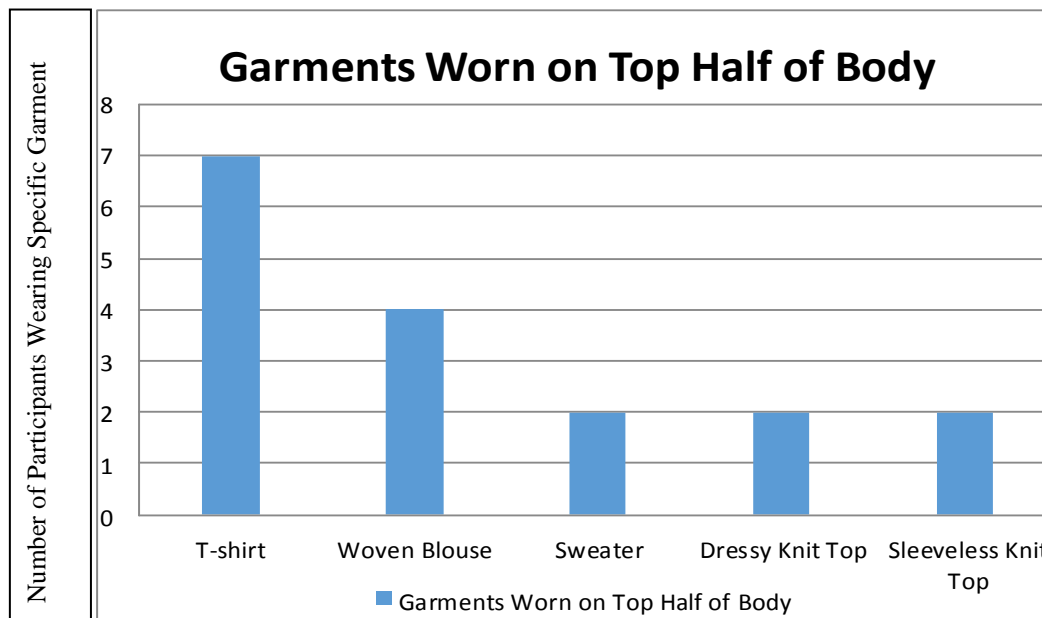
Clothing, Footwear and Accessories

Below is a summary of the items of clothing included in participants' descriptions of their appearance. I will first offer a description of the types of garments or accessories found in each category, and then I will offer a chart to assist in explanation.

The types of garments worn on the bottom half of the body varied widely. Much of this variation was due to factors such as where the interview was conducted (i.e. in the participant's home versus at the participant's place of work), along with the time of year the interview took place. The interviews were conducted during summer, fall and winter. Nine of seventeen participants were wearing denim jeans, one was wearing dress pants, one was in athletic pants and one was in capri pants. Five participants were wearing skirts or dresses. One such participant stated that wearing skirts was a new occurrence for her. "I only started wearing skirts I guess a year or so ago when I realized that pants were just not sustainable in the summer." (Lacey) The majority of participants were wearing jeans, which they explained were part of their at-home wardrobe, motivated by convenience, comfort, and function rather than fashion.

Table 7. Visual Summary of Garments Worn on Lower Half of Body

Garments worn on the top half of the body included the following: Seven of the seventeen participants were wearing t-shirts, while six were wearing a knit top or sweater, and four wore a woven blouse. Additionally, one participant wore a blazer over her woven blouse.

Table 8. Visual Summary of Garments Worn on Top Half of Body

Footwear

There was a wide variety of shoe styles worn in the photographs: Four of the seventeen participants were wearing sneakers, five wore open-toed shoes (flip-flops and sandals), three wore boots, two wore ballet-style flat shoes, one was photographed wearing socks only, while two participants had bare feet in the photographs.

A few participants gave reasons for their footwear. The reasons for wearing specific types of footwear were driven both by aesthetics and practicality. The participant wearing work boots stated that she switched to wearing sturdy, comfortable footwear as a result of what she learned in self-defense courses.

- I've taken a few self-defense courses...The main kind of defensive moves often involve kicking someone with your shoes. So I feel that having shoes with you can both comfortably run in and painfully kick someone with [is important]. It's quite important to feel confident about defending yourself. Natalie

Additionally, quite a few interviewees talked about flat shoes versus high-heeled shoes, and reasons for or against wearing each style. Most who talked about this debate felt that high heels were uncomfortable and therefore they chose not to wear them.

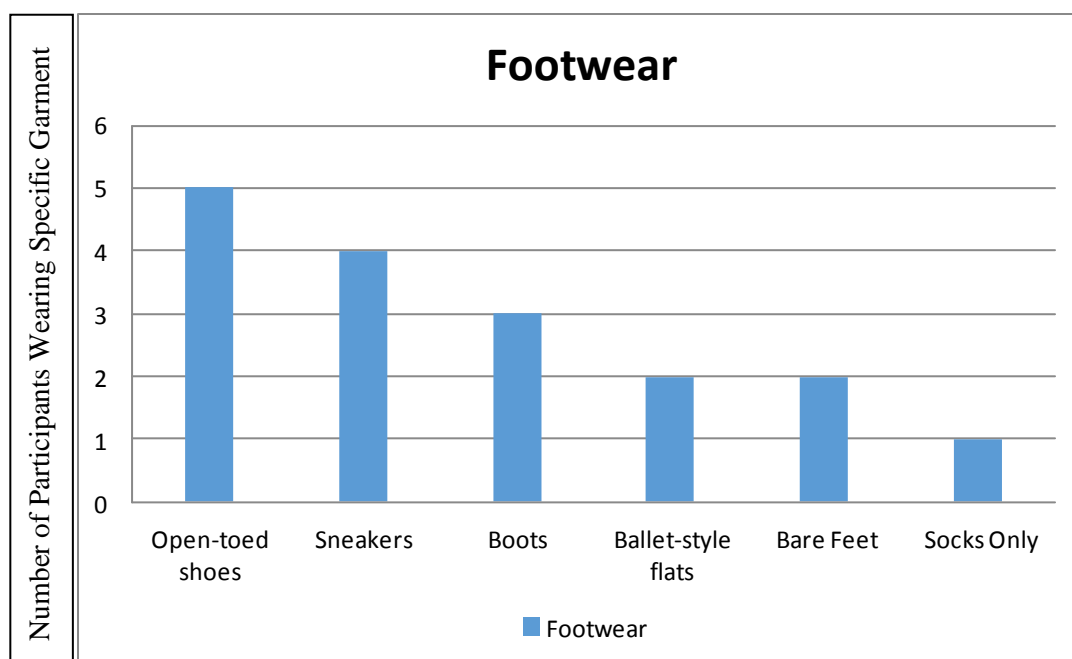
- I usually wear flats because I used to wear heels like all the time, when I was in high school. But then I just reached a point where I was like ‘this is just so uncomfortable.’ I love heels and I love the way they look, and that they make your legs look great and stuff, but I just feel like there are so many cute flats now, why suffer, and I can sort of follow that trend. Katherine

One participant had a personal physical painful experience with high heels which, when combined with feminist writings she has studied, led to no longer wearing heels.

- I didn’t wear *very* high heels, but I felt better when I was wearing them. I thought that I looked better, other people thought I looked better.... I think for me, the change in footwear to always *always* comfortable shoes -- and not even just flat shoes, because often flat shoes, women’s flat shoes, are made so badly they’re not comfortable at all -- that made me feel so much better about myself, actually. Natalie

Another participant stated that she does not like heels because she feels too tall when she wears them:

- I don’t wear high heels. I am a bit tall, so I look like a giant if I wear heels. Madeline

Table 9. Visual Summary of Footwear

Accessories & Jewelry

Some participants were wearing accessories which were visible in their photographs: three of the seventeen participants wore eyeglasses and three participants wore scarves.

Many participants wore some kind of jewelry, and many of these were pieces worn frequently, if not every day. These items had become extensions of the self. The majority of the interviewees stated the jewelry worn every day typically had some sentimental value attached to it. These pieces were often souvenirs from travels and gifts from family members. One participant wore a necklace given to her by her mother who was very ill:

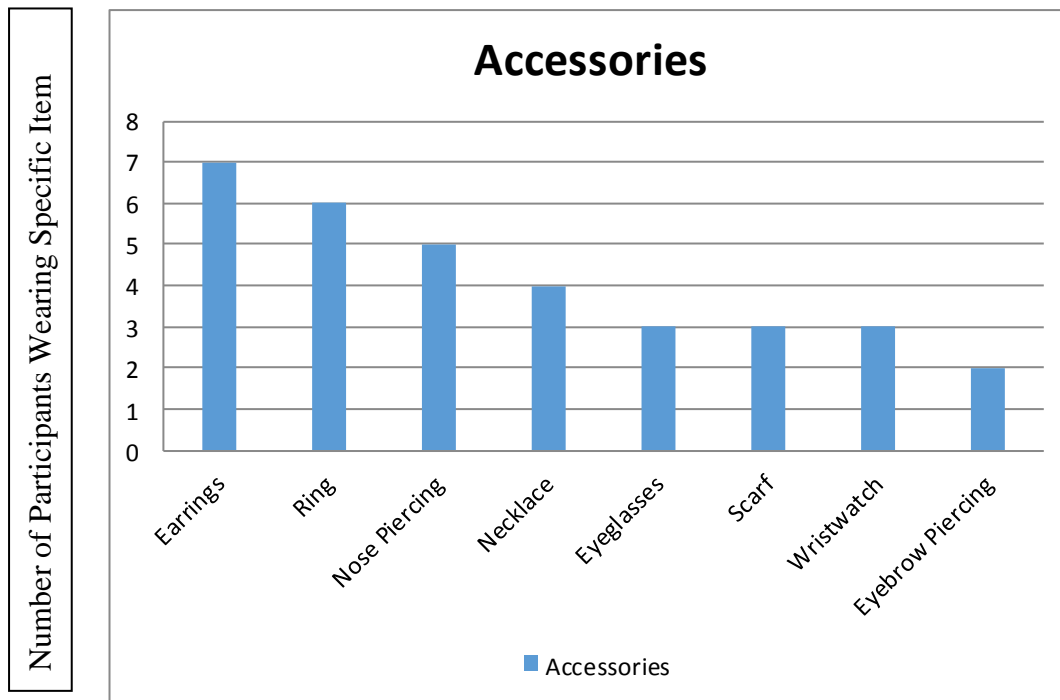
- [The necklace] makes me think of my mother and how fortunate I am to still have her in my life...I actually feel a little bit naked without it. I'm always clutching at my throat to make sure it's still there. Amanda

Some of the participants had pieces of jewelry that they explained were symbolic or had ties to their beliefs. For example, there were rings shared by the participants and their romantic partners (such as wedding bands and engagement rings), and there were pieces that symbolized gay pride and religious beliefs. There were also pieces of jewelry that participants explained as representing an affinity for literature and science fiction.

Five participants had nose piercings and two had their eyebrows pierced. All but one had pierced ears, but only seven participants were wearing earrings during the interview.

Interviewees were most talkative when it came to their nose piercings, and often remembered specific times for getting their noses pierced:

- I think it was definitely [to mark] a milestone...I think it was probably finishing my first year [of graduate school]. Lacey
- I got [my nose piercing] right at the end of my sophomore year of college. At the time it was a more liberal environment than I was accustomed to, which I loved, and I saw that a lot of other women on campus had nose studs. And I loved that...And there have been periods in my life where I've had an actual hoop in my nose, usually when I've been trying to convey a little more liberalness. But the past year, I don't know, I feel like maybe I've grown out of that a little bit. Amanda
- The reason I got [my nose piercing] was partially a feminist reason, because it doesn't necessarily conform to standard beauty norms, but I find it beautiful... It is my one little bit of transgressive dressing these days...In more formal situations where I think the nose ring will attract negative attention, I put a stud in and it's not very noticeable. But I would definitely never remove it entirely, because if they can't handle nose studs, they probably can't handle me. Marcy

Table 10. Visual Summary of Accessories

Hair

The topic of hair was the source of much discussion during the interviews: five of the seventeen participants had long hair (past their shoulders), eight had medium-length hair (above their shoulders), and four had hairstyles that were cropped very short.

Additionally, two respondents stated that they used to shave their heads.

The general consensus among the six respondents with long hair (past the shoulders) was that long hair requires less maintenance than short hair styles.

Some participants mentioned how their identity was tied to their hair.

- I cut off all of my hair a year ago, and was traumatized by it, and I feel like I didn't realize how much of it was my identity. I feel like my physical identity is bound up in my hair. I feel like that's probably true of a lot of women. Your hair is just a security blanket or whatever... So it's getting back to where

it was, so I feel more comfortable. I feel like I look better with it longer.
Katherine

One participant described how difficult it was to grow up with very curly hair, and also linked her hair to her identity:

- I was made fun of for [my curly hair] a lot when I was younger, but now my hair is a huge part of my identity. I only straightened it for the first time recently when my roommates convinced me to. The reason I didn't do it before was because I was afraid if I straightened it, people would say 'oh you look so much prettier now.' I was very ashamed of it, so I wore my hair up a lot...Now I have a different confidence; I wear it down almost every single day. I love my hair. Amanda

The topic of hair color was also something most participants had thought about, and many had experience with it. At the time of the interview, eight participants were sporting dyed hair, though many whose hair was natural stated that they had dyed their hair in the past.

Finally, two participants stated that they used to shave their heads. One said the decision to shave her head was "definitely feminist" while the other stated that shaving her head was about looking non-normative:

- The decision to shave it was definitely feminist. That was really to divert male attention, or at least the kind of male attention that I did not want, and maybe to attract the male attention that I did want. Marcy
- I've worn it shaved or cut close to my head for many years, and I've been thinking about going back to that, but I haven't yet because I like the way it feels long and I'm comfortable with it and everything, but also I think it's pretty feminine the way it is right now, and I think that's part of looking kind of normal, normative at work or at school. Larissa

Nail Polish, Tattoos and Makeup

Four respondents were wearing polish on their fingernails, and six had toenail polish which was visible in the photograph. It is possible that more participants had painted

toenails, but if so their feet were covered by socks/shoes, so they did not show up in the photograph and therefore were not discussed during the interviews.

One respondent whose toenails were visible began her self-description by talking about her painted toenails. She stated that her turquoise toenails were a form of self-expression related to feminism (I will revisit this respondent's views on nail polish and manicures when I discuss feminist appearance cues.):

- I would feel a little too conventional wearing a normal toenail color, like a normal red or a fire engine red. I could never see myself with a French manicure. Lacey

Another participant stated that she also prefers less conventional colors than the typical pinks or reds.

- I just like interesting colors. I hate wearing red or pink nail polish. I don't know that I even own a bottle. I just love blues or blacks. I like green nail polish, too. Amanda

Four participants talked about their tattoos, and two of these respondents had several tattoos. Often the participants considered their tattoos to be symbolic. Interestingly, two participants each had a tattoo of a phoenix, the symbol of rebirth, which they both got after enduring hardships. Another respondent had a tattoo of a fiddlehead fern, which she chose for similar reasons:

- My little sister drew it for me...I wanted a fiddlehead because I got it at a time of real change and growth, and that felt like a symbol of growth, a picture of growth to me. Larissa

Another participant stated that she views her tattoo as a marker of a milestone (graduating from college) and that she plans on getting another tattoo when she finishes her PhD. 1 interviewee stated that she views tattooed women as an "alternate version of femininity" (Marcy) and that specifically one of her tattoos, a mermaid, was linked to feminism and

femininity. Finally, two participants indicated that their tattoos had ties to family members and mentors.

I asked all participants about cosmetics/makeup they were wearing in the photograph, and most stated that they only wore makeup if leaving home. Three participants said they never wore makeup, even if leaving home. One of the respondents who said she never wears makeup stated that she wants to “look like me, naturally, intentionally” (Theresa). Another participant discussed her former dependence on makeup and why she decided to stop wearing cosmetics completely:

- The more I thought about it, the more I realized I felt compelled to put on makeup, like I felt rubbish if I went out without it. I didn't like looking at myself if I wasn't wearing it. I was late for things because I would put it on... Unless you can get absolutely used to not wearing makeup and remove the fear factor, then you're not really doing it as truly as you might like to believe. So that's why I completely stopped wearing makeup. Natalie

Eight respondents wore very minimal makeup, usually consisting of foundation, face powder and mascara. Most of the participants who wore makeup discussed feeling self-conscious in public with no makeup.

- I never leave the house without foundation, just because I'm not crazy about my skin quality. Lacey

Seven participants wore a more substantial amount of makeup, and expressed how they feel better when wearing makeup and how putting on makeup is a creative process.

- Sometimes I get up late and just say 'I don't care,' but I feel better when I am wearing makeup. So usually [I wear] color around my eyes and some blush and some lipstick, but I never wear foundation...And somebody actually asked me about my makeup at one time, saying 'well don't you think that's kind of phony to be putting on makeup?' I don't think anybody believes that my eyelids are naturally purple. I like the color there... I like being colorful. Jean

- Makeup is a recent thing for me. I never wore makeup until a little over a year ago when I broke up with my fiancé', and at that point I sort of went through a huge, well gradual, makeover. Amanda
- I guess in my mind makeup is just kind of like painting. It's just a creative outlet. I do my makeup differently all the time when I'm going out. It's kind of a fun way to change your look...I actually find it really fun. Katherine

Scent

I also asked participants about their use of scent, as the sense of smell is integral to the definition of appearance that I'm using. A few participants mentioned the body lotions they used which had scent, but only one participant stated that she normally wears perfume every day:

- I have two main perfumes that I choose what day I want to wear them...I think it's a big deal to me to smell nice and be confident with that, you know just for me or for people around me, I guess. Alecia

A few participants who stated that they do not wear perfume gave reasons for this choice:

- I've become a lot more conscious of people who are just really bothered by perfume and have allergies and I don't want someone to be stuck with me in a closed environment and react poorly to it, so it just not worth it. Lacey
- I'm pretty simple in what I choose to wear, and I think [not wearing a scent] is in line with that. Theresa
- I guess I live in fear of being that lady who wears too much perfume, because I think that would be too much of a feminine or sexualized statement to wear perfume on a regular basis. Jackie

Body

Several interviewees mentioned weight or other issues they have with their bodies, which sometimes limited the types of clothing they would wear. A more thorough discussion of body image issues is included in Chapter 6.

- I wore jeans all through the summers in Florida when I was younger, because I just did not feel comfortable showing my body at all. Lacey

A few participants remarked on their posture and pose in the photographs. Sometimes the respondents felt their analysis of posture reflected their level of comfort or confidence.

- I guess I'll start with my posture. Relaxed, which is generally how I usually am. Kimberly
- I was going to talk about my pose first. When people take pictures of me by myself, when it's just me in the picture...I'm a little bit awkward. Alecia

Finally, when describing their appearance in the photograph, a couple of participants mentioned their skin color:

- I'm white. I don't just want that to be the default, just assumed. Jean
- That's also something I'm sort of self-conscious about is being really, really pale. And, I feel like, as everybody gets older, we become more comfortable with, like you just come to realize that's just what you got, and there's not much you can do about it, and everybody's different. So I feel like I'm getting more comfortable with it. When I was little, my nickname was 'Casper,' and you know, I just felt like I was kind of strange-looking. Katherine

Images of Respondents

The majority of the participants in my study allowed me to use their photos in my work. I have included the photos here, along with a brief description each respondent gave when looking at her photo.

Figure 1. Samantha



“I see that I have not done anything with my hair, and I’m somewhat uncharacteristically not wearing a bra right now, because I’m not working, which is kind of interesting. And I’m wearing jeans and shoes inside, and I haven’t done anything so far to my appearance, because I haven’t gone outside. Sometimes I would look like this going outside, and then other times I would do a little bit more because I know that I’m going to be seen... I don’t have any kind of perfume on. I sprayed something into my hair just because it was driving me crazy, so I flattened it out a little bit. And my skin is relatively clear... And I’m wearing my glasses, which I usually do. Sometimes I wear contacts, but usually I’m too lazy, so I wear glasses... I don’t wear jewelry that often. Actually, interestingly enough, I’m actually missing something that now I’m going to freak out about. I have this pride bracelet that is now not on my wrist, so I need to figure out where that is. But I usually just wear this ring, which is a ring that she [my partner] and I both have, and occasionally a necklace, and usually no earrings, although I do have a second hole in one ear. But yeah, I don’t do a lot of jewelry. And I don’t usually wear things in my hair.” - Samantha

Figure 2. Rhonda

“I’m wearing flip-flops, which I do most every day and blue jeans that are too long for me because I’m really short and they don’t make jeans my size. A green t-shirt, green is my favorite color, so I wear a lot of it, probably too much of it... I have short hair, kind of spiked out-ish sometimes; I don’t guess it is today that much. And my regular jewelry that I wear every day...I have an Ohm necklace because I study Buddhism, so that’s what my necklace is. I have my nose pierced and my eyebrow pierced, just regular stud earrings right now, and I usually wear, but I’m not today, have jewelry on my wrist, a bracelet that says “peace comes from within” and a spoon ring and a ring with a Buddhist mantra on it, and that’s about it...It’s my natural hair color right now. I did have bright pink in it and then that faded a lot, so now it looks like blonde streaks, which I usually don’t have... I have on eyeliner and mascara and that’s all I ever wear.”

Rhonda

Figure 3. Madeline

“I’m a little bit over weight, and let’s see, I’m a brunette and I have short hair, relatively. I’m wearing a girly dress and I’m wearing a t-shirt underneath, because it is a bit too much revealing for the day. And I have golden shoes, which people are usually interested in. They ask me funny questions about my golden shoes, and what else? I’m smiling, and I look girly overall, pretty girly in an average sense.” - Madeline

Figure 4. Marcy

“I’m wearing Capri pants and a zebra-striped multi-colored t-shirt. I have my hair pulled back because I was too lazy to wash it this morning. I’m also noticing I have sandals on because they’re comfortable in the summer. I like the color of the toenail polish I selected; it’s like a deep blood red, almost purple. I generally pick longer shorts because I’m usually too lazy to shave my legs, or too busy I should say. Though it’s also partially a political decision not to shave my legs as frequently as some women do... I just don’t feel like it’s that important to shave your legs daily. Hair grows there and it should be allowed to grow there...I have quite a few piercings. Many more than I wear on a daily basis. And I’ve taken quite a few of them out, and it’s not necessarily because of my position at the university or as a teacher. It was a decision I made because of my fieldwork. I do fieldwork in both liberal and conservative churches, so that was a decision mostly because of how I would be perceived.” - Marcy

Figure 5. Larissa

“I put this product called “control paste” in my hair. It’s an Aveda product... I put this cheek stain on my cheeks. And then I get dressed... That’s the only makeup I put on. That’s pretty much all I ever put on. I occasionally put on mascara if I’m like going out to dinner or something, but otherwise I just put on cheek stuff... I don’t think it took me very long time to get dressed this morning. Oh, I stayed in my house for a long time, so I put on pajamas after I got out of the shower, and then I put on what I’m wearing which is a black shirt and I had earrings on, but I took them out. I have on a black skirt, which is really comfortable, like really stretchy, teal tights, and black flat shoes, and this scarf... There’s an orange side and a green side. And I wear this scarf probably every day. Well, no. Probably two thirds or the time, and there’s other scarves that I wear the other third of the time.” - Larissa

Figure 6. Leigh

“I like big earrings, and jewelry is important, like I don’t wear much makeup so I guess I tend to default to jewelry a lot. I’m really pale and I always wear black, and especially when I see it in pictures, I’m always like ‘wow.’ *laughs* I still like black a lot...I just let my hair air dry. I have curly hair. I spent the night up talking, so it straightens out, so it’s kind of like yesterday’s curly. I don’t wear makeup on my face. I do wear mascara... I wear Chap Stick, it’s reflective. And I do wear stuff for dark circles under my eyes, you know, because I am in grad school. Yeah, I did wear blush last night, so I might have some of that on as well...My jeans are really old... I also feel like I kind of look out of style a little bit.”
Leigh

Figure 7. Lacey

“I shaved, actually this afternoon right before I tutored because I was going to wear a skirt. And I usually shave only if my legs are going to be shown, which is not very frequently. I’m wearing a skirt, which is fairly unusual for me. I only started wearing skirts I guess a year or two ago, when I realized that pants were just not sustainable in the summer... But this is kind of my go-to utility skirt. It’s comfortable, it’s neutral, and it’s light. So, I went for this over capris because it was more comfortable. I’m wearing a top I really like. I just got it on sale at Kohl’s. And I especially like it because it has a banded bottom, so it looks a little more professional and age appropriate. So, I’m either trying to transition toward more professional-looking t-shirts.” - Lacey

Figure 8. Natalie

“So, my hair, I try to spend as little time and money on it as possible. I don’t have to do anything to style it. It just kind of goes like this... So this morning I washed my hair. And then if I have to leave the house, then I’ll blow dry it, but it doesn’t require anything done to it...I have thought about getting it cut much shorter, I suppose because I feel like there’s some value in androgyny. But I think actually, if I were to get it cut much shorter, I think it would take more time to do stuff with because then I suppose it would require...it would much more easily look what people think is bad. And so I would then have to make more negotiations about whether to put in an effort to make it not look like what they think is bad, which I may or may not. So that’s kind of why it is how it is.” - Natalie

Figure 9. Jean

“I have brown hair. It’s kind of medium length and straight and kind of, I don’t know, kind of poufy. I would like it to curl or to be straight, and it just doesn’t. I have blue eyes, and I think I have a big smile, and the gap in my front teeth is prominent, which I like. I’m not very tall. I’m kind of thin, but kind of curvy. Today I’m wearing a black tank top and a crazy complicated skirt. It’s blue and purple and green, and kind of flowy and different pieces that move around. I like that, but it’s also complicated. I don’t wear it if I have to walk around campus a lot because I have to grab onto it... I’m wearing kind of heels, let’s see, yeah, sandals with heels, but they’re comfy to walk in. And today I have on more jewelry than usual. I’m wearing big hoop earrings, but I always wear my wedding ring.” - Jean

Figure 10. Jackie

“I have medium [length] curly hair. I always feel awkward, like I don’t know how to smile or hold my chin in pictures... And I’m wearing a black wrap t-shirt and dark blue jeans, and I’m not wearing shoes or socks, and you can see my toenails are red, which I think is just kind of there leftover from various weddings and events... I notice in this picture I am chunkier than I see myself, because I always see myself in that mirror (points to the mirror in her living room), which is the best mirror ever. So I prefer to think of that mirror as the reality. And I don’t look as pale as I usually look... These are kind of my good jeans right now.” - Jackie

Figure 11. Theresa

“I guess I see my outfit first, and I’m comfortable. I feel comfortable in it and I look comfortable. It’s Sunday, and I was out running and working out this morning, so I sort of chose something that I think reflects that mood I was in this morning, like athletic pants. And my shirt is a rowing shirt, which was my career for a long time. And yeah, my hair looks a little bit goofy today, because it was still wet when I styled it, but other than that, I look like me. I look like me, actually before I went to grad school. I was a coach and I dressed in a lot of athletic apparel...I basically never wear makeup, so it looks like me, naturally, intentionally.” Theresa

Figure 12. Amanda



“I used face wash and face lotion this morning. I tweezed my eyebrows a little bit. And then I put on yellow eye shadow to match my shirt, and then I put a little mascara on, even though I don’t really think I need it too much... And then I have some Burt’s Bees lip gloss. Okay, and then I’m wearing a mustard (colored) shirt, which I bought because it was like \$2, and this scarf that my mom got me... So I’m wearing a sparkly green scarf, and then I layered with blue, some kind of blue spaghetti strap tank top. And my good jeans that aren’t ripped at the bottom, because they made for short people. And then I’m wearing my really old beat up sneakers without socks because I’m lazy. And then I used like body wash and Jergen’s lotion today. I shaved my armpits with men’s shaving cream, because I have a thing against women’s shaving cream. I don’t know if that’s a feminist thing or not. I’m wearing my college ring, which is my other standard piece of jewelry... It’s from Bates, I went to State for undergrad. It’s in southern Maine. And I’m wearing my mom’s earrings.” - Amanda

Figure 13. Katherine

“This is sort of just how I usually dress. I like to wear things that are kind of cute and a little bit different. I really like fashion, so I like the idea of mixing patterns and textures and stuff like that, so, I feel like I dress pretty conventionally, but I like to have one piece that something is a little bit sort of fun looking and unique, like this top, I guess (points to the top she’s wearing in the picture). But I also feel like I like to be somewhat covered. So I guess I’m not showing skin and stuff, but I try to dress for the weather. But nothing’s like hanging out there. And then, I guess the same thing with the jeans, just trying to be comfortable. They’re kind of cutesy just by having the like shorter, cropped [length]. And then with the flats, I usually wear flats... I love heels and I love the way they look, and that they make your legs look great and stuff, but I just feel like there are so many cute flats now that, why suffer and I can sort of follow that trend [flats].” Katherine

Figure 14. Alecia

“I was going to talk about my pose first. When people take pictures of me by myself, when it’s just me in the picture, I often am like ‘okay, so there’s no one to put my arm around, am I going to do the sideways look?’ So I think that’s kind of showing how I’m a little bit awkward. *laughs* But I guess for me this is sort of typically what I wear to class. I generally wear nice jeans, like no holes, and then a nicer top... on my days off I might wear a t-shirt or something, but I felt ‘oh I’ll dress like it were a class day.’ So I’m wearing just a simple shirt and a cardigan and some boots... I do have to wake up early and take a shower and get ready for the day and everything and blow dry my hair, because I do struggle with my hair if I let it just air dry. It can get this like weird curly mess, so blow dry, some days I straighten. Today I straightened. And some makeup and perfume and I’m ready to go. So this is just typically how I look.” - Alecia

Summary

In summary, the participants in my study are all women approximately between the ages of 23 and 30. They look like any young woman you might meet on the street, or especially on a college campus. After speaking with each of them, it seems that they do not feel there is anything especially remarkable or significant about the way they dress on an average day. The most common appearance cues were tied to beliefs that did not have to do with feminism. Rather, they were tied to religion, such as the Buddhist necklace Rhonda was wearing, or signs of devotion to a loved one, such as a wedding or engagement ring. As stated previously, the pictures were helpful in that they prompted the participants to think specifically about their appearance. This attention to detail carried through to the rest of the interview questions, which I will discuss in the following chapters.

Chapter 6: Feminist Beliefs Tied to Appearance

Research Question #2: “How do feminist beliefs impact the way self-identified feminists like to look?”

Supporting interview questions:

5. “What is your personal definition of feminism? What are the key characteristics or beliefs associated with feminism? How do you practice your feminist beliefs through your appearance?”
6. “Do you associate any particular appearance characteristics with feminism?”
7. “How do you consider your appearance to represent feminism?” “Do you feel your appearance conflicts with your feminist beliefs? If so, how?”
10. “Has your appearance evolved over time? If so, how? In what way does this evolution reflect feminist awareness?”

I will begin analyzing the data that relates to this research question by first examining how the respondents in my study define “feminism,” and second, by looking at how feminist beliefs impact one’s appearance. I will consider the two parts of this question separately to begin with, and then look at what conclusions regarding feminist appearance I can determine by examining both of the components of the question together.

- We should never expect to agree. Feminism has always thrived on and grown from internal discussions and disagreements. Our many different and often opposing perspectives are what is pushing us forward, honing our theories, refining our tactics, driving us toward a more thorough dismantling of the white supremacist capitalist patriarchy... (Jervis, 2006, p. 17)

In order to fully answer my research question, it is necessary to understand the various meanings each participant associates with feminism because the definitions are so wide and varied.

I asked each of the 17 respondents in my study about her definition of feminism. This was a two-part question -- first regarding what the participant thought the general definition of feminism included, and secondly, her personal definition of what it means to be a feminist. I clarified this question by telling each respondent: “When I ask about feminism, I am asking about the larger group/movement of which you are a part. When I use the word ‘feminist’, I am asking about your personal experiences and beliefs.” For the purpose of this study, feminism refers to the feminist movement as a whole, while feminist refers to personal meanings associated with feminism (the specific personal beliefs that the respondent feels make her a feminist).

This summary outlines many interesting revelations regarding what it means to be a feminist, both in terms of my respondents’ specific beliefs and the commonalities they believe feminists share. Often my participants began their discussions of feminism by starting with a broad “umbrella” definition, describing what, if anything, they believe all feminists have in common. Participants then moved to a discussion of their specific personal beliefs, defining what it means to each of them to be a feminist.

When discussing the big picture or “umbrella” definition of feminism, most respondents mentioned gender and hierarchy. They also spoke about diversity, celebrating individuality, and the importance of stopping all forms of oppression, rather than simply

ending sexism. These beliefs are in alignment with the 3rd wave of feminism, but several of my respondents stated that they find the wave model in general to be too limiting.

When asked about their personal definitions of what it means to be a feminist, themes that emerged included: the importance of respect and choice, the prevalence of structural inequality, the need for an activist component, acknowledgement of privilege, the persistence of dualism, and the connection to humanism. The respondents' views on feminism, both specific and broad, will be addressed in depth later in this chapter.

For most people who study feminism academically, their personal definition of feminism and what it means to be a feminist is constantly evolving, and depends on what they're currently reading, what classes they're taking, who they're talking to and exchanging ideas with, etc. It would be incredibly difficult to find two feminists who agree on one definition of feminism exactly. Most feminists, especially those actively studying feminist theory, will admit that their own definitions are frequently changing. Some of my participants acknowledged the likelihood of this evolution, adding qualifying statements like "right now, my definition of what it means to be a feminist..."

Additionally, participants showed nervousness when asked to define what the word "feminist" meant for them, personally. This trepidation seemed to be equally present among respondents no matter how long they had been studying feminist theory. The difference in respondent education levels is addressed more fully below.

Many participants were also hesitant to give a definition for the whole movement, sometimes stating that they did not want to set up boundaries for feminism, or limit who can be considered a feminist. 21st century feminists are known for shying away from

labels and seeking to pluralize, to be inclusive, and the participants in my study were no exception.

- I think within [feminism] there are a lot of different camps and a lot of different variables. But it's not up to me to say what feminists need to believe. Marcy
- I think the main [component] of feminism is improving the access to opportunities for women, *all* women. So access to opportunities and respect for women. I think those are the keys. But beyond that, I wouldn't want to put any limits or definitions, because I think different people have different feminisms. Jean
- I think that *all* feminists don't really share much of anything. Samantha
- Obviously feminism is pluralized. There are so many different brands of it, according to so many different perspectives. Amanda

Education levels

It is important to acknowledge the difference in education levels among the respondents, specifically, the number of graduate-level feminist courses taken, as this varied greatly between participants, and feminist course work often alters one's definition of feminism.

I interviewed new graduate students in their first semester in a master's program as well as students who were about to defend their dissertation, and women at every level of graduate education in between. Interestingly, the degree of trepidation around giving one's definition of feminism did not differ based on one's level of education. Some respondents who were on the cusp of getting their doctorates in feminist theory were even more hesitant to nail down a specific definition than those who had less knowledge of the feminist movement. As I stated in Chapter 2, the more a person learns about the history of feminism and its various iterations, the harder it can become to define.

- I've taken a few women and gender studies classes, and even in the foundation course I never sat down to define [feminism] for myself. Alecia

Feminist authors cited

Some participants cited specific authors and bodies of work to help explain their own views of feminism. Often, the authors cited were those that participants had read and connected with in feminist theory classes and had shaped the participants' understanding of feminism. Most of the authors referenced by respondents are considered to be 2nd wave theorists, but are often viewed as "rebellious" within the group of 2nd wave feminist authors who are normally studied in feminist theory courses. These women often push at the boundaries of feminist theory and challenge the status quo. The work of this group of authors reveals a great deal about the ideals of my respondents, as well. Below is a list of the authors cited by the respondents in my study.

Marilyn Frye is a feminist theorist perhaps best known for her book of essays, *The Politics of Reality* (1983), in which she discusses sex markers. A participant explained the concept:

- Sex marking, like when you kind of acknowledge the sex of the other person when you're interacting with them, or ways which are in themselves quite demeaning to women because their kind of behavior is more submissive, the female clothing is more restrictive. Natalie

Iris Marion Young wrote a great deal about global justice and democracy through a feminist lens, while also talking about gender and race in her book *Justice and the Politics of Difference* (1990).

Audrey Lorde fought against the limitations of the label “feminist,” focusing on the importance of feminism in the lives of all African Americans. “As a perceived outsider on many fronts, Lorde believed that bringing together divergent groups can only strengthen and heal a torn society” (Andrews, 1997).

- When I say I am a Black feminist, I mean I recognize that my power as well as my primary oppressions come as a result of my Blackness as well as my womanness, and therefore my struggles on both these fronts are inseparable. (Lorde, 1988, p.26)

Judith Butler is perhaps the most well-known contemporary feminist theorist cited by the respondents in my study. Her most famous writing, *Gender Trouble* (1990), deals with gender, and specifically the fluidity of gender, rather than the binary system that only has room for male and female genders. She also has been vocal about the problems she sees within the feminist movement, most often related to gender and limitations she believes the group is placing on its members.

One respondent stated that she relates to Butler’s work because “When you kind of naturalize your system by going along with it as though it’s not an act, then you’re in fact perpetuating the problem.” Natalie

Feminism -- big picture of the whole movement

As I stated above, the respondents in my study often started their discussion of feminism by speaking broadly about what they view as the commonalities between feminists. This exploration of the big picture of the feminist movement resulted in common themes among the participants. I explore those themes in greater depth in this section.

Most of my respondents have a very inclusive definition of the larger feminist movement.

They often stated that feminism is about more than sexism, and that we can't move forward as a society until we address all forms of oppression. Some participants were hesitant to give a definition for the whole feminist movement because they did not want to limit feminism to a single definition. As stated before, feminism means many different things to different people, and my respondents wished to be respectful of that.

- Broadly, I'd say it's about being able to recognize that women have been and still are in a second class citizen status, and then taking active steps to combat that. Whether it's in your everyday life or in a group setting or what have you. Kimberly
- At the very minimum, I think feminism is the recognition that women are human and deserve equal regard with all humans...I think that's kind of the foundation...big tent-wise, I think feminism is a constant process of interrogation and questioning. Lacey
- I think it is respecting yourself as a woman, having a certain kind of independence, not personal independence but independence from the predominant beliefs in society, and knowing and accepting that there are injustices and these should be overcome...I think [my definition] is much more humanistic, not necessarily feminist, but also there is an element of humanism in feminism as well. Madeline
- The core beliefs are probably the equality of gender/sexes, the economic/social/political equality between women and men. And there is probably an activist component of some sort that we need to address structural inequality in ways that promote this equality. Erin
- Not believing in the way the status quo is, has any kind of normative value...I guess I'd call it a progressive belief in some sense. Jackie

The Wave Model & Beyond

As noted in chapter 2, there are generally considered to be 3 waves of feminism. The first wave consisted of women (and a few men) during the 1800s and early 1900s who

were most passionate about voting rights. The second wave of feminism was most active during the 1960s and 1970s, and the focus of the movement expanded to include racial minority rights and gay rights, but eradicating sexism remained the central issue. What followed is known as the third wave.

The third wave is generally considered to be comprised of women who were born during the second wave -- “daughters” of the second wave who wanted to put their own stamp on the movement. Characteristics of the third wave include a high level of inclusion in terms of who the members of the movement are fighting for. Members of the third wave seek equality for all races, sexualities, and classes, rather than looking simply at the division between men and women.

Although some would argue we are still in the midst of the third wave of feminism, this movement is considered by many (including scholars and participants within the movement) to have hit its peak in the 1990s.

Several respondents in my study self-identified as 3rd wave feminists. Additionally, many of these participants referred to the evolution of the feminist movement from the 2nd wave to what they perceive the feminist movement’s key characteristics and beliefs to be today.

- I have a more 3rd wave understanding of feminism...I think feminism means accepting that there is a prevalent inequality, not necessarily between the sexes, but between people as well. That is why I cannot understand people who identify themselves as feminist can overlook the fact that there is a huge inequality between men themselves or certain classes. Madeline
- In the beginning it was all these white, often Jewish, women who would just talk about these middle class white women and their need to get back into the work force...what about feminists of color, women of color, and their unique positions and their insider/outsider status? Alecia

- I'm really 3rd wave or queer feminist, so I'm kind of of the understanding in which the patriarchy, the system in society where white men have all the power, hurts everyone, including white men...I'm really into finding equality for people that exist outside of the binary. So not necessarily just men or women, but intersex people, transgender people, gay and lesbian people, things like that. So I think the 2nd wave notion of men and women is really limiting...With traditional women's rights, we still have a lot of work to do, but we've made a lot of advances and far less has happened for GLBT people. So I'm probably more queer-based than other feminists, but I still think it's within the realm of feminists' definition of feminism. Rhonda
- Feminism isn't just a white middle class female, you know, Betty Friedan type thing. It also has to take into account a diversity of women's experiences... Something I really do like about the 3rd wave is that feminism isn't just about 'let's get women out of the house and into the work force, you know, break the glass ceiling.' It's about 'What's going on with third world women? What does feminism mean to them when they can't feed their kids?' Amanda

Beyond the third wave

Third wave feminists allow for much more fluidity and contradictions than the previous two waves of the feminist movement. Additionally, "third wavers" tend to view feminism as an identity that anyone can claim, not necessarily only liberal women. The third wave is generally considered to be the last wave of the feminist movement, but many feminists feel as though the third wave is still too limiting. Rather than calling themselves part of a fourth wave or post-third wave, these feminists often refer to a variety of movements such as "queer feminism," "black feminism," "radical feminism," or "postmodern feminism," to help define what it is they believe. Lisa Jervis, founder and publisher of *Bitch* magazine, agrees:

- We've reached the end of the wave terminology's usefulness. What was at first a handy-dandy way to refer to feminism's history, present, and future potential with a single metaphor has become shorthand that invites intellectual laziness, an

escape hatch from the hard work of distinguishing between core beliefs and cultural moment. (Jervis, 2006, p. 14)

Jervis goes on to summarize the opposition (in her opinion, a falsely created opposition) between the second and third wave:

- Older women drained their movement of sexuality; younger women are uncritically sexualized. Older women won't recognize the importance of pop culture; younger women are obsessed with media representation. Older women have too narrow a definition of what makes a feminist issue; younger women are scattered and don't know what's important. Stodgy vs. frivolous. Won't share power vs. spoiled and ignorant. (Jervis, 2006, p. 14)

For many participants, diversity and inclusion were two of the most important aspects of feminism. These respondents sometimes felt that the third wave (and the wave model as a whole), was too limiting in terms of who it "allowed" into the feminist "category."

Black feminism and queer feminism

Two "offshoots" of feminism that came up frequently in interviews were black feminism and queer feminism. Black feminism looks not only at sexism, but also racism and class oppression, which it argues are problems which cannot be separated. Queer feminism seeks to include those who exist outside of the male/female gender binary. This branch of feminism widens the definition of who/what is included in the patriarchy and opposes oppression of any sort, including racism.

- I would probably more closely align myself with either radical feminism or black feminism. I more closely agree with the principles that I've seen put forth by black feminist or radical feminist writers...the fact that they're very closely related or inextricably linked with racism and classism and heterosexism, and that those issues have to be addressed before sexism can be fully addressed. Marcy
- I don't love the wave model. I think it leaves too many folks out...I think that I would label myself as a woman of color feminist or a black feminist or a queer

black feminist or somewhere along those lines. I often find myself saying ‘as a black feminist and a queer feminist,’ you know, kind of encompassing multiple labels. Larissa

Whether they labeled themselves as third wave feminists, queer feminists, black feminists, etc., the common thread between my respondents is the use of a very inclusive definition to describe the parameters of feminism. Respondents explained that feminism is not only about female empowerment and equality between the sexes, but it also seeks to end oppression of different races, sexual orientations and disadvantaged socioeconomic classes. The general sentiment from these women was that we cannot expect to have a truly equal world unless all measures of equality are taken into consideration rather than simply gender.

- I do very much believe in equality and ending oppression and subordination... not just for women, but for everybody, which is so hard because this world is so big and there are so many cultures where it's hard to think of that for them and I certainly don't want to think in an Orientalist sort of way or a way that makes me think ‘alright, everybody has to be like this.’ I certainly understand that there are nuances and different cultures, and it's totally different, but I hope that ideal of everybody finding a place and being equal [happens]. Alecia
- Addressing all inequality is important, not just addressing gender inequality between men and women, but thinking more about how those genders are constructed in the first place and the binary opposition between the two. I think that looking at that [binary opposition] as a socially constructed thing and power is infused in that. And addressing trans- and LGBT stuff generally and racial inequality and prejudice and discrimination are things that are important to me. Erin

Many participants who described diversity and inclusion as central to their understanding feminism qualified that this definition is “feminism at its best” or “feminism when done right” which they often saw as a contrast to the popular, widely accepted second wave definition. It is interesting to note that this idea of feminism as seeking equality for all

people closely aligns with the 3rd wave definition of feminism, but some of the participants who used this definition did not identify as 3rd wave feminists and specifically stated so.

- Feminism when done right is about combating racism, homophobia, and all those things, too, that link to similar manifestations of theories of subordination and natural subordination in terms of nature or biology. Jackie
- Feminism at its best is not just about gender or just about women. I think that feminism at its best or when it's doing what I want it to do, it's able to allow that entry point, like we are thinking about gender as something that mixes up how we normally think about the world and allowing it to help us think about the world differently, more critically in order to try to change the world in a way that helps more people, that makes the world more livable. Larissa
- I think any truly feminist endeavor should or would do well to pay attention to racism and classism and homophobia, because while those other -isms exist, I don't think sexism can be adequately addressed because they're all interrelated in some way. Marcy
- [Feminism is] consciousness and continual fight for equality for everyone. And that's on a broad level of not just men and women, but people of all races, all abilities, all sexualities or gender orientations. Rhonda
- Personally, I would take that [broad definition of feminism], and then argue that people be aware of the different kinds of feminisms, and that the mainstream talked about and portrayed is the white middle class. And that that ends up silencing voices of other feminism and what I'm interested in is bringing those voices to the forefront...race, classes, sexualities. Kimberly

Many respondents saw a clear delineation between the academic understanding of feminism and mainstream society's perceptions. This is tied to the second wave perspective, and the negative connotations associated with the second wave, for example, "man-hating."

- A lot of young people don't say 'Oh, I'm a feminist,' because it does have connotations. And I've even had professors say 'you know, I started class and the first day I walked in and said "how many of you would describe yourselves as feminists?" And no one raised their hand.' And that's because they say 'oh, I

don't hate men...' There's a lot of theory around post-feminism, and there is this challenge of what does feminism mean today when a lot of people don't want to say it? But I think it should be even more powerful now because we're getting to that stage...you know, that whole idea of the tipping point, where you have so many people who have discovered feminist theory or start to think that way.
Alecia

- I think society still has it in their heads that feminists are the bra burning feminists from the '70s...but I feel like most people who are in [academic] feminist work in some way know that we've evolved over the last 30 years to a more broad understanding of feminism with black feminism, queer feminism, and things like that. Rhonda

Some participants also referenced an insider/outsider aspect of the feminist movement, by which people on the "inside" (within the movement) understand feminism differently than those who are on the "outside" (observers of feminism).

- Overall, what I understand feminism to be might be prevalent, but how other people understand feminism outside, people who are not feminists, understand feminism in an entirely different way. Madeline
- Of course, you know, not everybody I consider to be a feminist considers themselves to be a feminist, and then lots of people call themselves feminist, but they're not...I consider myself to have a more nuanced and deeper understanding of feminism than what people normally think. They're like 'Ah, feminists. They're just about abortion and equal pay.' I guess I kind of take a more philosophical approach because of my studies. Jackie

A few respondents were quick to acknowledge problems they saw within the feminist movement, sometimes noting that feminism is limiting and constrictive, and other times that it promotes anger towards men. Again, these are often critiques associated with the second wave of feminism.

- I have some issues with feminism... I think that [feminism] a lot of times unnecessarily demonizes men...I think there needs to be a little more cooperation and a little bit less anger. Samantha

When I looked back on the respondents' broad definitions of *feminism*, a general consensus emerged: Feminism is predominantly a social movement or a political movement, along with the belief in equality for all people. Often respondents would state this definition, then stop and think about it, and muse aloud "I don't know why feminism is so controversial."

- There's feminism as a social movement, which is like a political movement to help ensure women have rights equal to men, and I guess also in other incarnations just to celebrate 'womanness' and 'womanhood' or whatever. But for me, it's my understanding of feminism as a social/political movement...the objective is to further the rights of women. Katherine
- [Feminism is] equality between the genders, female empowerment. By equality, I largely mean not only equal in terms of income and representation, but also in terms of respect...I'm certainly not for taking men down. I just want both genders to be equally respected, not objectified, not exploited. And honestly, that definition of feminism I think is representative of the larger movement, but I don't know why there is resistance to feminism if that is the definition. I was always taught that feminism is about those things, about equal representation, about stopping violence against women, about female empowerment. Those, to me, are not controversial things. Darlene
- I think the number one thing, if feminism isn't this right now, it is absolutely essential to do this again, I think we need a revival of political feminism. We need to be able to situate our personal individual experiences within the lives of a diverse array of other women...It's a huge component, being able to translate the personal into the political, and understanding it in those terms. Amanda
- To me, feminism has to do with striving to achieve political, social and cultural equality for women and to combat the kinds of massive dualism, so it's not just women per se, but a cultural movement that kind of denigrates the feminism. Jackie

Feminist -- Personal Definitions

After discussing the broad understandings of feminism, respondents explained their personal definitions of what it means to be a feminist. As expected, these definitions

varied widely and were often influenced by the individual interests and passions that were most important to the respondent being interviewed. These interests ran the gamut from religion to politics, economics, or women's health and sports.

As noted in chapter 2, Olive Banks discusses the subjective personal nature of feminism:

- Feminism...is in many ways impossible to define in any really objective way so that, in the last resort, the choice of entries is, and must be, a very personal one. (Banks, 1986, p. 2)

The following respondent's definition was informed by her religion, as well as her interest in academic feminist theory:

- A lot of my feminism is informed by my Judaism...A lot of change has happened since the '70s. Women rabbis have become a reality in many movements. Alecia

Another participant ties her feminist beliefs to women's athletics and a specific interest in

Title IX:

- I coached for 5 years. I coached a women's team at the university, which was added after Title IX, and I very much saw that as like one of my feminist projects, being a part of particularly sports of young female athletes and helping them be strong and self-efficacious and being proud of that and having a community that supported that. I feel like that's an example anyway of how I live my feminism, and I feel like I'm doing the same thing in some ways in Political Science, which is not a feminist community by definition, but there are a lot of us who, we certainly are feminists, and there's a lot of people who consider themselves under that identity, but I feel like me being feminist is every day sort of showing up and saying 'I'm here to point out what we're doing isn't bad, yet these things could be bigger if we saw the world closer to a place where gender exists, but doesn't constrain the options of men or women.' Theresa

One respondent described her feminist beliefs as having roots in economics and women's health:

- If I were going to classify my particular variant of feminism, it kind of intersects and overlaps with other concerns. It's questioning towards capitalism, and not

[just] capitalism. It's questioning towards the economic sphere in general... Attention to women's reproductive health is another. I feel very strongly that women have the final say about what happens with her body. Not all feminists believe that or believe it wholesale. Many believe it up to a point, but that's important to me. Lacey

For other participants, sexual politics is part of their central feminist beliefs:

- For me, [feminism] is very much a way of being in the world...It's a political or sort of politicized move. And then also I think [feminism is] really about an embrace of sexual politics...an embrace of queer politics that's interested in sexuality. Larissa
- I think [feminism] has a lot to do with looking for equality and partnership in relationships and I think it is really related to accepting female sexuality and not being ashamed of either pursuing it, not necessarily pursuing men, but pursuing a healthy sexual identity and taking care of yourself, like going to the doctor when you need to. Madeline

Respect and Choice

Many respondents discussed the importance of showing respect for other women and their choices, even if they did not agree personally with those choices. For some participants, this idea of respect was central to their personal definition of what it meant to be a feminist. Additionally, the word "choice" came up repeatedly, both when discussing personal definitions of "feminist" as well as when defining the larger movement.

- Respecting all women, no matter their choices. There are lots of things I don't agree with that women do, but I don't think it's the place of other women to call them out. I'm a sociologist, so it's part of a large social structural issue, so I try to respect all women and their decisions. I'm pretty liberal, so I have some trouble listening to some female politicians on the right, and respecting their views. I don't respect their *views*. I respect them as women, and I respect that they're out there working hard and they're doing what they think is best...I do think as women we can't take down other women. We have to support them. Darlene

Several respondents discussed the idea of choice specifically in regard to a woman's decision to work in the domestic sphere and fulfill heteronormative roles. These participants stressed how feminists need to respect a woman's desire to be a homemaker.

- Having agency over your choices...the typical thing I can apply it to is women in the domestic sphere, if there is a separation between public and domestic, that women can be house moms. It's their choice. Leigh
- For me, feminism in a word is 'choice'...the choice [for women] to be and do what they want, and it shouldn't be circumscribed by men or ideas about what women should be like. And so if they want to marry a man, be a homemaker and not work, that's equally as viable as being a lawyer. There shouldn't be any judgment there. But then, as I said, women differ on their ideas about that, because some feminists would say that it's really anti-feminist to be a homemaker and to be married to a man, but other feminists would say that's equally viable. Samantha
- Feminist activity would be defined by women who want to see [other] women have the opportunity to access whatever role they choose in life, including those women who perform gender normative roles. Some women want to be mothers as their primary occupation and to that extent I think having access to choice, over your personal choices, over your body, over your life course is sort of what binds feminists together. Theresa

In addition to discussing how feminism entails respecting women's choices, several participants noted the importance of recognizing the false notion of choice, as when it is assumed that women are free to choose from as wide an array of options as men, but in reality the choices available to women are quite limited.

One respondent described the types of feminism with which she disagrees:

- Those kinds of feminism which say that because somebody has chosen something, then we don't need to think about it anymore...the fact that somebody has chosen something automatically makes it okay, that we don't need to look at the ways that that choice disadvantages them, the way that some groups are systematically influenced to make that choice. Natalie

This respondent cited Catharine MacKinnon, one of her favorite feminist theorists.

- [MacKinnon] challenges this idea of 'freedom' which is like as long as you chose and you're not obviously complaining, then it's all fine and dandy. Natalie

Similarly, another respondent stated:

- When we talk about choice, that's predicated on the false assumption that all choice is free. It's not, not even for men. No one has a free choice in this world. It's always constrained by something, *something*....I have to make sure that whatever I choose, whether it's applying to law school, or wearing makeup, or even down to small things, it's that I'm choosing something from as wide and diverse an array of options as would automatically be there for a guy. Amanda

Structural Inequality -- Privilege

Related to the idea of false choice is the concept of structural inequality, in which a bias is inherently built into the societal system. Many participants discussed this given hierarchy when discussing why feminism is important.

- Being a feminist, practicing feminism in my daily life means that probably number one in terms of the structural opportunities that are available to me, you know, in terms of career or educational opportunities, I have to consciously work on it every single day, to make sure that the same opportunities that are...automatically there for my male counterparts are automatically there for me...As a whole, I think feminism...is about providing women with structural and ideological choices to pursue what makes them happy, what fulfills them. I think it has to happen, again, on an institutional level. For example, we absolutely have to have better paternity leave, childcare in the workplace. Amanda

When discussing choice and structural inequality, some participants stated that it is important to acknowledge privilege and recognize when you are in a hegemonic group:

- I'm going to do what I want to do... the fact that I'm a woman isn't going to be a barrier to that, hopefully, in any way. And if it is, I'm going to work against that and make sure people are aware that I'm not able to do X, Y, or Z because I'm a woman, but I, because of those other categories that I belong to like being white and middle class I have fewer barriers to reaching that point, so I'm also aware of that. I think part of feminism for me is also drawing attention to those categories where I do have privilege and sort of negotiating those. Samantha

- I feel like I'm a privileged white female and I can make life decisions that aren't necessarily encumbered by a lot of other things, like, I don't often think of myself as "a woman" when I'm thinking about my life or the things that are possible for me or what I should be doing. And even, like I grapple a lot with the idea of getting married and having children, because those aren't really things that I think about ever. I feel really far away from that, if ever. So, coming to terms with that, and feeling like it's okay if I don't want to have kids. Just because I'm a woman doesn't mean I have to have children, so just trying to get beyond the idea that here are certain things that I have to be doing or certain things that I should be doing because I'm female. Katherine

On acknowledging privilege to make choices for her own good:

- I'm from Canada, and I just moved away from my family and I was like 'I got into school; I'm just going to go ahead and do it.' I have parents that were able to help make that happen, and it wasn't difficult for me to make that life choice. Whereas for someone else, maybe for financial reasons or whatever, or even for cultural reasons... I feel like [there are] certain restrictions or expectations I don't have to deal with. Katherine

Activism

Several respondents, especially when discussing structural inequality, emphasized the importance of activism. The defining factor of what makes one an activist was widely varied. Some participants had spent time traveling the country from protest to protest, marching for women's rights and gay rights. Others discussed how they are "arm chair activists," working on ending oppression and changing society through education and academic work. For a thorough discussion on activism, please see Chapter 4.

Dualism, gender binary, hierarchy and change

For some respondents, the definition of feminism took shape when discussing dualism and the gender binary, and hierarchy and change. One respondent gave a definition and then broke it down into three parts:

- The system of gender is a hierarchical system, so people are divided into two groups and then one of them is subordinate to the other...And that's really so much a matter of kind of noticing the ways in which that happens and not just taking it as a kind of natural, given thing...and I think also that you would have to think that it's possible to do something to change it.
 - 1 – The first aspect is in relation to how you see a system of hierarchy being created and maintained.
 - 2 – The possibility for change, and I think that there's also a very clear distinction between those feminists that stick with this very strong liberal distinction between public and private, in which they say that freedom is maintained and things are kept private by keeping the state out of them...so I guess on that extent I would find myself differing from the more kind of liberal feminists.
 - 3 – I think that issues of sexual violence and abusive relationships are really central to feminism for me in a way that I think is often obscured by the presentation of feminism as just about the pay... I think one of the biggest effects that feminism has had for me is the way that I think about sex and personal relationships and it's just almost impossible to have an equal relationship. Natalie

Feminist Beliefs: Impact on Appearance

In this section, I will analyze how feminist beliefs impact participants' appearance. In order to fully answer my research question, I must understand what appearance elements the participants in my study attribute to feminism, particularly those related to their own appearances.

Several themes emerged when analyzing participant responses. The first was the idea of femininity, and the question of whether it is an opposition to feminist appearance. The majority of the respondents in my study discussed how the notion that feminists much

eschew all appearance cues associated with femininity has largely been dropped by their generation of feminists. However, many respondents agree that they do not want to fit into the cookie-cutter stereotypical look of what is considered to be feminine and sexy. According to the participants in my study, the appearance cues associated with femininity and sexiness usually consists of a thin body frame with long blonde hair and blue eyes. Identity *Not*, is a term used to define the process by which people more easily describe what they are *not* than what they *are* (Freitas et al. 1997). This term can be used to describe the mental process the respondents in my study used in order to explain feminist appearance. They would often say things like “Well, I can tell you what feminism *isn't*” or “A feminist probably doesn't look like _____.”

Additionally, the concept of appearance negotiation was explored by almost all of the respondents in my study. The general consensus suggests that in order to communicate one's feminist beliefs through appearance, there is often a negotiation in order to find a middle ground between hyper-femininity and simply blending in, which would mean not showing creativity/personality in their appearance.

The discussion of negotiation led into a conversation about the concept of compromise. Many of the respondents in my study explained that some level of compromise is often required in terms of their personal appearance. There was a general consensus that it is too exhausting to fight every feminist battle, so for the sake of focusing on whichever feminist fight that took precedence for each respondent, making a compromise such as shaving one's armpits when attending a fancy event was thought to be okay if, for

example, one felt like the entire evening she would have to defend her reasons for having armpit hair.

The idea of being “comfortable” was mentioned by every respondent, and sometimes this comfort was psychological in nature while other times it was physical. Psychological comfort is closely related to the ideas of negotiation and compromise, mentioned above. This type of comfort can take precedence over what one is “supposed to do” or “supposed to look like” when one is a feminist. Some of the participants who preferred to look non-normative in their everyday lives described how they need to look normative in certain situations in order to feel comfortable.

Perception was also a common theme, both in term of awareness of public perceptions of feminist appearance as well as the respondents’ assessment of others’ appearance negotiations. Some participants discussed how they are read as “queer” due to their appearance, and the assumption that the appearance cues associated with being gay often overlap with those of being a feminist.

Feminist versus Feminine Appearance: Always an Opposition?

The idea of feminine appearance came up in every interview. The appearance cues commonly associated with femininity have largely been perceived as restrictive, and thereby anti-feminist, by people involved in the various iterations of the feminist movement.

Participants in my study identified with feminine appearance on varying levels.

Respondents largely agreed that one can exhibit feminine appearance cues while being a

feminist. However, respondents also put an emphasis on an appreciation of diversity and not trying to fit into what they described as a cookie-cutter feminine image.

- You can be as fem as you want and still be a feminist and still be an empowered woman, and I have absolute respect for that. I just don't feel comfortable in it. It's not the gender presentation that I feel comfortable with. Rhonda

Identity *Not*

As mentioned above, it is often easier for people to describe who they are *not*, rather than who they *are*, especially when asked about identity as it relates to appearance (Freitas et al. 1997). This proved to be true when I asked respondents in my study about the ways in which feminism informs their appearance. For my participants, identity *not* was tied to inaction in which they stayed away from appearance elements associated with “the other.” One respondent explains that she practices feminism by not buying into things that are explicitly heteronormative:

- I think I convey my feminism more in my inactions. I would never get a boob job. I think that's the most grotesque inhuman thing you can do. It's the epitome of objectification because... It would be completely for the visual consumption of men. So I convey my feminism visually by choosing not to have collagen injections, obviously I can't afford them, by choosing not to have a boob job or have a tummy tuck or something. Or maybe even down to the color of my nail polish, I don't have a problem with pink, but I don't think I own anything pink. So yeah, things like that, my decision not to buy into things that I think are explicitly heteronormative or heterosexist. Amanda

Another respondent stated that she finds “being heavily dolled up all the time” to be anti-feminist. This would include wearing full makeup, having one's hair done and being very dressed up. The same respondent emphasized the importance of diversity in appearance. She stated that a more feminist look in her opinion would involve a natural

appearance, along with a look that does not try to fit into the seemingly mass-produced stereotype of what is attractive.

- I know it's kind of unfair, but when you just make snap judgments on the street, this kind of overly tanned, you know, overly done up, like every hair is perfectly highlighted and all the makeup is super perfect, kind of way that I actually don't find attractive, it says to me that you are more interested in sitting in a cookie cutter-like pornified existence... And I think that's why I would be more inclined to think someone is a feminist if... they have curves, they're showing them off in a not obviously, I don't know how you draw the line, but in a not overly sexualized way. Jackie

Another participant echoed the importance of diversity in appearance when she talked about choosing not to straighten her hair, as the stereotypical image of a "beautiful" woman has long, straight hair. She also agreed that women can desexualize themselves to the point of becoming invisible.

- I think diversity is a huge component [of feminism]. So for instance, I never thought about this before, but I guess in some ways keeping my hair curly would be a mark of feminism... When all women look the same, when we all aspire to this normalized cookie-cutter mold of beauty, you know, straight blonde, boring hair, look the same, it means that one woman is as good as another. We're all interchangeable, and then we're just left with the commodity value... On the one hand, I want to be taken seriously as a woman, so I put on some makeup. On the other hand, I want to be taken seriously as a student, an anthropology student or eventually a law student. Well then what do you do? Do I take the makeup off? Okay, then they're not going to see me as a woman anymore. Amanda

Freedom to create one's own identity, and not feeling limited by ideas of what one *should* look like was related to appreciation of diversity as a feminist concept.

- The idea that you can be who you want to be and create your own identity and you don't need to fall into any kind of ideal of what it means to be feminine... I like the idea of doing what appeals to me and not feeling limited by ideas of what I *should* look like, as a woman, as a grad student, as a geographer or anything like that. Katherine

Identity *Not* was also exhibited through avoidance of specific types of clothing. One participant mentioned how she avoids clothing that is offensive or is expensive:

- As a feminist, I would not feel comfortable wear anything that was blatantly offensive to women or that was super expensive...Like Juicy Couture pants with “juicy” on the back. That’s just not appropriate...That’s not a message I want to send to men, that that’s how they should see me...I try to avoid things that don’t fit in with my values. Lacey

She then went on to describe how the avoidance of status items is part of her feminist practice:

- I think it’s worth paying money for things that are attractive and durable... But status items I personally find really problematic... Conspicuous consumption just doesn’t make sense to me. Sometimes it makes sense to spend a lot of money on something, but not just to show that you’re able to. Lacey

The discussion of status items as anti-feminist continued, and this participant explained why she feels that toenail polish in traditional colors is less feminist than polish in a non-normative color, such as blue or green. According to this participant, because pedicures are luxury goods, the act of getting a pedicure is aspiring to an oppressive ideal. By painting them a color that doesn’t conform to the typical feminine stereotype, the pedicure becomes less oppressive. Also because she views her choice to wear nail polish as optional, she argues that it is less oppressive.

- Pedicures...because they’re a luxury good, they send a message, and it’s a message about class and also about femininity. And so if I was really conscious about keeping them up, and going for a stereotypically upper class feminine appearance, I would wonder why I was spending the money to fit into that particular viewpoint. And so I feel like, by doing more outlandish colors, that I get the benefits of the pedicure, which is that they’re relaxing and make my toes look better... and I’m not sending the message that I’m trying to aspire to a particular ideal that I don’t think makes a lot of sense... It requires money and time. And it’s an ideal that becomes oppressive... And I feel like I get pedicures

infrequently when I want to. If I felt like I always had to have my nails a particular color, and many women do, and there are environments where there is a norm, that I would find oppressive. Lacey

Appearance Negotiation

Related to the concept of Identity *Not* is the idea of appearance negotiation. Almost all of the participants mentioned negotiating between a hyper-sexualized appearance and a boring, seemingly invisible appearance. Many respondents specifically used the word “frumpy” when describing the type of appearance they want to avoid.

- I guess I don’t know if I try to look feminist, but I try to look like somebody you could respect or take seriously or someone that you wouldn’t just write off because she’s a girly whatever. But also, I don’t like to look frumpy either, or I don’t like to wear things that don’t fit, that are oversized and don’t fit, especially when teaching. But as you know, we can’t win at this sort of thing, because you can get too unsexualized and that makes you invisible and write off-able. Jackie

Another participant noted a similar negotiation in her appearance, walking the line between concealing her body and calling attention to herself, while acknowledging that she wants her appearance to be read as interesting and creative.

- I mean, I think I don’t try to hide my body, but at the same time, I try not to really call attention to my body as if I were saying that that’s the most important aspect of me... I want my appearance to be, interesting, creative. Sometimes I like to think that I’m using my body as a canvas or something, but not to the point that my appearance is getting in the way of my functionality as a person. Jean

The concept of negotiation was especially important for the respondents who personally identified with feminine appearance. As I stated previously, femininity has in the past been viewed as a contradiction to feminist values. Even though the respondents in my study view feminism as a more open category (accepting of people from all backgrounds and with various appearances) than the feminists from previous generations, the

participants in my study still said they struggled with some of the connotations connected to feminine appearance.

One participant discussed how she considers her appearance to be at odds with the typical feminist appearance markers, meaning that she feels she is more feminine than the stereotypical feminist. She discusses this contrast with the women's studies class she teaches and acknowledges that she might not fit into stereotypical feminist appearance "boxes."

- I do talk about my appearance being at odds with what a lot of people think are feminist physical markers or qualities... that [will] be a discussion in class sometimes... It's a small class that I teach, so it's really discussion-based and we try to do the whole feminist classroom thing. I'm sure you know, like destabilizing power, and that kind of trends into more of me sharing personal stuff, so sometimes I admit to my unfeminist stock to talk about how complicated it is. In the past semester, they were kind of fixated on my engagement ring situation. And they were specifically talking about gay and lesbian stuff and marriage... So talking about things like the ring and my clothes and how I can choose to wear makeup if I want to, and how it's complicated because you're playing into the system, but at the same time It's a choice you're making for whatever reason. But I guess that's how I (show my feminism). Erin

Negotiation as Related to Psychological Comfort

Several respondents agreed that they didn't want to "stand out" from the crowd, simply for the sake of being noticed, but at the same time they don't want to change their appearance simply to fit in with society's expectations. They do not want to pretend to be someone they're not. For some participants, feminist values factor into appearance management as a type of recalibration: "What are society's expectations, what are my expectations, and which expectations do I care about meeting?"

One participant described how she catches herself feeling pressure to dress up even in casual situations (i.e. the grocery store). She now focuses on correcting herself when she feels like she doesn't look nice enough:

- When I'm not dressed up and I run to the grocery store and my hair's crazy, and I'm wearing sweat pants... I have a second thought like 'oh, I should do this before I leave the house.' I'll kind of self-correct for myself and be like 'Hey, what do I care? I'm not impressing anybody. I'm just going to the store. What am I trying to prove and to whom?' Erin

The following respondent stated that negotiation for her is about finding a balance between objectifying oneself, buying into beauty industry, and having fun with fashion, while being wary of the disposable culture the fashion industry creates:

- I definitely understand the idea that as women, we have to be careful not to allow ourselves to be objectified by showing tons of skin, I guess projecting in other people's minds a certain kind of image, and also we have to be aware of not buying into the beauty industry that I think has kind of worked to undermine women by making them feel that we can always be better than we are, and there's always the next best thing out there and if we keep buying and buying that somehow we're going to get there. So I think there is a danger in that, but that is something I do struggle with a lot. But I also feel that, like I said, fashion is fun... The whole idea of novelty in the fashion industry I guess is problematic because it creates a disposable culture. But I also think there is something appealing about new ideas. And people grow creatively and intellectually and personally and emotionally, so I don't think there's anything different between that and changing your style, so you sort of match how you feel. Katherine

Another respondent stated that she wants to remain feminine, and practices feminism through her appearance by negotiating between two extremes: falling somewhere between hiding her body and showing a lot of skin. She said it is important to her to not downplay her femininity, to not try to hide the fact that she's a woman.

- It's a negotiation between these two extremes, or how I'm interpreting these two extremes. I'm definitely not going to wear something with shoulder pads because I'm a woman. I'm round...My breasts are still there and they're still beautiful, even though they're not out for everyone to see...So I guess I kind of act out my own feminist choice through not adopting either [extreme]. But I don't know if a

negotiation is the way it should be. There's nothing wrong with being on either extreme, but for me maybe it's a negotiation... Adopting a male persona is disempowering. And the other extreme I feel is disempowering, too... And I realize that defining yourself against the oppression is just another form of oppression. So I'm kind of in the middle ground. Leigh

One participant stated that she feels more confident when dressed nicely and wearing makeup and that she is adding to the variety of feminist approaches to appearance. She also went on to state that she experimented with not wearing makeup in college, so she has experienced both sides.

- I like the way that I look when I wear makeup and I wear nice clothes. I am aware that that is done within a structure of patriarchy. But even with that knowledge, I'm more comfortable with it. It's a contradiction, but I'm more comfortable, so I do it. I went through a phase in undergrad, in college, where I didn't wear makeup for a while, just to try to feel liberated. So I definitely experimented both ways, and I just decided to wear makeup... There is the public perception that feminists don't wear makeup or don't look good. But I think that's slowly changing, and I think that through my appearance I add to that sort of variety of feminist approaches to appearance... I feel the same self-wise, whether I'm wearing makeup or not. I really do. But in terms of interactions with others, I think that I might have a bit more confidence if I'm dressed nicely and have on makeup. Darlene

One respondent discussed her thoughts about the future when she will be practicing law. She expressed frustration that women are held to a (higher) double standard when it comes to appearance. She stated that the world was designed for men, but women have to fit into their standards:

- When I go into law... I'm probably going to end up wearing more pantsuits than, you know, skirt suits, whatever they're called. Just because I hate pantyhose, I hate wearing them, and I don't feel I should have to wear them as a woman... I remember reading in the sociology of gender class that, you know, women have gotten to be very vain because they obsess all the time about their personal appearance and their clothing. And I remember loving this point, it's so true: it's not vanity, it's the fact that, it's almost like being bilingual, is how I think of it. Men, okay, I mean the world was designed for them. It's men-friendly... There

are two situations: there's professional and non-professional. You put on a suit and you go out. And that's fashion. Other than ascots, they haven't changed in hundreds of years. Or you put on a t-shirt and jeans. You're good to go. No one is going to judge you on your personal appearance. They're going to judge you on your actions. Women, it doesn't matter what our actions are, currently we also have to convey a sense of who we are and how we want to be treated by what we wear. I absolutely hate that. I think I should be judged on the exact same terms as men. Amanda

Several respondents discussed how they pick and choose their battles and choose to conform to certain societal expectations (ex: shaving their legs, wearing makeup):

- I compromise a lot. You know, is it important to me personally that I shave when I show my legs? No. Is it important to society and am I conscious of that? Yeah, and so I will...Whereas I shave my underarms because I find underarm hair personally unpleasant and don't enjoy it. So I would do that regardless and do it every day. But shaving my legs I do because that's the dominant understanding. Wearing makeup for fun I do for myself. Wearing foundation every day, I do because there are understandings of what appropriate skin looks like. Lacey

A few respondents discussed the practice of wearing makeup. The majority of participants who talked about makeup stated that one can be a feminist and wear makeup, regardless of whether or not they personally chose to wear cosmetics. One respondent stated that she believes the feminist practice around beauty is definitely about self-identification on a personal comfort level:

- I don't really feel like wearing very little makeup is so much a feminist practice for me, because I have in the past worn more makeup and I own makeup. I don't feel uncomfortable putting it on...Sometimes I feel confronted by people who definitely think it's non-feminist, and that makes me kind of ticked off. I generally for the most part feel like for me, feminist practice around beauty is definitely about...self-identification on a personal comfort level... If someone comes to me and they're wearing makeup or whatever, they're implying with their makeup that they're identifying this way, and that for me feels like 'okay, cool.' And that's kind of how I try to treat myself...trying not to judge. Larissa

Psychological comfort

Participants often discussed psychological comfort when compromising on their appearance. They described needing to look normative at certain times/in certain contexts to feel comfortable. Respondents explained that feminist principles allow them to not judge themselves for ascribing to a normative appearance:

- There are probably a million important tenets of feminism. A couple of them for me, for my feminist practice, are consent and comfort. And I think that both of them translate into my own body, particularly in terms of comfort. In terms of my body, comfort is pretty much crucial. And that means in some ways, and I find myself doing this often, sometimes it means in order to be comfortable in a space I need to look really normative. And I need to kind of ‘pass’ for really normative, and that makes me question what I’m doing and makes me curious about like ‘why do I want to wear a dress to go to this particular thing?’ Maybe I should question that, but I’m also willing not to judge the fact that maybe I just feel comfortable blending in sometimes. Larissa

Physical comfort

The notion of physical comfort also came up in during interviews as an important consideration when dressing as a feminist.

- If something just really isn’t comfortable, then I try not to wear it. Although unfortunately sometimes with shoes, I don’t recognize that until it’s too late... I don’t do things that hurt. Like I’ve never plucked my eyebrows since, well when I was like 11 I read somewhere that you were supposed to pluck your eyebrows, so I got the tweezers out and just one and was like “that hurts!” I never did it again. So, okay, I have bushy eyebrows. That’s fine. Jean

Physical comfort can be intertwined with psychological comfort. The two types of comfort inform each other, particularly when discussing the negotiations and compromises that one makes as a feminist woman:

- I very rarely wear high heels because they hurt. And I think that if I knew how to wear them without hurting, then I would have no problem with them. And I don’t look down on women who wear high heels, but they hurt my feet so I don’t [wear

them]... I don't shave. Sometime during college, it was right around when I shaved my head, actually, I stopped shaving my legs and my armpits....Again, on rare occasion it's just easier to shave. Like I don't want to have a conversation about the hair on my legs, so I'll just shave, but for the most part it's itchy, it hurts, so I just don't do it... the thing about it that's tricky is I often feel like if I walk into a fancy event and my armpits are shown they're hairy, then it becomes a topic of conversation, which make me feel very uncomfortable. Larissa

- I don't wear tight jeans. I find them uncomfortable. I find that they attract too much attention. I do not distinctly dress to attract male attention, but if I'm going out, I will wear something that shows some cleavage. Marcy

Specifics: T-shirts

A few respondents gave examples of specific articles of clothing or accessories that they use in order to convey their feminist beliefs. The most common examples were t-shirts and buttons with feminist messages on them.

- In the [political science] department. We have this thing called 'Feminist Fridays,' so we always wear something [related to feminism]...I always wear my Wonder Woman shirt. Madeline
- I have a lot of feminist t-shirts that are, you know, like political t-shirts from feminist organizations or whatever, so I have very explicit things that I wear in some settings...I have a t-shirt that says "respect women," just a yellow t-shirt with black across the front... I have a sweatshirt that says "This is what a feminist looks like." I have a shirt from NARAL that says "I'm pro-choice and I vote." I have a few others; I have like a National Women's Political Caucus shirt that says "Women are not born Democrats, Republicans or yesterday," which is an old shirt from like the '70s. So, things like that. Some of them are from particular organizations. Theresa
- I have a couple of Ani DiFranco t-shirts, so they actually have messages of feminism that people can read right on my chest, which is I think kind of funny, because you know, it's like calling attention to my chest so you can read a message, but also in a way, kind of not calling attention to my chest, it's just a surface where you can put words. Jean

Awareness of Others' Perceptions

Several participants discussed other's perceptions of their appearance, and how, if at all, this affected their desire to look a certain way. A few respondents described their appearance as queer first and foremost. These participants acknowledged an overlap between public perceptions of queer appearance and feminist appearance. One respondent stated that she views her lesbian appearance as a version of social rebelliousness, but she draws the line at looking sloppy.

- I feel like I have a queer woman's wardrobe, and to some extent falls in line with feminism... It's just a pretty gender-neutral style, like jeans, bigger belts... simple features, shorter hair. And some clothes, some jeans I buy in men's sizes, but I'm pretty small so it's hard. I look kind of frumpy, and I draw the line at that. I don't want to look like a big dump just to say, you know, 'I don't want to look girly.' But I view that is some sort of defiance, like we want to reinscribe younger women. I definitely see myself as part of a world that is living that. Theresa
- I think just by presenting myself as I feel comfortable, and not necessarily worrying how people are going to perceive me... And I guess my way of appearing as a feminist is not forcing myself into more feminine boxes. That's not how I feel comfortable. Kimberly

Another respondent focused on the conscious choice to put minimal effort into her appearance, while at the same time acknowledging that she thinks about how others are reading her appearance.

- I think it's definitely a choice to not put effort into your appearance, not that I don't put any effort into it, but I put minimal effort into it, and I think that that is a choice, and it's something that I'm kind of, I'm happy about. I'm just like, 'I don't need to impress people or to articulate anything specific to other people about who I am on the basis of the way I'm dressing... So I think that is part of my feminist belief, that I don't need to be somebody that I'm not for the sake of other people. Samantha

Perceptions of others' appearance negotiations

Some respondents described their observations and perceptions of other people's appearance negotiations. One participant discussed the masculine presentation among women in academia she had observed, specifically when the academic women are presenting for an audience in professional situations. She went on to state that the same women had more feminine mannerisms when talking in a one on one situation.

- I feel like a lot of women in academia take on a masculine type of presenting themselves... especially in speaking. If I'm speaking to a woman one-on-one, versus when she's presenting [in class], it's like a completely different person. Like she won't mention her children during lecture, but maybe when I'm talking to her one-on-one...If I'm speaking to my adviser, like one-on-one, she'll take her suit jacket off and be very relaxed, whereas in lecture she's always wearing a suit jacket. And it's still kind of like the '80s, like big should pads and very boxy.
Leigh

This participant went on to express concern that she is being "sucked in" to this masculine persona in class. She stated that she finds her desire to not appear masculine to be in conflict with her classmates in the women and gender studies program, most of whom do not want to appear feminine.

- So when I'm dressing for class, I'm constantly negotiating between being my own person and wondering if I'm being sucked into a box of being masculine...I'm always thinking, 'Am I just adopting this masculine persona that I don't want?'
Leigh

In contrast, a different participant described the process of training herself to "unlearn" feminine body language. She discussed her observations of other students' feminine body language, and has taught herself to avoid feminine body language through the "Alexander technique," a process in which one focuses on awareness of one's bodily

motions in order to avoid unnecessary or unwanted movements in the future. She

describes the technique below:

- [The Alexander Technique allows you] to notice what you're doing and to notice what other people are doing. I've noticed it an awful lot in my classes... The way that, you know, students and professors will... conform to a very feminine way of using their bodies... this would include a kind of coy simpering look whenever they say anything. And so this kind of quite unsure presentation and kind of semi-sexualized sort of submissive look, and I'm absolutely certain that they don't do it on purpose, but that's just the way that they talk. It's like completely, completely part of their body and their body experience, and I think that's the point. I mean, now I find it sort of painful to watch. It's not like I think badly of them for it. And the other thing is, in relation to how you sit, and this is something that I think Marilyn Frye mentions and Iris Marion Young, the taking up little spaces, folding your legs, having your bag neatly tucked away... It's something I have thought about, and since it's something I'm still noticing, what other people are doing, what I'm doing, then I would say I'm still conscious of it... One thing I've noticed that I do, which is not something that I've managed to change much yet, is touching my neck. This is actually a very female thing to do. Natalie

Summary

To conclude, two schools of thought emerged from interview question 5. The two schools of thought are not mutually exclusive. Rather, they complement each other:

1. "Feminism allows me not to judge myself on days I feel the need to conform to heteronormative appearance standards."
2. "Feminism reminds me that I don't have to wear makeup or look extra nice just because I'm leaving the house."

When discussing key beliefs and principles of feminism, one word kept coming up over and over in the vast majority of interviews: "choice." The idea that feminism is centered around a woman's freedom to choose what she wants to do and how she wants to act in society directly translates to appearance. The same idea that feminists need to respect the choices of other women and suspend judgment also emerged during interviews when I

asked participants about feminist appearance. The respondents were quick to acknowledge that not all feminists share a similar appearance, and therefore will view feminist appearance differently from one another.

- Like I said before, the word ‘choice,’ like it is a choice to look like that. So I assume that other people who are feminists also feel strongly that they are making a choice not to participate in certain definitions of how a woman is supposed to look. And I’m sure that others do, but that’s their choice, again, that they want to be feminine or masculine in how they look. Samantha

Chapter 7: Appearance Cues and Feminism

Research Question 3: “How do feminists believe their appearance is tied to feminism?”

Supporting interview questions:

5. “What is your personal definition of feminism? What are the key characteristics or beliefs associated with feminism? How do you practice your feminist beliefs through your appearance?”
6. “Do you associate any particular appearance characteristics with feminism?”
7. “How do you consider your appearance to represent feminism?” “Do you feel your appearance conflicts with your feminist beliefs? If so, how?”
8. “Are there certain ways you have altered your appearance in order to signal to others your ties to feminism? If so, how?” “Do you look for these visual signals in other feminists? If so, what are they?”
10. “Has your appearance evolved over time? If so, how? In what way does this evolution reflect feminist awareness?”

Research Question 4: “How do feminists use their appearance to signal feminism?”

Supporting interview questions:

5. “What is your personal definition of feminism? What are the key characteristics or beliefs associated with feminism? How do you practice your feminist beliefs through your appearance?”
6. “Do you associate any particular appearance characteristics with feminism?”
7. “How do you consider your appearance to represent feminism?” “Do you feel your appearance conflicts with your feminist beliefs? If so, how?”
8. “Are there certain ways you have altered your appearance in order to signal to others your ties to feminism? If so, how?” “Do you look for these visual signals in other feminists? If so, what are they?”
9. “How do you think other feminists perceive your appearance? How do you think non-feminists perceive your appearance? Do you believe others perceive you as a feminist? How do you know?”

Because research questions 3 and 4 are closely aligned and there is much overlap in terms of the supporting interview questions, I am going to discuss them together.

Appearance Characteristics Associated with Feminism

- It’s clearly an overgeneralization and it’s not always true, but in a lot of ways I can assume someone is not just feminist but politically and socially more aligned

with my own beliefs if they appear alternative in some way. So if they have tattoos or piercings or not name brand clothing or something like that. And those visual markers will signify something to me that means, 'Oh this person is probably closer in line socio-politically to what I think.' But that's not always true at all, and it can get you in a lot of trouble, making those generalizations. There's a lot of people who appear alternative in some way that are not at all feminist or socially aware or conscious of anything, and then there are a lot people who wear name brand clothing or women who are very feminine and men who appear to be very conservative in their dress that are quite feminist...but I do think that in some way I connect that, I assume that these signs mean these things.
Rhonda

Stereotypes

- I think there is still a stereotype about how feminists look. But largely that stereotype resonates with people who don't know feminists, or aren't aware of what feminism is. I think more conservative people might still have that stereotype, but I think it's really, really changing. Students in universities have professors all the time who look differently, have different approaches to appearance, and they're usually feminists. Darlene

When asked about appearance characteristics associated with feminism, many of the respondents in my study immediately thought of a stereotypical appearance, even if they do not believe that feminists actually look like the stereotype they were envisioning. Many specific appearance cues, such as unshaved legs, going braless, and not wearing makeup, came up repeatedly during interviews. Several respondents stated that stereotypes were limiting to the movement and hurt the movement, in terms of participation. The concern is that women who might think of themselves as feminists will avoid the term because of the associated negative stereotype.

- I just don't think feminism should be stereotyped in the way that it has been. I think it's limiting to the movement, I think it definitely makes people unwilling to want to be a feminist or call themselves a feminist or think about feminism or the

goals of feminism, even. But I mean, I think if you look at how the media presents feminists, my appearance wouldn't fit with that [image]. Erin

- There's obviously a lot of homophobic connotations, now that I'm saying this, that that tie in. You know, the fact that they're trying to put women down by using and talking about additional negative stereotypes. I think that is really how many women and men think about feminists today. And maybe that is part of why women are made to feel discouraged about labeling themselves as such. They don't want to be seen as this hairy, man-hating dyke, like marching through the streets. Amanda
- Women are like 'I don't want to be called a feminist because I have a very specific idea of who that person is'... in movies and stuff they show these women who are really manly women who have short hair and wear flannel shirts or something. I mean, I don't want to be too crass, but they're just like militantly feminist or militantly anti-men...the radical feminist who's angry at everyone and looks really scary. And that's sad, because that has become the image... 'oh, I'm not a feminist because I'm not *that*.' Alecia

The negative stereotypes were often attributed to media by the participants:

- Well, I think of Rush Limbaugh, who said something about how feminists are 'ugly women, who are only feminists because they can't find a husband' or something horrible like that. And I think some people that are uninformed about feminism and probably negatively predisposed towards feminism think of women who are not very feminine-looking, and I think that that's not an accurate view. Jean
- I'm realizing now I think a negative stereotype of feminists comes from this absolute hatred of women in the media, deliberate or otherwise... I think that there's this intentionally negative stereotype of women, of feminists, it originated in the second wave and I think it persists today, that feminists would look like someone who doesn't shave, which is another thing we can get into I think about a lot. She doesn't shave, she has long hairy armpits. Amanda

The common stereotypes that the participants mentioned can be broken into a few categories: second wave feminists, hippies, and "butch" women. One stereotype that came to mind for participants was that of a second wave feminist. Appearance cues

associated with this stereotype include short hair, a pantsuit, and little-to-no makeup. A few participants mentioned well-known feminists when discussing the second wave “look,” including Andrea Dworkin and Gloria Steinem, which is quite interesting, because I find these women to look very different from one another. Additionally, Judith Butler’s androgynous appearance was mentioned as representative of the second wave look.

Another stereotype that came to mind for participants was that of a hippie, with the focus on long hair and an unshaved body.

- I guess the stereotype of a feminist is like long, unkempt hair. And also maybe not just hair on the head, but armpit hair, eyebrows or legs or something. Leigh

However, for the vast majority of participants, looking like a stereotypical feminist means displaying visual markers associated with a “butch” appearance. The list of visual cues associated with a butch woman includes short, spiky hair, baggy clothes, flannel shirts, work boots, tattoos, and piercings. In addition to the appearance markers, there are also specific behavioral and personality characteristics, such as aggression and assertiveness, associated with this stereotype.

- The stereotype is the lesbian who has short hair, baggy clothes, and is a lesbian feminist, specifically, and is assertive, outspoken, man-hating, all of the things that come along with that. Samantha
- I’m definitely aware of the stereotype of the butchy feminist who doesn’t really care or tries to project that kind of tough guy image that’s like ‘just because I’m a woman doesn’t mean you can jerk me around.’ Katherine

Conflation of “butch” and “feminist”

The discussion of the “butch” stereotype led to a conversation about the conflation of lesbian identity with feminist identity, both in terms of visual markers as well as beliefs and values. Participants stated that the public perception of feminists as the butch stereotype leads to this conflation but that it is not uncommon for educated feminists to make the mistake of conflating the two identities. Several respondents, especially the ones who identified as lesbian, admitted to making assumptions about feminist beliefs based on a woman’s appearance. For example, if a woman appears to be non-feminine, then they assume she is both a lesbian and a feminist. Respondents also discussed the danger in these assumptions.

- I think I probably do [align lesbian identity with feminist identity], whether it’s there or not. I’ve definitely had moments where I’ve assumed that I have a shared belief system with women who are gay, and then I’m startled to find out that I don’t necessarily. But for the most part, most of the people who I know who identify as gay have feminist sensibilities. It has to do largely with how they identify a source of oppression... or if they’re pushing back against something. But I think most of the people who I know anyway, identify as feminist if they’re also gay. Theresa
- When looking at a woman, I don’t think the first thing [a perceiver is] thinking about is ‘I wonder if she’s a feminist or not.’ I think it’s like ‘is she gay?’ And that may or may not be related to the second question of whether she’s a feminist. But once they decide she’s gay, they then would assume she’s man-hating and therefore a feminist, which I think is also incorrect, because you can definitely hate men without being a feminist. Samantha
- If I saw somebody who was very recognizably a butch lesbian... if they had short spiky hair, I would assume that they were lesbian and therefore would have political tendencies toward feminism and pro-gay rights. Jackie

Specific Appearance Cues Associated with Feminism

Aside from stereotypical examples, participants also noted specific items of dress that a feminist might wear, such as buttons, t-shirts, or patches with slogans on them, or even tattoos.

- The t-shirts with like the slogans on them, tattoos to some extent, political tattoos like a raised fist or something. Kimberly

One respondent relates feminism to other interests such as responsible consumerism and sustainability concerns, and therefore believes that feminists are more likely to wear sustainable fabrics and to be concerned with the types of environments where their clothing is made.

- I would say feminism now is also related to responsible consumerism, because feminism is so related to sustainability. So now I'm thinking about it in terms of sustainable fabrics, and maybe she bought it from an NGO or something, or someone she knew so that it was slave labor-free, from recycled products or something, so that's what I would think... Everything is very soft... It's like "naturally" feminine. Leigh

Some participants based their examples of feminist appearance on their own appearance.

The respondent below discussed the shared appearance cues of the group of feminists she spent a great amount of time with as an undergraduate.

- In terms of my own 'what do feminists look like who I know,' as undergrad[s] we definitely all looked the same. Except for race, we were a pretty mixed race group... So we all looked like, you know, kind of like dirty hippies. *laughs* You know, like various piercings and usually some kind of non-normative hair thing going on like a Mohawk or a shaved head. There was always at least one or two of those happening at any given moment when I was in college. A lot of sort of dyke appearances, so still obviously in a female body, you know still identifying as a woman, but like trying to have a lot of piercings or be really edgy in some way. We had a lot of folks like that. Larissa

Other respondents came up with specific images based on people they consider to be feminist role models, such as female professors and politicians.

- I picture someone with shorter hair, I mean short sexy hair, like I know some professors... Various ages, but the kind of short, spiky styled hair look... more of a funky, original style versus a kind of boring style... long flowing clothes and bright colors, funky jewelry... Or, maybe if they're black they have the natural hair and maybe kind of little dreadlocks. But sort of like the bright tunic or tunic and pants sort of thing that has bright colors and a bright scarf, it's kind of flowing and like a shawl maybe around... Lots of flowy [fabrics], but in a way that's kind of dignified and elegant... I see [female professors] as models, as to how to be a professional woman feminist... the feminists I know most, other than my peer group, that I would know would be older professors. Jackie

A couple of respondents mentioned that feminist appearance is contingent on other factors, such as geographic location.

- If I meet a woman on the street, and she's not wearing any makeup and has a short haircut, I'm not going to assume that she's a feminist, even though that might be sort of the stereotypical image. Geography makes a difference, though. If I see that type of woman in Austin [Texas], I might think she's a feminist. Darlene

Identity *Not*

Several participants in my study used the concept of “identity *not*” (see p. 90 for a discussion of this term) when asked about appearance characteristics associated with feminism, as it was much easier for them to explain what appearance cues would *not* be associated with a feminist. For example, brand name clothing (or clothing with a logo conspicuously attached to it) was discussed as the type of clothing a feminist would likely avoid. Another type of appearance would be that of someone showing a lot of skin or

wearing very body-conscious clothing. Participants were quick to point out that the idea of what a feminist does *not* look like is also a stereotype and is not always fair.

- A little too much sexiness even with work clothes, and it has to do with hair and makeup, too. Like if you have the long straight hair that has a little bit of curl in it, like Megan Fox. There's like one hairstyle that's associated with sexy... And trying too hard to emulate that indicates to me that you kind of fall into the same kind of vision of beautiful trap that would make me think that you're not a feminist. Jackie
- I tend to think that a really flashy, really revealing appearance isn't in my opinion very feminist. To me, that kind of puts appearance on top and kind of anything else would maybe be secondary to looking good according to mainstream U.S. heterosexuals, you know. Trying to look hot, trying to catch men's attention by flaunting normative sexuality. But then I still feel uncomfortable saying that, because I don't want to judge, you know? I don't know why different women dress the way they do, so, maybe that's just what they like and they're not looking for attention. Jean

On the other end of the appearance spectrum, one participant's view of what a feminist does *not* look like came from the extremely modest dress of a nun.

- So I think the most obvious example is if you were wearing like a nun's habit... I suppose I think that the kind of social meaning of practices that have to do with kind of conveying female modesty... I think that would be something that feminism for me would criticize, even though it wouldn't say 'well you can't be a feminist...' It's not as simple as that. Natalie

Visual and Verbal Cues

Several respondents stated that when identifying a feminist, they may look for visual cues, but also verbal cues, such as an assertive personality, can go a long way in helping someone recognize a feminist.

- It's definitely related to appearance, but it's not how they look or how they're dressed. It's their bodily comportment and their assertiveness, their personality, and the things they choose to say, respond to, and talk about. Samantha

- I think the appearance piece is not as big of a part of it as actually what people do and how they think about things, like how they conceptualize and make choices. Erin
- My roommate, she's as big a feminist as I am and she wears pearls, she has these cute little 1950s house dresses. I know that personal appearance can be, this interview is proof at least for me, that appearance can really convey that identity, but I don't want to take for granted that that is what they're signaling or not signaling. I don't think you can really understand what a woman's feminism is until you talk to her. Amanda

Finally, some respondents were hesitant to list appearance cues associated with feminists.

The same way they were reluctant to put limitations on what it means to be a feminist, many respondents did not want to label a person as a feminist or non-feminist simply based on appearance. They all seemed to have an understanding of at least one feminist stereotype, but most did not want to acknowledge this stereotype as representative of feminists. Even if they felt a woman's appearance is in conflict with feminist beliefs, they were not likely to definitely say that she is not a feminist.

- I don't want to reject any woman because of how she appears. And I, myself, have felt occasionally rejected because of how I appear. So I don't think that's a healthy way for a movement to go... My vision of a feminist is somebody who pays attention to what she is wearing and recognizes that some of what she is wearing might have problematic implications and has wrestled with that. And whatever conclusions she comes to about it, those are her conclusions and I feel like they're open for discussion, but I don't feel like they disqualify her from being a feminist... Do I think that getting breast implants is the most feminist choice in the world? No, I really don't. But I wouldn't disqualify anyone from being a feminist because she got implants. I would just want her to have thought about what the feminist implications of getting them were. Lacey
- I really like the t-shirt campaign... 'This is what a Feminist Looks Like...' I look very different from how I did three years ago. I was still a feminist then. I don't think the way that you look can disqualify you from feminism, but I do think the

way that you look is not a neutral issue with respect to feminism. So I do think that there can be a conflict between kind of feminism and particular kinds of appearances. In particular, I suppose the most salient in dominant U.S. culture would be the kind of pornographic appearance norms which are quite prevalent. That's certainly the case in the U.K. as well... It's just that it's kind of complicated in people's individual lives, what they feel they can do at a particular point. They're going to prioritize. Like you can't fight every battle, that kind of thing. Natalie

A couple of respondents did allow that there was likely some truth to the stereotypes, especially when the respondent personally identified with the visual cues of the stereotypical appearance.

- I obviously recognize that there's an incredibly wide range of people who are of all gender expressions and sexes, that identify as feminist, that have feminist beliefs and you can't just judge that on the basis of certain things, but I think that like any stereotype, it comes from somewhere. So there's at least a group of feminists who don't care about their appearance, because there's no way that a stereotype would arise, and I'm kind of living proof of that I guess, with the fact that I've not cared at all how I look despite the fact that I knew you were coming here to interview me about my appearance. Samantha

Summary

The participants in my study had very specific ideas about the stereotypes associated with feminist appearance regardless of whether or not they believe the stereotype is true.

These stereotypes include appearance cues associated with second wave feminists, hippies, and butch lesbians. In addition to appearance cues, there are also behavioral characteristics associated with these stereotypes, including aggression and assertiveness.

Respondents discussed the inaccurate assumptions that all lesbians are feminists.

In terms of their own beliefs about appearance cues associated with feminists, several respondents noted specific items of dress, such as political buttons, message t-shirts, and

tattoos. For many participants, it was much easier to describe appearance cues that would not likely be associated with feminists. These include dressing in an overtly sexy way and wearing clothing with brand names or logos prominently displayed.

Even with these associations, most respondents felt uneasy making assumptions about a person's beliefs based on her appearance. Additionally, many respondents believed that feminist appearance stereotypes are limiting to the movement and dissuading people from wanting to call themselves feminists.

Research Question 5: “How do respondents vary their feminist appearance based upon different situations and contexts?”

Supporting interview questions:

2. “Is your appearance in the photograph the way you like to look every day? If not, how is it different?”
 3. “How do you alter your appearance to fit various roles and contexts? For example, do you change your appearance if you are in the GWSS department (in class vs. teaching a class, meeting with a colleague, etc.), or in another department, or outside of school?”
- Every day I wake up and look in my closet and sometimes I stand there five minutes thinking ‘what context am I going to have to participate in today? What is it that I have to convey to other people? Am I going to be teaching? Am I going to be clubbing?’ Actually, you know I’m a little bitter about this. It’s extremely frustrating. Men don’t have to contend with that. Amanda

In my attempt to understand the appearance cues tied to feminism, along with the perception of these cues, it is also necessary to define how feminists alter their appearance to fit into the different environments and situations they encounter from day to day. I asked the participants in my study “how do you alter your appearance to fit into various roles and contexts?” If they had trouble getting started with their answer, I gave an example of a role they were likely to have experienced, such as that of a student, teacher, or conference presenter. Because all of my respondents were graduate students, most of them talked about very similar contexts and roles. Themes included what constitutes a professional wardrobe versus a casual wardrobe, in what settings each of these wardrobes might be worn, and finally, a discussion of appearance tied to sexuality.

Casual versus Professional Appearance

Every participant in my study talked about altering her appearance based on whether she was leaving home or not. The vast majority of the participants discussed a “non-working uniform,” worn when not teaching or not in a role of authority. This look usually consisted of jeans, a t-shirt, and sneakers. Major factors when choosing a non-working uniform included convenience, comfort, function over fashion, “laziness,” and a strong preference for low maintenance clothing.

When discussing casual appearance, the subject often evolved into a conversation about what constitutes a “good” pair of jeans versus a casual pair of jeans. Some of the elements included in a “good” pair of jeans were dark wash, proper length (not ripped at the bottom hem) and no holes. Additionally, the idea of what constitutes “comfort” in one’s wardrobe extended beyond physical comfort to psychological comfort, which a few participants mentioned.

- I always feel uncomfortable if I try to wear something that’s not really my style... I usually don’t wear anything above knee length, just because that’s my personal comfort level... making sure that I’m appropriate or modest. Alecia
- I see my outfit first, and I’m comfortable. I feel comfortable in it and I look comfortable. Theresa

Specific elements of professional wardrobes were also discussed. Participants stated that they often wore professional attire when attending conferences and for teaching. Usually these wardrobes consisted of tailored, structured clothing such as dress slacks, a skirt, a blazer, a button-up collared shirt and a dress shoe. Also important were “finished” details such as a banded bottom hem of a t-shirt and proper fit.

A few participants also discussed why they felt it was important to look nice when taking classes:

- I am pretty conscious that my jeans look nice and don't look too old or too ragged, because... I just feel like I want to look nice in class. Especially as a graduate student where I feel like I'm making this my career, I want to show that I'm prepared for that... I feel like that's me showing that I want to be there, and I appreciate it and respect everybody. Alecia
- Now that I'm a grad student, I'm trying to present myself as an investment. Larissa
- A couple of years ago I instituted a 'no jeans in the department' rule for myself. Jackie

At the other end of the spectrum, one participant described why she dresses very casually for class:

- Now that I'm in grad school, you're supposed to pretend that you're oppressed as a student...I do like getting dressed up, but when you're in grad school...I don't want to be the girl that's really dressed up and spent like four hours to get ready, because there's so much work to do. I'm not going to sacrifice four hours of reading so I can look cuter at school. Leigh

Several participants stated that they dress casually in certain academic departments. The alteration of appearance based on academic department is discussed further in the following sections.

Many respondents talked about their attempts to look professional when teaching, because it is role that demands respect. They discussed a desire to visually separate themselves from their students by wearing "more adult clothes," "clothes that make it look like I know what I'm talking about" and appearing "like I actually care what I look like." The challenge of overcoming hurdles such as age and small income were also discussed.

- If I'm teaching class or doing something more adult where I have to look better, I'll wear like black pants and nicer shoes. Or if I do wear jeans, I'll wear a heel or whatever to dress it up. Erin
- I've spent more time thinking about [professional appearance] this year than other years just because I see myself getting closer to the teaching stage. I want to be myself, but I also want to make sure [students] don't mistake me for one of them, because I'm going to be teaching. Theresa
- I was pretty conscious at the beginning of the school year of trying to dress in a way that felt kind of professional...kind of put together. I wear skirts to school almost all of the time... It was really important to me not to hide my age, but to not let that be the first thing that anyone notices about me...I was just afraid people wouldn't take me as seriously if I looked really young. Larissa

Other participants discussed how they dress more casually when teaching certain groups of students. One respondent decided to dress down for her role as a teaching assistant, somewhat in response to a fellow TA's plan to dress in a suit in order to intimidate undergraduate students.

- Whatever identity I want to primarily convey about myself is going to differ contextually...I've actually consciously made it a point when I TA not to dress up too much... And I walked into [the classroom] and I said 'I'm going to model myself as the complete antithesis to [my fellow TA], because I'm just a very casual person and I really don't believe in reinforcing these hierarchies.' Especially, you know, in a didactic situation. I really believe in discussion-based learning, and I'm not going to make an uncomfortable environment that's conducive to uncandid discussion... I really consciously made an effort to make it a comfortable, casual environment for them. That's where learning happens, at least for women's polity. Amanda

Another participant discussed the importance of altering her appearance depending on the age of her students. She teaches high school students, a role she dresses casually for, as well as undergraduate students, an audience she dresses professionally for.

- I definitely alter my appearance based on the function I expect to play and the audience I expect to see...It's actually interesting because I teach test preparation for high schoolers... when I first was teaching when I was 20, I started out

looking exactly like the students because I look younger than my age. And so [I taught] in jeans, like normal. And then about a year ago, I wondered what would happen if I dressed up, and so I started wearing nice pants and tops to teach, and actually it didn't work. I just did not connect with the students. I definitely felt like they perceived more of a barrier. The put me more in the stuffy teacher category, and so I went back to wearing jeans. If I'm teaching University students I always wear at least black dress pants and a nice top...I have a very informal [teaching] style, and I'm very young and a woman, so I feel like I need extra authority, and my appearance is the best way to do that. I almost always wear makeup when I'm teaching university students, and again that's just part of looking older. Lacey

Some participants stated that they feel the need to dress up more because of the fact that they are women who study feminist theory and use feminist methodologies in their academic work. They feel their work is not taken as seriously as non-feminist scholars or men, and professional clothing helps to combat this.

- Another issue is being a younger woman in academia or even like what I'm doing with my fieldwork. I'm engaging with professionals, and I find it really difficult to be taken seriously...because it happens that women in particular are objectified. Katherine
- My [work wardrobe] is partly due to feminism, but especially in my case because feminism infuses my work, because my scholarship is feminist scholarship, and because I know some people will take what I do less seriously... Because I'm not doing the 'important' work. You know, the methodologies are different. I'm not doing the kind of standard political science methodologies from my critical theoretic feminist perspective. Jackie

When asked about contexts in which professional dress is required, all respondents mentioned academic conferences. Several participants discussed how they felt uncomfortable in their conference attire, which often included a suit. This attire often felt like a costume to the person wearing it, as it consisted of pieces of clothing and other appearance details that the respondent would not normally wear.

- At a conference, I'm in full drag...It's a persona that I put on very consciously. I wear suits and heels and I do the full makeup. Basically I want to look professional. I want to distance myself from popular conceptions of what people who do feminist international relations would look like. Lacey
- I feel very *unfunctional* in conference clothing, but I also feel like I fit in with what else is going on. I can't get out of those [clothes] fast enough...I feel like I'm faking it. Theresa

Participants with tattoos and piercings other than earrings discussed whether they felt the need to conceal their body art for professional settings. Respondents were split on the issue, with some stating that their tattoos/piercings were part of their personality and they saw no reason to hide these appearance details. Others reported that they felt pressure to hide their tattoos or piercings in certain departments in order to appear "respectable."

- I never take my piercings out and I could care less if my tattoos show. My attitude about tattoos is: if I have a job where I need to hide them, I need a new job. Rhonda
- When I first started teaching, I felt the need to cover my tattoos...but not too long after I started, I just gave up. First of all, because it was too much of a pain. And second of all, I really started to feel like, you know, the world is changing, and if students can't deal with [my tattoos], they're going to have quite a problem in the real world. So they just need to learn how to deal with it... I make no attempt to hide tattoos or the piercings when I'm teaching. Marcy
- I really consciously don't show [my tattoo] at school, particularly in my department. My colleagues probably know and have probably seen it like on warm days or whatever when I've worn t-shirts, but I definitely was very consciously putting a sweater on before I went to class...I just feel like some of my professors would be perturbed if they knew, and I just don't want to go there with them. Larissa

When discussing professional appearance, one participant discussed how she alters her appearance when she is in the role of the researcher doing fieldwork, which takes place in

conservative church communities. This appearance alteration includes taking out her piercings to make herself look “more approachable”.

- All the tattoos are covered... [I look] considerably more professional than when I’m teaching, and considerably more conservative. I mean, I will wear fluffy pink sweaters and black dress slacks, you know, the whole bit... When I do field work, there’s an attempt to project a very different personality. These are clothes in the back of my closet and do not make it into the normal circulation... It is very much a costume... I used to feel bad about it, but that’s what you do to get data. Marcy

Footwear was also a popular topic when talking about professional appearance.

Participants were divided on the issue of whether or not they would wear high-heeled shoes. Some believed they looked better and felt more confident in heels, while others linked high heels to pain and impaired walking.

- I don’t wear flats unless I’m really schlepping...because I feel like my legs are kind of short and stumpy, so I always want to wear heels. Jackie
- My suit is actually cut for and hemmed to wear with heels... in a suit, being a little taller seems a little more commanding. Theresa
- I find it upsetting to think of how much pain those people [who wear heels] are in for no good reason at all. Natalie
- I feel like I’m tall enough and I can’t walk in heels. I wasn’t taught to. There was no time when my mom was like ‘You need to wear heels.’ I just can’t do it, so I look ridiculous, and I’m afraid I’m going to fall over. Samantha

Only one participant mentioned styling her hair differently in professional versus casual settings:

- If [my hair] is in a Mohawk, I’ll wear it down and more professional-like if I need to for a conference or something like that. Rhonda

Altering appearance based on academic department

Many participants were taking classes in different departments and discussed how they altered their appearance based on what department they were in on a particular day.

Sometimes the differences were subtle, and sometimes were revealed only in posture or the way the participant thinks about her appearance when in a specific department. Some respondents stated that they felt less pressure to dress a specific way in feminist studies departments.

- In Jewish studies classes, I think I'm a little bit more conscious of being modest... In observant Judaism there are laws about modesty, so women have to cover their arms and have shirts up to the neck and skirts below the knee. I don't follow [the modesty rules], but I am aware of that especially if we're talking about Jewish women in class or something, these kinds of things will come up. So for me, I will go 'Oh God! Cleavage! Let's make sure my shirt is buttoned up or something...' I've always sort of felt in my women's studies classes that there is such a range... it seems to be whatever I'm wearing is fine, because there always seems to be a range. Alecia

One participant stated that in the feminist studies department it feels like she doesn't have to combat the perception that she's not serious because of her feminist scholarship, but this is a concern in the political science department.

- I remember once I wore a really funky necklace...It was a unique piece, and I was like 'Oh, I could get away with it over there [feminist studies department]'... In [the political science department,] I would think 'everybody's going to be looking at this, and be like "what the hell?"' and it would work against my efforts to blend into the background or to be taken seriously...In the feminist studies department, I think I would be more willing to, if for some reason I wanted to tie my hair back, I might not in political science or I'd make sure it looks nice, whereas I might just say 'screw it' in feminist studies. Jackie

Another participant felt the exact opposite from the above respondent regarding her appearance in feminist studies versus her appearance in political science. She stated that she felt like an outsider in feminist studies, so there was extra pressure to play by that

department's "rules" of appearance, as opposed to her home department of political science, where she felt like she belonged. In the political science department, she felt she had more freedom to dress however she wanted because people in her own department would not question her legitimacy based on her appearance.

- In the political science department, it is me as an actor. I'm a legitimate actor. And I'm working there, so I have the right to be who I am. But in gender and women's studies, although I'm very much interested, I'm still an outsider. Madeline

She went on to discuss the pressure to dress casually in the feminist studies department, stating that she would dress down for feminist theory class because she didn't want to stand out as "the girly-girl":

- I made an effort to dress very casually when I was going to my feminist theory class, because everybody was very casual. So I didn't want to be the girly girl. I think it is kind of sad and weird that I'm thinking about this while I do a lot of feminist research myself... But if I'm going to the poli-sci department, I dress how I want to dress, and I really wouldn't care what people thought there... The problem with [the feminist theory] class is that we were pushed in order to access a certain feminist description. Madeline

When I asked the above participant whether she thought the singular definition of feminism included specific appearance standards, she indicated that this was the case, and she considered the following visual cues to be consistent with the way the feminist studies students were expected to look class:

- Very casual, who doesn't care how she looks... I think the image was 'brains over looks' probably, and that's understandable but that's not for me. Madeline

Another respondent stated that she feels pressure to look like she doesn't care about her appearance in her home department (geography) and academia in general even though she views dress as a creative outlet.

- I think especially being in Geography, which is a discipline that's super critical of capitalism and consumption and stuff like that, and fashion is kind of this disposable industry that's seen as the epitome of what's wrong with the world. I definitely have felt not 'is this okay?', but 'are people going to judge me because of this?' But then I kind of feel like this is who I am, and I struggle a lot with sort of the consumption part of fashion and how to address that in my own political views, and it's kind of this ongoing struggle for me. And I also believe there are ways to have fun with your clothes. I feel like being interested in fashion doesn't mean that you're a shallow person or that you don't care about the world. But I definitely have felt, just being in academia... I feel a little bit like an outsider because I feel like a lot of people seemingly don't care about their appearance and there's this idea that you shouldn't or you are shallow or representing all these bad things. But I feel like I've always just... it's part of who I am and it's something that I'm interested in, and for me it's just a creative outlet, the way that I dress. Katherine

Desire to Appear Neutral

A few participants mentioned that a main strategic element of their wardrobe selection is that they desired to "appear neutral" and blend into a crowd.

- In my mind it's trying to dress in a neutral way. But that's neutral in terms of a whole bunch of different things, like will it be flattering to my body type? And in my head I wear pieces that are just kind of classic and not too trendy... like young professional... I don't like to be the center of attention... so I guess I would like if people saw me and noticed my appearance, that they would think 'Okay, there's some who's just sort of sophisticated but not trying too hard.' Jackie
- I'm just trying not to make my clothes noticeable, I guess. I'd rather just have it be taken for granted and have someone look at my face... you could just scan your eyes over me and... there's not really anything you can interpret about who I am. You have to engage me as a person. Leigh

Socializing at Bars, Parties, Dates

Another context participants often brought up was that of attending parties, going on dates, and going to bars. Many respondents mentioned putting on garments that are more sexually provocative, such as a shirt that shows cleavage, for these settings. One participant stated that her clubbing wardrobe goes into “potentially anti-feminist terrain” because of the sexually suggestive nature of these clothes.

A few participants went in the opposite direction and stated that they dress casually when going out at night.

- If I was going out dancing or something, I would probably wear sneakers and jeans and I would probably wear a t-shirt, and I would probably deliberately wear a t-shirt that showed my tattoo... So I guess I look pretty similar when I go out, but definitely more casual. Larissa
- If I'm going to a kind of event that's supposed to be more formal and I'm in kind of a resistant mood, then I'll wear some baggy trousers and a top...but if I'm in a slightly less resistant mood, then I will wear jeans and a top. Natalie

Appearance Tied to Sexual Orientation

Several participants stated that they identify as homosexual. I did not ask my respondents specifically about their sexual orientation, but many of them brought up the topic during our discussions about appearance, which in turn led to a dialogue of what appearance markers are tied to homosexuality. Additionally, participants talked about how an environment or setting impacts how they will present themselves visually. For example, a respondent might alter her clothing or posture based on whether other gay people will be present. Often, this alteration translated into wearing less feminine styles if she knows the environment is gay-friendly.

- I think [the alteration of my appearance] has more to do with knowing whether I'm going to be surrounded by a lot of straight people or a lot of queer people, and if I know I'm in a queer setting, then I definitely dress to that. And I just carry myself differently... I will wear really simple things on my top, like plain t-shirts... bigger belts....I sit differently in chairs ...I sit farther back and a little bit more slouchy...I don't cross my legs in most [queer] settings. Theresa
- I do think about my appearance a little bit more, interestingly, when I'm moving in sort of lesbian circles... People do say sometimes that girls dress up for other girls more than they do for guys, so I wouldn't be surprised if that had something to do with it. Samantha

One participant stated that she feels compelled to look a certain way when spending time with her gay friends or hanging out in gay-friendly settings.

- I actually get more comments from my gay friends about not dressing gay enough. So it's not really my straight friends that I feel like I'm dressing up to. I feel like I just probably do it, you know, to fit in... It's clothing and hairstyle. My hair's long, obviously, and that's not typically associated with visible dyke lesbians. And I do wear girls' clothes, so you know, wearing men's clothing or baggier clothing is probably something that would be more associated with gay women. I don't know. I'm actually a little confused and aggravated by that...One time when we were planning on going out to this gay bar, my friends were like 'do you think you can dyke it up tonight for us?' Erin

Additionally, several respondents stated they were concerned with how "out" to be in an everyday setting, unsure of whether they wanted everyone to know that they were gay and wear appearance markers commonly associated with homosexuality. This presented a conflict, as a couple of respondents acknowledged that it is sometimes easier to be assumed as heterosexual.

- A lot of the time people don't just assume that I'm gay...It's good and bad in the sense that I don't get harassed and people don't make assumptions that are negative about me, but at the same time, I'm always having to come out, and people are questioning it. Erin
- I think in African American Studies intellectual respectability is a big deal and I have a couple of friends who are in the department who are also queer, who are

negotiating how to dress, how to look, how to act, how 'out' to be. And all of us are out, but I don't know, I feel like having a marked body in some ways is tricky territory, similarly to shaving my head again. You know, I think that some of my professors would be like 'that's not very respectable.' Larissa

One respondent discussed how she dresses in a more feminine way around her family members and tries not to fit into her mother's stereotype of lesbian appearance, even though her family knows she is gay.

- My mom has all of these ideas about lesbians, and she has concerns about me wearing a sports bra and having my hair in a ponytail. So sometimes I try to avoid the problems by wearing my hair down and not wearing a sports bra... Sometimes it's easier to just not [resist], especially if I go shopping with [my mom] or my sister. I definitely try to wear makeup and make sure to dry my hair and, you know, look cuter, I guess. Erin

Cultural Differences in Appearance

In addition to describing what they saw in the photograph I took at the beginning of the interview, several participants discussed reasons why they wore certain styles of clothing.

Often, the rationale given for wearing clothing that offers substantial coverage of the body was tied to the culture specific to the region where the participant grew up. For example, one participant is from Turkey, which is a country with a very traditional society. She remarked that she dressed with her body covered as a mode of personal safety.

- In Turkey, you have to be very careful about how you look, especially if you're a woman... If you are going to a certain street or a certain part of the city, you have to be very careful about what you wear in order to be left alone by yourself. I think it's coming from family as well. They are very careful about how they look. I'm surrounded by women everywhere, and they are very dominant women who are always standing up for themselves. But they have to be very careful about what they do and how they are viewed because you don't want to be the talk of the town or anything in Turkey. So I think that is why I'm very careful about how I am viewed. Madeline

Summary

All participants varied their appearance based on specific contexts. One of the main contexts mentioned was that of professional situations, which included school for some people. Roles within school also helped determine a participant's appearance. Many respondents were teaching at their educational institutions in addition to taking classes. Participants noted looking far more professional (i.e. slacks instead of jeans, hair and makeup done) on days when they're teaching than days when they'll be students.

A few respondents stated that they alter their appearance based on which academic department they will be visiting on a certain day. Certain participants with tattoos and piercings discussed whether they would hide any of their body art based on context.

Participants were divided on this issue. Some felt that they are respected more if tattoos and piercings are hidden in professional situations, while others saw these appearance elements as integral to their self-expression and would never consider concealing them.

Finally, several participants varied their appearance depending on whether or not they know they will be in a gay-friendly environment. Participants who identified as lesbian mentioned appearance characteristics associated with their sexual orientation. They would play up these appearance markers if they knew they would be in a safe space that welcomes gay culture.

Chapter 8: Conclusions

My interest in this project stems from my own experiences as a young feminist in an academic setting and from my own observations that the women I talk to in daily life seem to want to disassociate themselves from the term “feminist.” I began this study by stating that I believed negative stereotypes associated with the feminist movement, especially appearance stereotypes, are causing women, especially women in my generation and those who are younger, to steer clear of the movement.

I started this project hoping to better understand how feminists in my generation interpret feminism and the specific beliefs and values they identify as inherently feminist. I then aimed to uncover specific visual cues that feminists use to signal a shared belief system to fellow people within the movement. I wanted to know if these cues were stereotypical in nature, according to the participants. Additionally, I was interested in appearance negotiations (and the motivations behind these negotiations) that feminists take part in on a daily basis.

I was not surprised to find that the participants in my study had very inclusive definitions of what it means to be a feminist. These definitions were closely aligned with the third wave definition of feminism, but many of the participants did not want to be labeled as third wave. This generation of feminists allows for a great deal of fluidity and openness in the movement, and they often feel that the wave model is too limiting.

In research question #1, I asked how self-identified feminists describe their appearance. The answer came as the participants viewed their own images and gave detailed

descriptions. There was not much inherently feminist about these descriptions. Their descriptions seemed to be in line with how the majority of women their age would describe their own appearances. In fact, many respondents would make statements about their dissatisfaction with their weight, hair, skin quality, etc. and then say something along the lines of “I know I’m not supposed to say that as a feminist.” The idea seems to be that feminists are supposed to be happy with the way they look, and are not supposed to desire to change their appearance. This is not the reality, of course, and for the majority of my respondents, there is guilt tied to this desire.

In research question #2, I asked how feminist beliefs impact the way self-identified feminists like to look. This question led me to discover how feminists in my generation define the movement. It turns out that the respondents in my study felt uncomfortable defining what it means to be a feminist. They were okay with identifying their personal feminist beliefs, but when it came to the entire movement, they did not want to put limitations on it or the people who claim to belong to it.

This desire to not limit and to not judge extended to the participants’ own appearances. First, feminist values seemed to remind participants that they do not need to do anything special to their appearance simply for the rules of society. Second, if they do feel the desire to conform to heteronormative appearance standards, feminist values allow them not to judge themselves too harshly.

Research questions #3 and #4 were closely aligned and examined together. Research question #3 asks how feminists believe their appearance is tied to feminism, and #4 asks

how feminists use their appearance to signal feminism. These questions led to an exploration of stereotypes associated with feminist appearance. Participants in my study had stereotypes that immediately came to mind. They agreed that these images, like most visual stereotypes, were unfair and not representative of the feminist movement as a whole. Additionally, many respondents thought that the stereotypes were viewed as negative by society and hurt the movement in terms of participation.

Some participants stated that they do have specific items within their wardrobe that they consider to be feminist in nature, such as message t-shirts or political buttons, but that these are not necessarily items they wear every day. Many respondents stated that a person will come to understand their feminist positions by observing their actions rather than their appearance.

Finally, research question #5 asks how respondents vary their appearance based on different situations and contexts. All participants varied their appearance based on specific contexts, which included teaching in a classroom, being a student in a classroom, and taking part in social and professional situations. The specific academic department also mattered to some participants, as did whether or not the environment was gay-friendly or conservative. The differences in appearance were not limited to clothing, and could include hair styling and makeup, and for some participants, covering tattoos and body piercings.

Pulse Survey

Additionally, I used a written pulse survey before I conducted each interview. This four question survey allowed me to quickly gauge a participant's feelings regarding her appearance and feminist beliefs:

- 1. How much do you think about your appearance?**
- 2. How important is feminism to you, personally?**
- 3. How much does your appearance reflect your feminist beliefs?**
- 4. How much do you feel appearance signals feminism?**

I used the answers to the pulse survey along with data from the interviews to discuss my hypothesis: "The more active a self-identified feminist is in the women's movement, as identified in the pulse survey, the higher the probability she will choose to appear as a stereotypical feminist."

From the pulse survey it was obvious that feminism is very important to the participants in my study and they have varying ideas of what it means to be "active" in the women's movement. They also have specific notions of what stereotypical feminists look like. The majority of the participants feel that their appearance cues represent feminism, at least to some extent, but they do not necessarily believe their appearance reflects the stereotypical feminist "look." The most definitive answer I came away with after examining all of the data is that the respondents, most of whom have very open and fluid definitions of what it means to be a feminist, do not feel that a woman needs to look a specific way in order to represent the feminist movement. In fact, they believe that assigning specific appearance cues to feminists, stereotypical or otherwise, actually hurts

participation in the movement by alienating those people who feel they do not fit in with the feminist “look.”

Conclusions Regarding Overarching Research Question:

The five supporting research questions discussed in chapters 5 - 7 all pertain to my overarching research question: “Are there appearance cues tied to feminism, and if so, does the perception of these cues shape society’s understanding of the current feminist movement?” Based on the analysis of the respondents’ answers to the interview questions in my study, I will now provide evidence for a conclusion to that larger research question. The majority of the participants agreed that there are indeed appearance cues tied to the feminist movement. However, the appearance characteristics associated with feminism are usually considered to be representative of a stereotype that is not necessarily accurate. Additionally, many participants feel that the belief in these stereotypes as valid representations of feminist appearance is affecting society’s understanding of the current feminist movement in a negative way. The participants in my study agree that today’s feminist movement is much more inclusive of a variety of people than what the majority of the public thinks. The consensus is that the movement does not have one look associated with it. The inclusiveness of the current feminist movement, according to the participants in my study, extends to appearances, including appearance cues traditionally associated with feminine looks.

Future Implications

Several future studies come to mind which would address the questions that arose out of the present project. First, I believe it would be useful to complete a comparative study of

feminists between different generations. I would explore how 2nd wave feminists and 3rd wave feminists differ in their definitions of the current feminist movement. Additionally, it would be helpful to investigate whether the way 2nd wave feminists define the women's movement has evolved since they first began to identify as feminist.

I am also interested in completing a comparative study between feminists in different cultures. The participants in my current project believe that the women's movement has something to offer to women all over the world. It would be impactful to pose the question "Why does feminism matter in your life?" to women in various parts of the world and compare/contrast them.

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Appendix A.**CONSENT FORM**
Analysis of Feminist Appearance

You are invited to be in a research study on feminist appearance. You were selected as a possible participant because you are a graduate student in the Gender, Women, and Sexuality Studies department at the University of Minnesota. We ask that you read this form and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to be in the study.

This study is being conducted by: Joyce Heckman, a graduate student in the University of Minnesota's Design, Housing, and Apparel Department. This project is conducted under the direction of Professor Marilyn DeLong, Department of Design, Housing, and Apparel.

Background Information

The purpose of this study is: to explore appearance negotiations for subjects within the feminist movement.

Procedures:

If you agree to be in this study, we would ask you to do the following things: You will have your photograph digitally taken for the purpose of describing your own appearance. You will also be asked a series of questions regarding your negotiation of appearance and meanings you associate with appearance as a person self identified as a feminist.

The interview will be recorded on audio tape.

The entire process will not last longer than one hour.

Risks and Benefits of being in the Study

There are no foreseeable risks associated with this study. I anticipate a conversational style of interview.

The benefits to participation are: you will have the opportunity for self reflection and the possibility of learning more about yourself and meanings you associate with appearance.

Compensation:

There is no monetary compensation for participating in this study.

Confidentiality:

The records of this study will be kept private. In any sort of report we might publish, we will not include any information that will make it possible to identify a subject. Research records will be stored securely and only researchers will have access to the records. Audio recordings of the interviews, as well as photographs will be kept private and will be destroyed once the project is complete. In any published material, your photograph will not be identified by your real name, but rather with a code name.

Voluntary Nature of the Study:

Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with the University of Minnesota. If you decide to participate, you are free to not answer any question or withdraw at any time without affecting those relationships.

Contacts and Questions:

The researcher conducting this study is Joyce Heckman. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, **you are encouraged** to contact her at 240 McNeal Hall, 1985 Buford Ave, St Paul, MN 55108, 612-963-1222, heck0098@umn.edu. Or Contact Marilyn DeLong at 240 McNeal Hall, 1985 Buford Ave, St. Paul, MN 55108, 612-625-1219, mdelong@umn.edu.

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher(s), **you are encouraged** to contact the Research Subjects' Advocate Line, D528 Mayo, 420 Delaware St. Southeast, Minneapolis, Minnesota 55455; (612) 625-1650.

You will be given a copy of this information to keep for your records.

Statement of Consent:

I have read the above information. I have asked questions and have received answers. I consent to participate in the study.

ATTENTION FEMINIST STUDIES GRADUATE STUDENTS:

Volunteers needed to participate in a research study regarding personal appearance and appearance associated with the larger feminist movement.

Must be willing to be photographed and participate in an interview (2 hours max).

**Contact: Joyce Heckman
heck0098@umn.edu**

Appendix C. Recruitment Letter

Dear Professor xxxxxxxx,

My name is Joyce Heckman and I am a Ph.D. candidate from the University of Minnesota. I am currently conducting research for my dissertation, which focuses on personal appearance and appearance cues associated with the larger feminist movement. I am recruiting graduate students who are currently enrolled in feminist studies programs (either as majors or minors) to participate in interviews (2 hrs max). Participants must be willing to be photographed and audio recorded. I would greatly appreciate any help you could give, including forwarding this email to potential participants or people who might be in contact with potential participants.

Below is a sample of survey questions participants will be asked:

1. How much do you think about your appearance?
 1___2___3___4___5___6___7___8___9
 Not at all Neutral All the time

2. How important is feminism to you, personally?
 1___2___3___4___5___6___7___8___9
 Not at all Neutral All the time

3. How much does your appearance reflect your feminist beliefs?
 1___2___3___4___5___6___7___8___9
 Not at all Neutral Significant Amount

4. How much do you feel appearance signals feminism?
 1___2___3___4___5___6___7___8___9
 Not at all Neutral Significant Amount

Please contact me if you are able to help. I greatly appreciate your assistance!

Best,

Joyce Heckman
 PhD Candidate in Design, Housing and Apparel
 University of Minnesota
 heck0098@umn.edu