

ANALYSIS OF FEMINIST SOCIAL MOVEMENT FRAMES IN AMERICA

by

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Introduction

This project is an analysis of how Americans frame feminism, and focuses specifically on language used by activists in the prior three US feminist movements. The existing literature on the topic of feminism in the United States presents evidence of racial, sexual, gender and other social determinants impacting one another. This is referred to as intersectionality. The existing literature also shows intersectionality becoming more present in the conversations and membership of feminism, but this is supported with primarily qualitative evidence. In this paper I predict that the quantitative data I collect supports the existing evidence of an increase in intersectionality and thus a shift in the framing of feminism over time.

Text comes from photographs of feminist social movement activities, such as marches and protests, in order to create a lexicon, a sort of empirical dictionary, of feminist terms. This language is analyzed using an LDA (Latent Discriminant Analysis) to see how feminist frames have changed since the 1910s. The evidence supports current theories that over time feminism has moved away from broad ideals and demands of the public sector and more towards specific demands and demands for change within the private sector, and that intersectionality has increased in the feminist movement. These results lead the way to further research about text mining, strategic framing of social movements, and the effects of increased intersectionality within the feminist movement.

Studying Social Movements

Overall, the historical literature on social movements is plentiful. It can be distinguished into two groups: scholarship that is more descriptive, and studies which examine the impacts of social movements. While historical literature describing these social movements is ample, fewer studies have examined their impacts. For the purposes of this paper, social movements are a collaboration of multiple actors - whether they be individuals, organizations, states, or informal groups - on the same side of a social conflict (Diani, 1992). These actors begin processes of addressing or drawing attention to emerging or pre-existing social issues. The shared collective identity and ongoing network of informal interaction separates social movements from other similar forms of political participation. For example, a single organization cannot be a social movement in itself, but it may be a part of a social movement. The same with protests - because a protest (which often has collaboration of organizations and individuals, like a social movement) is an isolated event, and not an ongoing process.

Social movements are effective when they are organized (Diani, 1992, Jenkins, 1983, Franceschet, 2004, Andrews & Edwards, 2004). Factors such as the number of issues demanding attention, violence, use of incentives, and leadership all impact the success of a social movement (Gamson, 1989, Mirowsky & Ross, 1981). When social movements are aided by protesters, have a single-issue demand, selectively use incentives, and are not the object of violence research shows a correlation with success of the movement (Amenta, Caren, Chiarello, & Su, 2010).

Feminism In America

In order to understand possible current social movements, it is useful to review the historical record of feminist social movements in the United States. These movements, and the scholarship which describes them, provide us with several insights into the subject matter at

hand. In the following section I review feminist movements by such insights. These include the consequences of their failures, achievements, participants, beneficiaries, and historical placement. Feminist ideology, values, goals, outcomes for members, and outcomes for both society and the state are considered when it comes to the ignition and success or failure of a feminist social movement. Organizational factors such as the method and practice of activism within a social movement as well as the external relations are also considered (Johnston & Klandermans, 1995).

The United States of America has had three feminist “waves” in its history. A feminist social movement or wave can be defined as a series of campaigns for political and societal reforms of, but not limited to, reproductive rights, domestic violence, maternity leave, equal pay, women's suffrage, sexual harassment, sexual violence, and the end of gender discrimination in order to have a more egalitarian society (Martin, 1990). While all waves advocated for feminist ideology and equality, each varied in participants, structure, goals, and achievements. Over the course of U.S. history, three prominent feminist social movements have emerged: the 1920s and suffrage, the 1960s aiming for economic equality in the workplace, and the 1990s when feminism was expanded to include women of color and LGBTQ+ members to address sexual assault.

The first wave’s focus can be generalized as the promotion of legal rights for women. This period lasted from the late 1910s to the 1930s. Property ownership, as well as rights pertaining to political participation such as jury duty and suffrage (Vashisth, A., & Kumar, A. 2014), were some of the legal rights suffragettes pursued. Other focuses arose as well, such as the rejection of objectification of a woman’s body; fashion became about expressing oneself. Hemlines rose, hair was worn short, and flashier fabrics were common. “Suffragettes,”

participants and activists of the first feminist movement in America, were motivated to unattach themselves from men both legally, and symbolically through self-expression (Martin, 1990).

The first U.S. feminist social movement had multiple successes. The main focus and achievement of this wave was women's suffrage and the right to vote. The 19th Amendment to The United States Constitution was passed in 1919, giving women the right to vote alongside men (Peltola, Milikie, & Presser, 2004). This is likely due to the centralization and organization of the movement; it had few and focused leaders and a narrow set of issue-demands - the right to equality in political participation.

The second feminist wave, which spanned from 1960s through the 1970s, focused primarily on economic and employment rights, including being allowed to work overtime or at night (Vashisth, A. & Kumar, A. 2014). A phenomenon known as the "wage gap," which is still prevalent today, was brought to light. The Wage Gap is the differences in salary and hourly pay between genders for the same jobs. Women who are also ethnic or racial minorities get paid even less than white women (Peltola, et al. 2004). The "pink tax" was brought up during this period as well, and corporations started to be scrutinized for gender-based price discrimination, as well as the state for sexism in employment.

Feminists of the second wave criticized the long-held idea that women could only find fulfillment through homemaking and mothering, and insisted on equal opportunity to establish their own careers. This wave was another success; even though some major legislation was not passed, such as the Equal Rights Amendment, conversations on gender equality were instigated in workplaces, corporations, legislation, and day to day life.

The third wave is best described by the change in participant demographics rather than a specific set of issue considerations. The third wave was made up primarily of women who had

grown up with feminism; they had been born in the 1960s-1980s. The major concerns were sexual freedom, violence against women, and intersectionality. The movement expanded accessibility of feminist activism to include women of different groups such as race, ethnicity, culture, lesbian, bisexual, transgendered and low income (Peltola, et al. 2004).

By expanding the demographic diversity of the movement, the issue-demands broadened as well to express the needs and injustices of all the factions of feminists. The third wave's success is debated (Neher, 2016), partially because it is so recent in history that the effects are not fully determined. Some successes include the surge of women elected into Congress, the start and support of feminist organizations (Take Back the Night, Association for Women's Rights in Development, and professional women's advocacy organizations), and the accessibility to feminist activism.

Thus far we have reviewed the factors to success of a social movement, as well as the products of feminist social movements in America. One large influence in the birth and consequences of political activity is the way a movement's message is described and translated into political language. This is a process known as framing. The next section will explain framing and its importance in this study.

Framing

Framing is a schema of interpretation, a collection of word associations, archetypes, stereotypes, and other such connotations that individuals rely on to understand and respond to events in politics. Framing effects should be distinguished from priming and agenda setting. It has been used in research as a way to measure the competence of citizens (Druckman, 2001).

Framing is not just the way that citizens interpret events, but it is also when events are portrayed in a particular way, either by intent to manipulate the audience, or by unintended bias (Goffman, 1974). Frames are used by journalists and producers of information to organize large amounts of information for the effective consumption of their audiences. It should be noted that framing a situation through one lens or another should not change the facts; framing presents information in different but equivalent ways (Druckman, 2001). Often producers of information will put certain emphasis on certain aspects of the events in order to elicit the response they desire from their audience (Borah, 2001). The aspects that are emphasized, whether by journalists or by consumers, are referred to as lenses. For example, commonly in academia data is analyzed through an economic, political, or social lens. The same data and events are considered, but are framed through different lenses, which can lead to the exploration of different perspectives and information that may come out of said data and events (Beck, 1998).

Framing and Social Movements: Current Approaches

Feminist social movements is a widely researched topic. Research has been conducted on how frames affected the outcome of the first feminist wave, and makes predications on how the second and ongoing feminist waves' outcomes will be affected by the frames it is currently using (Franceschet, 2004). This research does not use quantitative analysis and often does not analyze feminism strictly within the United States. Research that does analyze feminism in the United States usually does so with a qualitative approach.

The use of text mining to identify frames has been utilized in feminist research. News releases from the National Organization for Women (NOW) from 1995 to 2003 were examined to determine how NOW conveyed its messages, and journalistic frames on social movements.

One of the prominent frames discovered was the alliance with other human rights advocacy groups. This research concludes with suggestions on how to correct journalistic frames that dismiss social movements and the benefits of an advocacy network across human rights issues (Barnett, 2005). There have also been studies on the collective identity of feminists as they appear on Twitter. Tweets were collected and analyzed by grouping them into categories, similarly to my research. The lexicon created by Lommel, Schrier, and Fruchtmann was done so by manually screening Twitter to investigate which hashtags and words come up frequently in online expressions of current feminist activism (Lommel, L., Schreier, M., & Fruchtmann, J. 2019). This research, while it is recent and involves text mining, does not have the preliminary data collection of feminist jargon that I have created using photographs. The similarities in our research gives all three studies support in the credibility of our research methods and the merits of using text mining to identify frames.

Uncovered Topics by Existing Literature

While there has been extensive research on political effects of feminism in the United States, I have not found research that investigates the current focus and framework of a feminist social movement in the United States of America. Current research addresses social, cultural, and political factors to the underrepresentation of women and the prevalence of sexism in the states, but fails to explore the presence and language surrounding the mobilization of feminists. My research investigates the current climate of feminization in the United States; how Americans think about feminism today. Specifically: to what degree, what aspects of feminism are discussed, and how feminism is framed by citizens of the United States. Research measures and defines the interest in feminism in the United States and compares it to interest at other points in

time and during past feminist movements, and known periods of time of absence of feminist social movements.

Data Collection: Quantitative

The data for this research comes from photographs. This is because posters and marches are the most widely used form of protest over all time periods, and photography easily captures the use of that form of political expression. Photographs are courtesy of the Prints and Photographs Division of The Library of Congress and The Sophia Smith Collection from Smith College Archives. The Library of Congress categorizes its photos by subject. For example, “Women protestors,” “Politics, suffrage,” etc. Similarly, The Sophia Smith Collection only contains photos relating to feminist activity within the United States. Therefore, by using the photographs within each section and collection, it can be safely assumed that the content would be related to feminist social movements and their events.

Photographs are selected for data if they have any text in them, including but not limited to any poster, banner, or sign. Text on a permanent installation (i.e. a business’s sign, a school’s sign, etc.) is ignored. Photos are identified by their calling card number, location, and year. Photos used are from 1905 to 2005 (which includes all three confirmed feminist movements). Photos are not used if not taken within the United States.

Any qualifying photograph that became a part of the data set are categorized within several variables: “Location” (the location in which the photograph was taken), “Date” (the date when the photograph was taken), “Tone” (the emotional attitude portrayed in the photograph), “Text” (any of the aforementioned printed language featured in the photograph), “Subject” (a

description of the images within the photograph), and “Archive” (the source the photograph was found in).

Analysis Methods

A lexicon was created from the photograph data set described above. The R programming environment (R Studio) was used to perform text analysis and cleaning. The text data was cleaned of numbers, determiners in the English language, whitespaces, and punctuation. These were removed in order to clarify the results of the analysis; punctuation may be important within the context of a sentence, but the same words appearing with different punctuation, or occasionally being uppercase or lowercase, does not allow R Studio to count them as the same word. In order to get an accurate count of each term, grammar, punctuation, case, and spaces were removed. Using R Studio, correlation of term association was analyzed, and Latent Feminist Lexical groups were created, showing categories of word usage within similar documents. A Latent Discriminant Analysis was used in order to see groupings of terms across documents.

Results

A word cloud is presented here to illustrate the width and distribution of the data (Figure 1). Terms that occur more often in the lexicon appear larger on the word cloud, and smaller words are representative of terms that have fewer occurrences. We see “votes,” “era,” “womens,” and “demand” are some of the more prominent words. Smaller words such as “countries,” “organization,” and “workers” are on the edges of the word cloud and do not appear as often within the lexicon. Note the terms “votes,” “era,” and variations of the word “woman”

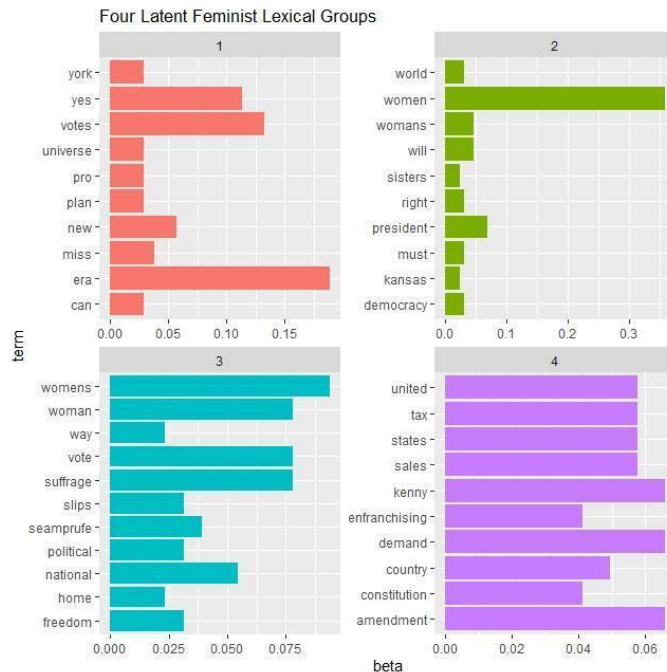


Figure 2: Four Latent Feminist Lexical Groups

As shown in the figure above, there are four latent feminist lexical groups, labeled 1 through 4. Category 1 includes words “york,” “yes,” “universe,” “pro,” “plan,” “new,” “miss,” and “can,” with particularly high usage of the words “yes,” “votes,” and “era.” Category 1 has words associated with some specific legislation (the ERA) and primarily calls for action. It should be noted that the words “miss” and “universe” were used in conjunction with each other, in reference to the 1968 Miss Universe and Miss America protests.

Category 2 consists of the words “world,” “woman,” “womens,” “will,” “sisters,” “right,” “president,” “must,” “kansas,” and “democracy.” The word “woman” has a much greater beta value than any of the other words in this grouping. Category 2 has urgent language and references critiques of certain institutions.

Category 3 has the words “womens,” “woman,” “way,” “vote,” “suffrage,” “slips,” “seamprufe,” “political,” “national,” “home,” and “freedom.” While the beta values between words are not as extreme as categories 1 or 2, the words “vote,” “suffrage,” “woman,” and

“womens” are stronger in this group. We can see that category 3 includes words associated with political freedoms and rights, especially suffrage and legislation to promote equality among genders.

Category 4 grouped the words “united,” “tax,” “states,” “sales,” “kenny,” “enfranchising,” “demand,” country,” “constitution,” and “amendment” together. Category 4 uses words associated with the US government and constitution.

Some terms seem to be out of place or unrelated to the research, but each term is relevant. For example, the terms “Kenny” from Category 4 refers to a politician named “Kenny” from Kansas, who was the center of some criticism from feminists. The word “fire” refers to several instances where employees were laid off due to gender or association with the movement, and occasionally the term was used as part of a demand that a figure be fired/impeached, as in reference to “Kenny’s” time in office. Text mining is not, by itself, sufficient for concrete analysis; the researcher must take into account the context of the terms that appear in the LDA.

These categories show a switch from broad ideals and demands of the public sector and more into specific demands and demands for change within the private sector; latent lexical groups 4 and 3 are more representative of the earlier waves of feminism (1920s - 1940s), where the right to vote was fought for and amendments to the constitution were proposed, both issues relating to the public sector. Whereas latent lexical groups 1 and 2 are representative of feminism in the 1950s and onward; the resurgence of the Equal Rights Amendment, the protest of objectification of women within the Miss Universe Pageant, and the emergence of the Pro-Choice and Pro-Life movements.

The results of the word cloud and the LDA both show the same terms as appearing the most often throughout the lexicon; the results do not conflict and so support each others' conclusions.

Conclusion

The categories show a transition over time from broad ideals and demands of the public sector and more towards specific demands and demands for change within the private sector. We can use this data to confirm current theories about feminism: feminism has become more intersectional; as time goes on the language used acknowledges a larger demographic.

This data set is unique; a comprehensive and empirical “dictionary” of feminist terms may be used by other researchers. It may also be used to see how frames are used to strategize social movements. This research may be applied to investigation on any current or future feminist movements and the frames they employ. Qualitative analysis in the form of interviews with feminist activists would be a good comparison between frames of feminists and frames of feminist experts. I may also apply this feminist terminology collected to search engines to find the frames of inquiring laymen on feminism in America. Future research is poised to examine the effects of these frames, the current feminist frame of intersectionality, and the general evolution of language.

Today we can only expect feminism to continue to expand its breadth of issues as more demographics participate in the movement. The terminology used by feminists exudes frames of agency, goals and rights consistently through all three waves. I expect frames of ideological struggle to emerge as the feminist movement has more competing perspectives and ideologies present in activists.

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