

Do young adult men believe that feminism poses a threat to them and if so what can be done to mitigate these misinterpretations?

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0. Abstract

The first objective of my research will be to explore the perception of young adult men (age 18-23) about feminism. The hypothesis is that young adult men might perceive feminism as a certain threat or have mixed feelings about it. If the hypothesis is correct then the second objective will be to figure out what can be done to mitigate these misinterpretations. In order to find out if young adult men might perceive feminism as a certain threat or have mixed feelings about it, I conducted a focus-group discussion. The results of the research showed that young adult men do feel threatened by feminism. Afterwards, I did in-depth interviews to figure out what can be done to mitigate these misinterpretations. The main findings were that young adult men perceive feminism as a threat, especially extremism within feminism as well as wrong information about it contribute to negative perceptions. Strategies for mitigating this issue include dialogue, education as well as initiatives to bridge the gap between young men and feminism. Rebranding the term feminism may also help. In conclusion, the findings indicate that young adult men feel threatened by feminism and it is important to address this issue in the future and look for solutions in how to mitigate this. For future research, I recommend having participants from a more diverse background including more countries and not all of the participants being university students from the same university.

Keywords: Feminism, young adult men, threat, mitigation, misinterpretations

1.Acknowledgement

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2. Introduction

“One in five Britons also think feminism does more harm than good, while three in 10 feel traditional masculinity is under threat today – the highest among eight western European nations surveyed”(Beaver MBE, K. ,2022). This research clearly shows that the understanding of feminism is contested, leading to severe misconceptions about the concept of feminism and that many men feel threatened by changes in gender roles. According to current feminist discourse, it is important to keep in mind that gender inequality will only disappear when men and women work together to end it, even though this may downplay the real difficulties that men face in anti-patriarchal movements. To achieve gender equality, many men's views and behaviors will need to be altered (Flood, M.,2015).

Most men, like most women, assume that men and women are equal, that they have the same rights and obligations, and that women should be treated fairly and justly in the distribution of benefits and responsibilities. This is supported by recent national studies of community

sentiments in Australia. International data is similar. The International Men and Gender Equality poll (IMAGES), conducted in 2009-2010, provides valuable data on men's gender beliefs and practices. The poll included nearly 8,000 men and 3,500 women aged 18-59. A survey from Brazil, Chile, Croatia, India, Mexico, and Rwanda found that males in all countries, save India, were generally supportive of gender equality, with 87-90% agreeing that promoting women's rights does not disadvantage men. However, this support may be simply superficial or tokenistic. Men's support for quotas and affirmative action programs to boost female involvement in politics, education, and the workplace decreased to 40-74% according to Flood, M. (2015). Men's reactions to initiatives to enhance women's rights and gender equality can be mixed, with favorable, defensive, or resistant answers (Flood, M.,2015).

Many men misunderstand what “feminism” is and thus perceive it negatively, at the same time, the current feminist discourse argues that there must be a cooperation between men and women on quitting gender inequalities. However, due to the high percentage of men who might have this misconception about feminism, this goal would be difficult to reach. Therefore, I want to investigate in this study if young adult men might perceive feminism as a certain threat or have mixed feelings about it and if that is the case then I want to answer the question : “What can be done to mitigate these misinterpretations?”“The notion of feminism for this research is defined as “a movement to end sexism, sexist exploitation, and oppression” (Hooks, B. ,2000, p.1).

3. Research question

The first objective of my research will explore the perception of young adult men (age 18-23) about feminism. The hypothesis is that young adult men might perceive feminism as a certain threat or have mixed feelings about it. If the hypothesis is correct then the second objective will be to figure out what can be done to mitigate these misinterpretations. The research question is formulated in a way that allows me to answer the first part (“ Do young adult men believe that feminism poses a threat to them?”) and if this is correct, I can research the second part (“and if so what can be done to mitigate these misinterpretations?”). There is relatively limited research in combining the perception of young adult men on feminism as well as finding solutions to mitigate these misinterpretations. The research question is formulated in a way that makes it possible to investigate in two different parts which enhances the research since it gives me the opportunity to do more data collection.

4. Theoretical framework

4.1 Introduction to Feminism and goals

The notion of feminism can be defined as “a movement to end sexism, sexist exploitation, and oppression” (Hooks, B. ,2000, p.1). Feminist activists recognize that many people are unaware of or dismiss sexism as a non-issue. Many people believe that feminism is always and only about women wanting to be equal to men. The majority of these people believe feminism is anti-male. However, since most people learn about feminism through patriarchal media, this contributes to their misunderstanding of feminist politics. Women who prioritize gender equality, such as equal

pay for equal labor and shared home tasks and parenting, are the most common representations of feminism in popular culture. They observe that these women are typically Caucasian and wealthy. Media portrays women's liberation as advocating for the right to abortion, lesbianism, and resistance to rape and domestic violence. Most individuals support gender equity in the workplace, which involves equal compensation for equal labor (Hooks, B. ,2000).

4.2 Perceptions of Feminism Among Young Adult Men

Skinner G.et al. (2024) discovered that among those aged 16 to 29, 46% of women believe feminism has done more good than harm to society, which is 10% greater than the number of young males who believe the same (36%). This indicates that more women believe that feminism does more good to society than harm compared to young men. The fact that only 36% of men believe that feminism has done more good to society than harm is quite worrying since this indicates that 64% disagree with the statement (Skinner G.et al. ,2024).

4.3 Intergroup threat and social dominance orientation

Although useful, the preceding study of Morrison, K. R. et al. (2009) on status, group identification, and SDO (social dominance orientation) fails to account for the fact that a group's relative place in society can be more or less stable. That is, status and power relations can shift in response to social and economic situations (for example, employment shortages, elections, policy changes), with some groups believing that outgroups are jeopardizing their interests. In this

work, the researchers refer to perceived barriers to a group's status, power, and material resources as intergroup threats. Threats to a group's position have been proven to elicit outgroup prejudice and support for initiatives that benefit the ingroup. Intergroup threats can also influence more direct manifestations of support for social inequality (i.e., SDO), though perceptions of status have yet to be evaluated in this context. In one relevant experiment, highly identified humanities majors who were under threat from scientific majors had higher SDO scores than those who were not. Thus, SDO appears to serve as a strategy of defending the ingroup's status and resources in the face of adversity, especially for those whose sense of self is linked to their group membership. It is unknown, however, whether threatened group members will be more motivated to safeguard their resources in this way (i.e., to support social inequality) when they consider their group to be high or low in status. Morrison, K. R. et al. (2009) propose that among strongly identified group members, perceptions of group status and intergroup threat may interact, resulting in increases in SDO when both are very strong. Morrison, K. R. et al. (2009) research has found that the association between danger and indirect measures of support for social inequality (e.g., prejudice) is larger for high-status groups than for low-status ones. One possible explanation is because high-status group members believe they have more authority and resources to lose from the threat. Therefore, when the ingroup is not endangered, high-status group members should not feel compelled to defend their interests against outgroups by accepting social dominance views (Morrison, K. R. et al., 2009).

4.4 Rethinking Masculinity: A Call for Feminist Perspectives

More men are becoming aware of masculinity as something they do and perform rather than something they are, in addition to a growing awareness of structural inequalities caused by unequal gendered power relations in the practice of masculinity. A return to feminist theory is therefore required in order to account for questions of agency and emotional reflexivity when males negotiate masculine practices and discourses. As contemporary society becomes more aware of issues such as social inequalities, misogyny, and sexism, it is critical to reconsider how we theorize masculinity, considering men's identifications and practices that are not reducible or contained within identity categories. As it stands, masculinity is still viewed as something that actively constrains or oppresses men, provides them with a set of rewards and privileges, or serves to categorize males. If men are becoming more conscious of their own privileged positions in society as a result of their engagement with masculinity, how can they negotiate and reflect on their positions while considering the effects they have on others? These are questions that remain unresolved in the research (Waling, A. ,2018).

4.5 Three-Day Debate on Women's Rights and Gender Justice

Since this research also focuses on solutions on how to mitigate misinterpretations about feminism, I will look at an example of a three day debate on women's rights and gender justice. Each day of the debate was centered on a particular topic and a set of essential guiding questions. On Day One, participants shared positive experiences of collaboration and partnership, as well as problems faced while working with men and boys in women's rights and gender justice. On Day

Two, participants explored the meanings of partnership, accountability, and gender transition in greater depth. On Day 3, we discussed proposals for advancing women's rights and gender justice, both personally and collectively. We also provided recommendations to funders, governments, and UN organizations. Over 100 participants contributed to a dynamic and thought-provoking debate over three days (MenEngage Alliance, n.d.).

5. Methods

5.1 Focus group discussion

To answer the first part of my research question : “Do young adult men believe that feminism poses a threat to them?”, I did a focus group discussion. For my moderator-dominated focus group discussion , I structured the discussion into 4 parts: Introduction, exploring perceptions, understanding their concerns and conclusion. The introduction part included the questions: Can each participant briefly introduce themselves and share their general thoughts or experiences related to feminism? What does feminism mean to each of you, and how do you perceive its impact on society?

For the second part which was about exploring perception, the following questions were posed: Do you personally believe that feminism poses a threat to you? Why or why not? Have any of you encountered or observed instances where feminism was kind of perceived as a threat to young adult men so maybe also from your surroundings if you heard any situations?

The third part talked about understanding participants' concerns and included the following questions: Do you have concerns or fears regarding feminism for now or in the future? How do these concerns or fears influence your attitudes towards feminism?

To conclude, I asked the participants: Based on our discussion today, what do you think are some key insights or conclusions regarding the perception of feminism as a threat to young adult men? Is there anything else you would like to add or discuss before we conclude our focus group session?

The focus group included 3 participants. Individuals who are in the age group from 18-23 and identify as men were considered as a participant. Furthermore, they were all from different countries (India, Germany and the Netherlands). The participants were recruited from the University of Groningen and the focus group discussion took place online. In order to answer all of the questions I had for the group, the design for the focus group was a moderator-dominated group discussion (Hennink, M. et al. ,2020).

5.2 In-depth interviews

For the second part of my research question: “What can be done to mitigate these misinterpretations?”, I did in-depth interviews. The participants for the interviews were recruited from the University of Groningen and in total 5 interviews were conducted. Individuals who are in the age group from 18-23 and identify as men were considered as a participant. The

participants are also from different countries. One participant is from Germany, three participants are from the Netherlands and one is from Slovakia. Additionally, it is important to mention that individuals participating in the interviews have different sexual orientations which makes this research more inclusive. The in-depth interviews were either conducted online or in person.

The interview was structured the following way: The first part was about understanding participants' stance. Therefore these questions were asked: Could you please briefly introduce yourself? What comes to your mind when you hear the term feminism? Would you consider yourself a feminist ?

Second I asked more general questions coherent with the topic: What are some common reasons you believe lead young adult men to view feminism as a threat to them? Can you provide examples of situations where you've observed or experienced young adult men feeling threatened by feminist ideals or movements? In your opinion, what are some potential consequences of young adult men perceiving feminism as a threat? What strategies or approaches do you believe could be effective in addressing these misinterpretations and fostering understanding between young adult men and feminism? How important do you think it is for young adult men to engage in dialogue and education about feminism? Are there specific aspects or principles of feminism that you think young adult men find most threatening? If so, what are they, and why? Have you encountered any initiatives or programs aimed at bridging the gap between young adult men and feminism? If yes, what were they, and what impact did they have? How do you think societal norms and expectations contribute to young adult men's perceptions of feminism as a threat?

Afterwards, I delved into questions related to the focus group discussion I conducted: Why do you think quotas for women can be seen as a threat and what could be done about that? In my focus group one participant said that feminism going too far is something that actually scares young adult men. Do you agree with that? What do you think can be done to make sure that young adult men don't feel this way? One participant mentioned that there is a sort of meaning crisis for men because the defined gender roles are changing, what do you think could be a solution for that? One participant also mentioned that because women are becoming less dependent on men this makes them feel less valuable to the opposite sex, how do you think this can be solved? One participant mentioned also uncertainty about where feminism is going, what could be a way of changing that uncertainty? One participant also mentioned that feminism is badly mediated, do you also agree with that?

Concluding, I asked questions like: What steps do you believe are necessary to create a more inclusive and supportive environment where young adult men feel empowered to engage with feminism positively? What would help you for the future to engage more with feminism?

5.3. Informed consent form

The informed consent form of the focus group discussion was really similar to the informed consent form of the in-depth interviews. The forms only differentiate in their content provided since there is a different question asked for the focus-group than for the interviews. First participants were informed what the title of the study is, then I articulated what this study is

about. This was followed by the questions: “What does participation involve? Do you have to participate? Are there any risks in participating? Are there any benefits in participating? How will information you provide be recorded, stored and protected? What will happen to the results of the study?” Additionally, I provided information about the ethical approval, the informed consent form, and who you should contact for further information. In the end the informed consent form was signed by the participant and by me.

6. Expected outcomes

With my empirical research, I expect to find out if the hypothesis that young adult men might perceive feminism as a certain threat or have mixed feelings about it, is true. If the hypothesis is true then the second objective will be to figure out what can be done to mitigate these misinterpretations.

7. Results

7.1 Focus-group discussion

The focus group discussion which aimed to answer the first part of my research question : “Do young adult men believe that feminism poses a threat to them?”, had important insights for my research.

When exploring participants' perceptions I asked: "Do you personally believe that feminism poses a threat to you? Why or why not?" Participant 1 answered: "[...]So how it can be threatening is that because society takes the word of women much more than for men, for example, like you're in a workplace, and if a woman is getting offended by you, you don't need to, like offend her. And she's taken offense, by some way because of miscommunication or something, maybe she has an option to actually destroy your career by just making a false allegation, or just something like that. And, you know, the corporate won't even look into whether if it's true or not, they just take the word of the female, and they just fire him and they can potentially, you know, disregard, I'm not talking about genuine cases where women are actually being mistreated, I'm talking about where some women take advantage of these false allegations for their own personal advantages. Right. So that could be a way where the concept of feminism can be exploited in the wrong way." Participant 3 then supported this argument by saying: "[...]I think you make a very good point there. I think that's the one of the main concerns that most people have. Like, pretty much anything is bad when radicalized. So if it's [...] too far or too much, it's just bad. And I think that's what people are afraid of [,]that it's at some point going to be too bad. So I think in general, right now, I'm personally not worried. But like, if things would be so much like everything shifts completely one way or the other. I think that would be more concerning."

Participant 2 then states his opinion: "[...] I find, I guess, most worrying is sort of very insistent on quotas, and the move away from meritocracy, it seems to me, but as someone who I guess, would want to have a career and have, you know, research, I think it is, I would want to believe that that best world would be a world where you are hired based upon your abilities and your skills, and not based upon some immutable characteristic. But, you know, I guess [it] shouldn't play a significant role in most cases. So, and whenever people, I think [participant 3] also sort of

mentioned that in when when he talked about sort of like, managers and benevolence, but I think whenever you try to apply some sort of like quota system, but just not only, I guess, on a personal level, that really bugs me, because I feel like I have less opportunities or less potential opportunities, obviously, it's difficult to know, but also on a societal level, that really worries me, because obviously, I don't want anyone to be hired because of what they have between the legs or how they dress, I want people to be hired based upon the competency. And that also goes for the most important parts of society where it's about, like, safety. I don't want [...], I guess, a nuclear safety officer to be hired, because you know, they fit the right boxes. I think that would lead to disaster down the road.”

Another question I asked to find out the perceptions of respondents was if any of them have encountered or observed instances where feminism was perceived as a threat to young adult men and if so, if they could describe those situations. The response from participant 3 was that sometimes it's just impossible to get employed for a particular profession. For example, even if you want to be a waiter, you won't normally be recruited because they only hire women. The cashier staff is the same; they seldom ever hire guys. Interviewee 2 responded: “I think when I first moved to Groningen two years ago, just like amount of landlords or just like opportunities housing opportunities for woman is like so much higher, obviously but has also to do with like preference. You know, if you [...] are in a [...] student house and you want to live with only women that's completely fine. I'm just saying [...], if you are looking at housing opportunities at like, 60- 70% are only women or the landlord would only want a woman, that sort of is quite disheartening, I think. I think another sort of example, It's sort of a bit, I guess, outcome focused,

but I mean, I study psychology [...]. It's obviously social science. But if you just like, look around in university in general, but especially in the social sciences, you see 60- 70% women, and I don't think that's a bad thing or anything. I'm not I'm not complaining here. [It's] just that, well, obviously, university is a huge predictor on your [...] future career. And if, if you will, I don't believe in parity, I don't believe that, but I believe it's fine when certain fields have disproportionate representations. But when university overall becomes dominated by [...] one gender, I think [...] it's sort of like a symptom of a bigger issue. But men, young men, fall academically behind [and] choose different paths, and don't seem to [do] well, in the future will lead to, you know, reverse gender pay gap, or just like different, I guess, career choices.[...].”

Participant ones' transcripts to this question were unfortunately not really clear so I did not include them here.

When I wanted to know if the participants have concerns or fears regarding feminism for now or in the future, only participant one and two answered. Participant two responded that he thinks in our current societies, at least the ones where he grew up in, there's a lot of policy focus and programs, like women in STEM and so but they don't seem to have such great effect. However, he then goes on by saying that there is a lot of resources and money put into that and with great results like as he mentioned women are excelling not only higher in school, but also in higher education. He adds that also in the job market that if you look at women under 30 they really outperform the men when it comes to pay raises. He then explains that he doesn't think the resources in themselves are a bad thing but that we are leaving behind a lot of young men who seem to be struggling in school and who seem to not want to or not have the ability to go to

university. He concludes that if we keep on ignoring that we will have horrible societal issues. Participate one replies to interviewee 2: “Yeah, I totally agree with you on that, because I think mental health has been a major concern for the past few years, I think ever since the lockdown, mental health has been , I feel like the mental health of men has been overlooked compared to that of women. And that's no surprise that the suicide rates of men are much higher compared to women. “ The follow up question if these concerns or fears influence your attitudes towards feminism, will not be discussed in the results section since too many other things were discussed before the follow up question so I am not sure how accurately it was answered.

The concluding question: “Based on our discussion today, what do you think are some key conclusions regarding the perception of feminism as a threat to young adult men?” provided interesting insights. Participant two articulated: “ [...] I think what were the key takeaways, I think, what we, I guess, mostly agreed on at least that was my perception was sort of that [...] feminism in general is as a construct, the label that is way too broad and therefore [...]not really descriptive of anything, particularly. And that also [...] the noble goal of having [...] equal opportunity or something like that. As as, as feminism has sort of fallen short or doesn't, well, doesn't actually represent or mostly ignores young men's issues or problems with them, doesn't address them or try to handle them. I don't know if you agree, if you want to add anything?”

Participant one continued: “ Yeah, I will say more. So I would say [...] that you not only emphasize on the [...] moment of feminism, I think that women's issues should be talked [about] separately and men's issues should be talked separately so that collectively we can find common solutions to each other's problem[s]. And I think that could lead to good economic prosperity.

Interviewee 3 then concluded that he thinks most men are just scared that it is taken too far as in they will lose their rights or anything. He does not think that they are necessarily worried about the pay gap or like the equality of things but he believes that it is the not being equal part that actually scares them.

7.2 In-depth interviews

7.2.1 General questions

For the second part of my research I aimed to answer : “What can be done to mitigate misinterpretations about feminism posing a threat to young adult men?”

For the in-depth interviews the first question asked is: “What comes to your mind when you hear the term feminism?” Participants provided various insights to that. The first participant said that for him the suffragette movement and anything to while it's basically movements to create equality between men and women comes to mind when hearing the term feminism. The second participant talked about the ideology and the ambition to have equality amongst men and women. Additionally, the third participant articulated that when he thinks of the term feminism, also from his studies and everything, he thinks mostly about equal rights for women, on every sphere, in society, so it can be on an economic, political, political, societal level. The fourth participant said as answer: “Two things. First of all, just an observation, I would say. Secondly, I can't help but think of all the jokes some people have made and how it's a very conflicted feeling[...] every now and then towards it. Yeah, that's what comes to mind instantly. “ The last interview participant explained that for him the first that came to his mind when hearing the term

feminism is equality and activism also including female activism and equality of a female and male. Additionally he explained that for him feminism is like equality because feminism is also related to economy, philosophy and social sciences.

When asking the participants if they would consider themselves a feminist, different responses were mentioned. While four of the interview participants would consider themselves a feminist. However, participant 3 said: “I wouldn't per say consider myself a feminist. It's also due to the [...] grouping of the people that consider themselves feminists, I wouldn't say that I am, like, exactly similar to most people who consider themselves feminists. So if you [are] purely based on how other people identify who consider themselves feminists. So if you purely based on how other people identify themselves as feminists, I don't think I meet the criteria.”

When asking participants the following question: “What are some common reasons you believe lead young adult men to view feminism as a threat to them?” All participants provided different insights to the question. While the first participant argued that he believes that influence is the common reason for young adult men viewing feminism as a threat to them, the second participant stated that: “[...] I think the reason why young men could feel negatively towards feminism is because [oftentimes] we only see the extremes and if the extreme side of feminism exists, where they believe that men should be put down, for the benefit of women, and obviously, then there can be some resentment towards them, towards feminism.” The third participant expressed that for him there is an issue with feminism and this is mainly due to the marketing of

feminism. Furthermore, he goes on by saying that there are many people advocating for feminism but that there is no clear guideline on how to make it happen. The fourth participant, however, voiced that common reasons why young adult men view feminism as a threat is insecurity. He elaborates:” What I see what I also experienced, when I was younger, was it's now a very tricky place for a lot of men where, at least when I grew up, which was in the 2000s, was, it was still the time when as a white man, you got told, okay, you're a white man, you basically get to do whatever you want to get away with it. And this has been changing. And I think this has made a lot of men perceive feminism more as a threat than they already did. Because I do think men have always [been] perceived as a threat, because they enjoy the power they have. They are empowered, because they treat women as less and if women are treated as equal, they will lose a lot of power because we are equal.” For the fifth participant misinformation was the main reason.

When asking what strategies or approaches they believe could be effective in addressing misinterpretations about feminism and fostering understanding between young adult men and feminism, the participants provided different possible solutions. Two participants emphasized the importance of education as a solution. Participant one believes that starting at an early age is crucial in addressing misinterpretations about feminism and fostering understanding between young adult men and feminism. Additionally to that he says that: “[W]e should make people more aware of the effects of influencers and the agenda that they might have. And help people

tend to see the problems with their ideologies or show them what the true definition of feminism is, not just a group of women hating them, that sort of stuff.” One participant mentions the idea of having debates and media feminism properly. One of the participants had a really different and unique approach to the others by wanting to branch off from the word feminism itself since he thinks that it already has a negative connotation amongst many people. He continues: "So I would branch off and maybe like, get like a new branch in the tree of feminism, where it is academically, like, backed up where there is like, there should be a lot of like clean canvas. [...] Then a possible solution will be rebranding, creating a new branch of feminism and making sure the negative connotation is taken away, so you can actually[...]make your point come across. In that case, it would not be about looking for the road of most resistance, but it would be about like, for instance, how we see it on tik tok right now, Gen Z marketing it's not about pushing it in your face, but it's like moving people along the line that you want them to move on even though they're not noticing it. That should be the case with feminism as well, we should have equal opportunities for both genders in this case, or both sexes in this case where people don't even recognize anymore that there is a lot of resistance or a lot of [...] friction on both sides. It's just equally going there without them even noticing and then like equal opportunities is for all. But so yeah, I would use [...] a rebranding Gen Z method.”

When asking: “How important do you think it is for young adult men to engage in dialogue and education about feminism?” all participants agree that it is important for young adult men to engage in education about feminism. Additionally, three participants also clearly state the

importance of dialogue. For participants 2 and 5 it was for me a bit unclear what they think about dialogue when asking this question directly.

The question: “Have you encountered any initiatives or programs aimed at bridging the gap between young adult men and feminism? If yes, what were they, and what impact did they have?”, brought different insights on participants' stances. Participant one explained: “I don't know [of] any specific programs but you have the feminist network Groningen. If I'm correct. And they're open for youth, in general, to attend their meetings and events, for dialogue. [...]More for people who identify themselves as a feminist, [the] general public, any organizations that try to close the gap between young men and feminists, the only example [is] Femke Halsema, the mayor of Amsterdam, who actively visits secondary schools to talk with young men about feminism.” When asking this participant if the may and the organization in Groningen are having a big impact, he said that he doesn't think that he feminist network has a big impact. However, he believes that Femke Halsema is making an impact because she does make the headlines quite often. Participant two didn't know any programs or initiatives, however he argued that initiatives or programs aimed at bridging the gap between young adult men and feminism can help but depends on how everything is formed and formulated. Participant 3 provided a long and insightful answer to the question: “I mean we have the 8th of March, women's protest, which I think is a wonderful day to keep reminding everyone about what's still not in place, but then again, should it be one day or should it be every day? So yes, we have the 8th of March and, of course, within our uni, I think, we touch upon it a lot. I'm just wondering how effective it is because, like, we are already in a bubble, where we notice it a lot and like, I'm

personally not afraid of it at all that like, a woman is better than me, because I know my own value and know my own worth. So maybe it's also insecurity from [...] men in general that they will [...] underperform. So I can not say a lot about the effectiveness of the programs here because, yeah, it's not a blanco where we have a group of people who have never seen feminism before and then okay this initiative worked so well, because now they're all pro equal rights.” Participant 4 didn't hear of any initiatives and regarding participant 5 it is important to mention that the transcripts for this part are quite unclear so it is hard to know his precise answer to this question.

Participants had different opinions on the question: “How do you think societal norms and expectations contribute to young adult men's perceptions of feminism as a threat?” While two participants clearly stated that they do not think that societal norms and expectations contribute to young adult men's perceptions of feminism as a threat. Two participants do believe that this is the case and participant 4 gave a bit of an unclear answer to this question.

7.2.2 Questions related to focus group discussion

In my focus group discussion various topics were discussed. However some comments resonated with me which was the reason why I discussed them as well with my interview participants to find solutions for them.

One question is: “Why do you think quotas for women can be seen as a threat and what could be done about that?” Participant 1 answered: “I don't think there's anything that can be done to change that because it will, it will always remain this quota to be fulfilled and it will mean that some men will be discriminated against. The only thing that can be done is to show people that's the fairest possible process and that diversity is something we all benefit from[...].” Participant two started his answer by stating that he doesn't see quotas for women as a threat. He continued: “However, I'm also a strong believer [that] someone should also earn their job on merit, or in general should end their position and respect on merit. Regardless of if they're a man or a woman, a member of the LGBTQIA+community. So I don't really see it as a threat, but for me, in general, I think also positions in life should be earned because of what's done, rather than in general be given to you.”As a solution he said that potentially it would work to just have like a more secretive application procedure where you don't know the gender, for instance. Participant 3 is personally not in favor of quotas and concludes with: “[...] I would still opt for another solution [than quotas] and what it would be I have no clue.” Another participant answers the questions by explaining that it is important to ensure that candidates are hired on the basis of their qualifications rather than their gender. Although he does agree that this is a problem that starts at the bottom of the chain. He believes that if you start giving everyone equal opportunities in life—that is, giving women the same opportunities for education, internships, and all other kinds of opportunities—you won't even need quotas because resumes are what employers look at, not a person's gender. It basically boils down to who puts in more effort and is more. [...] Additionally, he believes that males are wary of quotas because they are aware that there may be women who are equally or even more qualified than them. Participant 5 is not in favor of quotas as well,

however he offers solutions to not make quotas for women seen as a threat. The solutions include campaigns, programs and workshops.

When telling my interview participants that in my focus group one individual said that feminism going too far is something that actually scares young adult men. I asked the interviewees what they think can be done to make sure that young adult men don't feel this way. They provided different insights, unfortunately for participant 3 I can not include the answer since I did not ask the correct question and for participant 5 the transcripts seem unclear what exactly was said. One participant explained that social media surveillance is ongoing, as users make contentious remarks against feminism. In his opinion, there ought to be a way to indicate in the footnotes where their suffering may not quite match reality. Another participant elaborated: "I mean obviously the best solution is people in general not having too radical ideas but I think, obviously, still, having discussions and learning about different perspectives is the best way to not be threatened by something. I think as humans in general, we are scared of things that we don't fully understand or can't control, so I think if we're able to understand the situation better and the intentions better, because I'm sure not [...] everyone who fully goes with the extreme also fully understands the extreme. But I think just in general education and having more discourse on it." According to participant 4, the solution to this is through sincere discussion and interaction. Furthermore, he adds it's critical to take into account the possibility that it may be difficult to locate those who are genuinely open to having that conversation.

7.2.3 Future steps

When asked: “What steps do you believe are necessary to create a more inclusive and supportive environment where young adult men feel empowered to engage with feminism positively?” interviewees all agreed that dialogue and conversation is the solution for this. For instance one participant elaborated:” Well, definitely open up the dialogue, get feminism more in the mainstream, so using ad campaigns make it something that's more approachable to talk about without being seen as either a radical or most relatively in favor or against feminism. Make it [a] more casual conversation topic and start at a young age, educate parents about how they're presenting gender roles, and traditional family roles and have them talk to their children about what's realistic in society.” Another interview participant stated:” I would say an important step is seeing feminism not only as a women's issue, it predominately is but also accepting that men have also a major role in it. As well[,]not immediately stopping a conversation or getting upset at someone for having a different view because perhaps they're not informed or if they are informed, understanding why we have this position and then having a discourse about that, rather than being in a polarized society.[...].”

Afterwards I had a follow up question to see what would help the interview participants themselves for the future to engage more with feminism. While participant 1 wants to be more mindful of feminism in the future and try to be more active in talking about feminism, participant 2 wants to take part in open and inclusive discussions. Participant 3 is unsure, nevertheless, whether he ought to focus more on the subject of feminism than he does at the moment.

Participant 4 did not give a precise answer to the question and participant 5 would like to have more events for women where men can also participate in.

8.Discussion

8.1 Comparison between literature and results

In the following I will discuss my results in relation to existing literature and compare if these findings adhere.

The first literature I want to compare to my findings is the quote that is posed in the beginning in my introduction: “One in five Britons also think feminism does more harm than good, while three in 10 feel traditional masculinity is under threat today – the highest among eight western European nations surveyed” (Beaver MBE, K.,2022). This result aligned closely with the findings of my focus group discussion which showed that this is not only the case for Britons. It is important to mention that the findings of Beaver MBE, K. (2022) are not exclusively only for young adult men.

Another important literature I want to compare my results to is the research of Morrison, K. R.et al. (2009) which highlighted that degrees of perceived threat also influence support for inequality. This strongly aligns with findings discussed in my focus group discussion where for instance one individual said that feminism going too far is something that actually scares young adult men. Furthermore, during my focus group discussion, one member mentioned that if you

look around at universities in general, but especially in the social sciences, you find 60-70 percent women. This may contribute to these perceived threats.

Furthermore, I am interested in comparing my findings with literature of Flood, M. (2015) previously mentioned in my introduction. In their research they discussed that men's reactions to initiatives to enhance women's rights and gender equality can be mixed, with favorable, defensive, or resistant answers. In my findings it is also clear that men support the idea of gender equality in general but when it comes to quotas many of my participants seem to have issues with it. In addition to that in my findings it seems like that participants are not in favor of affirmative action programs. One participant of my focus group directly mentioned that there's a lot of policy focus and programs, like women in STEM but they don't seem to have such a great effect. Therefore, they don't support affirmative action programs due to their perceived lack of success.

8.2. Limitations of focus group discussion

In the following I will discuss the limitations of focus group discussions in general and the limitations of the focus group specific to my research.

The dialogue between participants is spontaneous and, to some extent, unpredictable, which increases the risk of damage or confidentiality issues and decreases the amount of time that these

issues can be identified beforehand during the permission process. Because of the dynamics in the group, some people may end up controlling the conversation and preventing others from voicing their opinions. The many, intersecting interests created by the group environment further complicates issues. Something that would upset one individual might offer voice to another or give them a sense of affirmation. In a similar vein, actions done to preserve the confidentiality or anonymity of certain participants may compromise the input of others. When a focus group is held in the midst of preexisting social or professional relationships, more problems can occur. If reasonable expectations have been communicated and met, some of the ethical issues raised by focus groups can be resolved through the consent process. However, additional steps should be taken to bring these concerns closer to the actual focus of the focus group, such as during the discussion itself, in a briefing that occurs right before the focus group, and in a debriefing that occurs right after the focus group. But more is required given the dynamic nature of the focus group. It is imperative for the moderator to make prompt decisions, such as determining if the nature of the discussion poses a danger of harm to any persons or whether closing a particular topic won't cause other participants to lose their voice (Sim, J. et al.,2019).

Focus group discussions have a number of drawbacks. First of all, they require an experienced moderator—who can be hard to come by—to successfully steer the conversation. Additionally, focus groups need a relaxed atmosphere to promote candid conversation because of their less structured environment. Second, focus groups can have complicated group dynamics. Certain individuals may choose to take the lead in the discourse or choose to stay mute due to social pressure or the formation of hierarchies within the group. The non-confidential environment can

deter people from disclosing private information even more. Lastly, because of time limits, focus group discussions might only cover a small number of topics, and the responses they get might not be impartial, which makes them less useful for collecting data at the individual level. The process of analyzing data can also be expensive and time-consuming (Hennink, M. et al. ,2020).

Another limitation specific for my focus group discussion is that I could only find 3 participants instead of 6. The lower number of participants leads to a limited diversity of perspectives. In addition, due to the lower number there is also less interaction between participants.

8.3. Limitations of in-depth interviews

In the following I will discuss the limitations of in-depth interviews in general and the limitations of my in-depth interviews specific to my research.

There are some limitations of in-depth interviews. First of all, since they are usually one-on-one conversations, there is not always instant input from other participants to offer different viewpoints or encourage deeper investigation of particular subjects. Second, executing successful in-depth interviews calls for a sophisticated skill set. Interviewers need to be skilled at building a relationship with participants so they feel comfortable opening up and being honest about their experiences. The ability to guide the conversation while maintaining objectivity and to respond to the interviewee's responses in a sensitive and suitable manner both become critical skills.

Furthermore, transcribing these interviews can be a very time-consuming operation (Hennink, M. et al. ,2020).

The in-depth interviews consisted of 5 participants. One from Germany, one from Slovakia and three from the Netherlands. Therefore there might be bias in the research since 3 participants are from the same country (the Netherlands). Additionally, another limitation for the interviews is that I already knew two of the participants and with two of them I am also friends with. Another limitation for the interview transcripts is that the recorded audio for participant 5 was not of too good quality and therefore the transcripts are sometimes unclear and could not be used all the time for the results/discussion section.

8.4.Limitations of research

In the following I will look at general limitations specific to my study.

Another limitation of this research is that all participants are from the University of Groningen which means they all are able to attain higher education and there could be bias in the research because of this. Furthermore, some participants might be hesitant to admit sexist beliefs or that they perceive feminism as a threat. Especially in the focus group discussion participants might have felt insecure of explaining their true beliefs. Of course this can be also the case in the in-depth interviews, however with more people interviewees might be more likely to not say what they really think compared to the in-depth interviews. Moreover, it could be that participants' cultural background also influences their concept of feminism. Lastly, the literature in this research is not always focussing only on young adult men which should be kept in mind.

9. Conclusion

In this study, I aimed to answer the research question: “Do young adult men believe that feminism poses a threat to them and if so what can be done to mitigate these misinterpretations?” Answering this question was significant since there was relatively limited research in combining the perception of young adult men on feminism as well as finding solutions to mitigate these misinterpretations. The research question was formulated in a way that made it possible to investigate in two different parts which enhanced the research since it gave me the opportunity to do more data collection. The key findings of my research were that young adult men felt threatened by feminism. This was clear to see in the focus-group discussion I conducted. Participants of my focus group discussion expressed different perceptions of threat as well as concerns they had regarding feminism. When looking at solutions for how to mitigate these misinterpretations of feminism, interview participants gave important insights and believed that education from an early age as well as dialogue were important strategies to mitigate misinterpretations. This research contributed to a better understanding of the perception of feminism of young adult men. Moreover, this study shed light on the issue that the term feminism is often misinterpreted. This research contributes to enhanced information about a range of solutions that can help in mitigating misinterpretations of feminism. Limitations of my research included that I could only find 3 participants instead of 6 for my focus-group discussion. General limitations for this research were that all participants were from the University of Groningen which meant they all were able to attain higher education and there could be bias in the research because of this. Another limitation of this research was that some participants might

have been hesitant to admit sexist beliefs or that they perceived feminism as a threat. Especially in the focus group discussion participants might have felt insecure of explaining their true beliefs. Moreover, it could be that participants' cultural background also influenced their concept of feminism. Lastly, the literature which supports this research is not always focussing only on young adult men which should be kept in mind. Therefore, future research should aim to address these limitations in order to have more diverse and insightful findings. Since this research showed that young adult men did see feminism as a threat it will be important to find solutions to solve this issue. Therefore looking at solutions proposed in this study such as dialogue and education for mitigating misinterpretations about feminism will be crucial in the fight for more gender equality and a more positive association with feminism in the future.

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