



Pseudo-feminism vs feminism - Is pseudo-feminism shattering the work of feminists?

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Abstract

The feminist movement supports equity and equality for all. Alongside the feminist struggle for equity is a newly developing social phenomenon known as pseudo-feminism. Principles of pseudo-feminism support the advancement of females ahead of other genders, and the active targeting of males to right the wrongs of the past. These principles stand in direct opposition to the gender equity principles of feminism. This research paper seeks to provide insight into the phenomenon of pseudo-feminism as it appears across genders, explored in the personal and professional contexts of South African citizens. This study used a mixed-methods approach to collect data. Primary data were gathered via the use of anonymous online questionnaires, distributed via the researchers' professional and social networks. Key findings of the study indicate that there is often a lack of clarity around the intentions of the feminist movement. In addition, a theme of support for the pseudo-feminist strategy of advancing women ahead of other genders emerged, with many respondents considering this to be a necessary step towards correcting gender inequity. In the absence of a clear distinction within society between feminism and pseudo-feminism, feminism may be seen as a movement that has come to support the suppression of non-female genders, undoing decades of progress. These findings add to the body of knowledge and are valuable to gender equity activists, gender studies researchers, and academics.

Keywords: activism; equity; feminism; gender; pseudo-feminism

1. Literature

The word “feminism” encompasses a range of principles, socio-political movements, and ideologies, centred around equity and equality. The four waves of feminism, representing distinct periods of development within the feminist movement (Rampton, 2015), saw feminism evolving from a focus on addressing inequality between the sexes to a “more nuanced focus on the social and performative constructions of gender and sexuality” (Day, 2016). As such, any person of any gender can be a feminist. The term “feminism” was popularly used in the mid-19th century, in the United States of America to describe the development of the women’s rights movement which spoke out about injustices faced by women at that time (Pande, 2018). The concept of feminism grew to become a social phenomenon in the 1960s and continues to gain popularity to this day (Verna, 2020).

An understanding of the feminist movement of today rests upon insight into the changing struggles of gender equity and equality over the years. The first wave of feminism began in the United Kingdom and the United States of America during the 19th century and continued into the 20th century. The early focus was predominately on creating equal opportunities for women, with a strong focus on suffrage (Rampton, 2015). This included obtaining equal rights for women so that they would be considered legal persons, who would be able to enter contracts, own assets, and have equal access to education (Anand, 2018). Achieving this required fighting against the ownership of women, either through birth or by men through marriage. The organised movement of popular activists Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Lucretia Mott at the Seneca Falls convention in 1848 culminated in the achievement of voting rights for white women in 1920 (Rampton, 2015). Hailed as a victory at the time, it took another forty-five years for women of other races to achieve this right in 1965 (Stanford University, n.d.; Staff, 2022). The first wave can be described as a period where activists fought for basic legal rights for females and formed the basis for the second wave of feminism.

The second wave occurred from the 1960s to the 1980s (National Women’s History Museum, 2020). This wave was sparked by the frustration of women with higher educational qualifications who were forced to leave their jobs and return to being full-time housewives and mothers, following the return of men from the Second World War. As men moved back into the workforce, institutions fired women employees to free up vacancies for men. Women had gained a sense of independence and control whilst men were at war and felt stifled when returning to a male-dominated society (Anand, 2018). Alongside feelings of frustration and loss of independence, the advent of the contraceptive pill and intrauterine device (IUD) made it possible for women to plan for children and a career (CDC, 1999; WGBH Educational Foundation, 2022). “The Feminine Mystique” was published by Betty Friedan in 1963, bringing to conscious awareness the role that education and media institutions were playing in portraying females as housewives who had no place in the workforce (National Women’s History Museum, 2020). The President’s Commission on the Status of Women, founded by President John F. Kennedy and led by Eleanor Roosevelt, further highlighted inequalities in employment and remuneration between males and females. The second wave of feminism, therefore, focused on the issues of assault against women, discrimination based on gender in the workplace, and reproductive rights (Rampton, 2015).

The third wave of feminism occurred around the mid-1990s and continued until 2010 (History, 2022). Its emergence is attributed to an article published by Rebecca Walker in Ms. Magazine in 1991, written in response to the testimony of Anita Hill to an all-male judiciary

counsel. The third wave focused on redefining the ideas associated with women and the way they were portrayed in the media. Key focus areas included gender, sexual orientation, and the perception of beauty. This third wave aimed to eradicate sexual limitations and normalise the choice of sexual identity being independent of feminine and masculine traits. Activists leveraged the work from both the first and second waves by utilising their access to education, employment, and the media to share and achieve their goals.

The fourth wave of feminism began in 2013 and is still ongoing. It focuses on the role that social media plays in the feminist movement, drawing attention to aspects such as sexual abuse and harassment, creating an open online space and access to vast audiences (Cochrane, 2013). The fourth wave draws reference to the importance of intersectionality and the effect that this has on various social sectors of society (Rodak, 2020). It seeks to increase the level of inclusion – a challenging aim given the potential for the internet and social media tools to be associated with a level of exclusivity (Ntshangase, 2021).

When viewed through the lens of the four waves, the development of feminism and the fight for equity and freedom can be clearly seen. The feminist movement intends to bring the position of those left behind into alignment with those whose progress has been historically supported by society and policy. While the focus of the movement began with addressing inequality in respect of women's rights, the movement aims to achieve and maintain equity for all. Feminist theory, therefore, considers all inequities and inequalities within society, whether these be along lines of race, class, sex, sexuality, or ability (Day, 2016). There is neither a pro-female nor an anti-male prerogative. However, in parallel to the development of the feminist movement, there is also a phenomenon known as pseudo-feminism that is emerging and gaining support.

The word “pseudo” is used to indicate that “something is not the thing it is claimed to be”, or “almost, approaching, or trying to be” (Collins, 2022). Pseudo-feminism, therefore, may appear to be similar to or aligned to, feminism when in reality it is not. Whilst feminism is known as the conscious decision to treat all persons equally, pseudo-feminism is aimed at targeting males to undo the wrongs of the past. Pseudo-feminism can go so far as to involve dehumanising men, aiming to create a women-dominated society. As equity and equality sit at the very core of feminism, there is no doubt that the actions of pseudo-feminism go against the principles of feminism (Rani, 2021).

It can, however, be challenging to identify a pseudo-feminist agenda as it is often hidden in-between actions that purport to advance the feminist agenda. When making this distinction it is important to confirm whether the action/s in question is about creating an even playing field (feminism) or giving females the upper hand (pseudo-feminism). In other words, actions aimed at creating anything other than equity and equality, with the benefit of change skewed towards female advancement, is an action that advocates for pseudo-feminism rather than feminism. Says Sharma (2022:562): “The biggest issue today is that women have started using their rights, privileges, and most importantly, their gender, maliciously.” As the distinction between the two movements is not always recognised or understood by broader society, pseudo-feminism stands to impact societal perceptions of the feminist movement. Such an impact will undermine the message of feminism and the progress made by the feminist movement towards global equity. It removes men and those who do not identify as female from being proponents of feminism and spreads a message of endorsement for feminine power being used as a destructive force against non-females.

2. Methodology

A mixed-method research methodology was used for this study as it was deemed most suitable for obtaining a holistic view of the perception of pseudo-feminism and its impact on feminism (Giri et al., 2021). A sample population consisting of 45 South African respondents across all genders, 21 years and older, participated in the study. Respondents were surveyed via an anonymous online questionnaire which was distributed via the researchers' professional networks and social media platforms. The questionnaire obtained participants' key demographic details, personal perceptions of feminism and pseudo-feminism, individual experiences and encounters with both feminism and pseudo-feminism in their individual and professional environments, and personal opinions and recommendations on the topic of feminism. Responses were collected via Microsoft Teams and thereafter exported into Microsoft Excel, where the data were coded and analysed using descriptive-analytical methods.

Approval to conduct the study was provided by the Independent Institute of Education, in accordance with the institution's ethics review and approval procedures R.00034. All participants were informed of the intent of the study and were required to provide their consent before proceeding with the study. Participants were further informed of the ability to stop their participation at any time during the survey by ending the online survey. Participants were advised that their participation would be anonymous.

3. Results and Discussion

A total of 45 respondents were surveyed, with 38 identifying as being female, 6 as male, and 1 as non-binary. All respondents were South African citizens with the majority of respondents being from the South African provinces of KwaZulu-Natal and Gauteng. A total of 14 respondents indicated that they had lived outside of South Africa for more than one year at some point in time. The age of respondents varied between 21 and 61+ years old, with the highest representation being between the ages 31- 40 (43% of respondents) and the lowest between the ages 51-60 (13% of respondents). The study was independent of race. A total view of the results is presented below.

To establish existing levels of familiarity with the concept of feminism, respondents were asked to express their current understanding of feminism. Responses indicated that, while there were varying levels of understanding amongst respondents, 62% demonstrated an understanding of the key principles of feminism. These respondents indicated that feminism was the act of fighting for equity amongst all genders, acknowledging that the movement is founded on the inequalities experienced by women. Respondent 17 notes: *"A philosophical movement, not necessarily only women, who believe in the differences between male and female roles in society. More specifically, this movement emphasizes woman's rights due to the oppression of women and females."* Respondent 20 affirms: *"Feminism essentially promotes and believes in the equality of genders throughout the different spheres i.e. social, financial, cultural and personal. Feminism believes that no gender should be treated unfairly or unjustly."* By contrast, 38% of respondents indicated that the feminist movement was focused solely on the upliftment of women due to the historic inequalities faced by them as noted by Respondent 16: *"is the equality of all women in all aspects of life, be it social, economic or political"*. Respondent 33 states: *"It is a movement that encourages the respect*

of the rights, dignity, and power of women.” A small minority of participants highlighted that the concept of feminism has been through an evolution as noted by Respondent 8: *“Originally it was the efforts of women to gain rights as autonomous individuals, but it seems to have evolved into an aggressive movement that manages to denigrate men in the process of pursuing equality rather than equity.”* Rather than demonstrating an understanding of the four waves of feminism, however, this response highlights the risk posed to the feminist movement should a societal misperception develop considering pseudo-feminism as an evolution of feminism.

Following on from the understanding of feminism, respondents were asked whether they consider themselves to be a feminist and whether they felt it meaningful to be a feminist. Ninety-five percent of respondents indicated that they consider themselves to be a feminist and that there is meaning in this. As noted by respondent 19: *“Yes, I believe that all genders should be treated fairly and should receive equal treatment. No one should be judged based on their gender. Times have changed. All genders get up to work, so responsibilities need to be shared amongst them - regardless of whether it’s to clean the house, wash the car, bathe the kids, change diapers, do the garden or cook for the family. More than anything, gender roles are overlapping in this day and age.”* Respondent 24 states: *“I do support the idea of equal rights and opportunities for both sexes so on that basis I would say yes, I would see myself to be feminist.”* Only 5% indicated that they do not consider themselves to be feminists and do not see the value of the feminist movement. As indicated by Respondent 10: *“No. I feel that women and men have different strengths and that these differences should be celebrated, not eradicated, however, I do believe in equal pay for equal work and that all people are entitled to the same basic rights and freedoms”.* Respondent 30 states: *“No. Perhaps I am just fortunate but my father treated me as a worthwhile daughter, my husband has treated me as a worthwhile wife, and my sons as their special Mom. In The workplace, I have always been treated fairly as long as I did my work well. I never aspired to be a rugby player, a wrestler, etc so have never had to be disappointed that I was treated unfairly in the sports arena.”* Some respondents believe that feminism creates a division amongst genders, failing to recognise that each gender has specific areas of value to contribute to society. This was mentioned by Respondent 15: *“No I do not - I believe in equality between genders where equality is due. I do not like woman’s day, taking a female child to work or if a woman is abused by a male then there is an additional tag to the crime ‘domestic or gender-based violence’. If my son or my husband is hurt or worse, then which of their rights are protected? Men are being demoralised to the point that they do not know their roles or purpose in society anymore.”* In response to whether or not the respondent is a feminist, Respondent 16 indicates: *“no, I believe in equal opportunity for all gender.”* In respect of whether being a feminist is meaningful, this Respondent goes on to say: *“Yes as long as the drivers do not use it for their agenda or end up creating disadvantages for the other sex”.* The responses of Respondents 10, 15 and 16 affirm the risks posed to feminism by pseudo-feminism: Firstly, that pseudo-feminism will be mistaken for feminism. Secondly, those fundamentally aligned to the feminist principle of equity for all genders will consider themselves opposed to the movement as a result of believing that feminists advance women, aim to eradicate differences amongst genders, and break down men. Respondent 15’s response is an interesting misperception of feminism being a movement that is largely of benefit to women who only aspire to pursue traditionally male pursuits.

Before focusing on aspects specific to pseudo-feminism, and to more fully understand perceptions of feminism, respondents were then provided with a series of statements related to feminism and asked to indicate the extent to which they agreed or disagreed with each statement. This was indicated by means of selecting one option on a five-point Likert scale: 1 = Agree; 2 = Somewhat Agree; 3= Neutral; 4 = Somewhat Disagree; 5 = Disagree. The following discussion examines these findings per statement provided. When analysing the data, cognisance was given to the possibility of emerging themes related to the gender and or age of respondents. However, the analysis yielded no such link, with no trend in females or males of any age agreeing or disagreeing with each statement.

3.1 Statement 1: Feminism is distinct from gender, i.e. any gender can be a feminist

Respondents were asked whether they believed that the concept of feminism was distinct from gender. This would imply that a person could be a feminist irrespective of the gender that they identify with. As reflected in Figure 1, 90% of participants agreed with this statement, and less than 1% disagreed with the statement. When viewed together with the 38% of respondents that believe feminism to be a movement for the advancement of women, there are a significant number of respondents who believe that any gender can be a feminist, but that they will be focused on the plight of females. An example of such a response is the following description of feminism by Respondent 31, who agreed that feminism is distinct from gender: *“It is the promotion of women’s rights.”* Similarly, Respondent 36 also agreed with the statement that feminism is distinct from gender and then went on to say: *“An understanding of the feminine role in society and the protection of the rights of females”*. These two examples demonstrate that it is possible to believe that feminism is open to all but lack an understanding of the principles of the feminist movement.

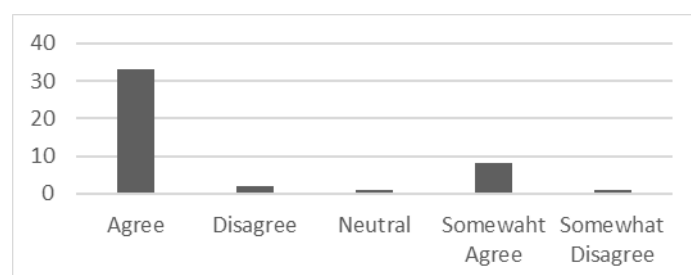


Figure 1: Responses to the statement: *“Feminism is distinct from gender, i.e. any gender can be a feminist”*

3.2 Statement 2: Feminism advocates social, economic, intellectual, and political equality for women and men

Participants were asked to what extent they agreed with the notion that feminism advocates for social, economic, intellectual, and political equality for both females and men. Eighty-six percent of respondents agreed, and less than 1% disagreed with the statement, as reflected in Figure 2. This stands in contrast to the number of respondents who felt that feminism works for the benefit of women only and further, indicates that distinctions between the principles of feminism and pseudo-feminism may be easily missed or misunderstood.

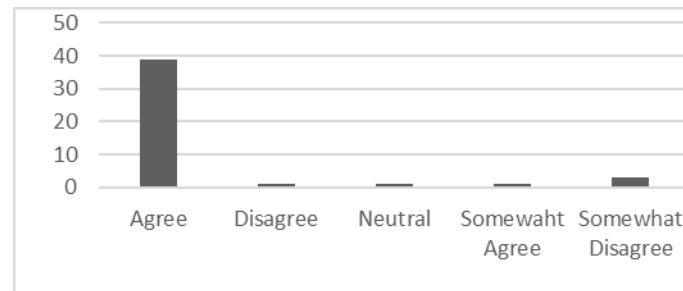


Figure 2: Responses to the statement: “Feminism advocates social, economic, intellectual, and political equality for women and men”

3.3 Statement 3: Feminism can be seen as reverse discrimination; Statement 4: Feminism works toward female superiority

Respondents were asked to reflect on the concept of feminism and to what extent they agree with the statement that feminism can be seen as reverse discrimination. They were also asked whether they agree with the statement that feminism works toward female superiority. As seen in Figure 3, 62% of respondents did not feel that feminism can be seen as reverse discrimination, while 24% of respondents agreed that feminism can be seen as reverse discrimination. As reflected in Figure 4, 71% of respondents did not feel that feminism works toward female superiority while 20% believe that this is an aim of the feministic movement. The broad alignment of these findings indicates that not all respondents who feel that feminism serves the interests of women only may consider this to be a form of discrimination. They may be amongst the respondents who consider this a necessary correction or reinstatement of females to the level of advancement needed for a righting of past injustices

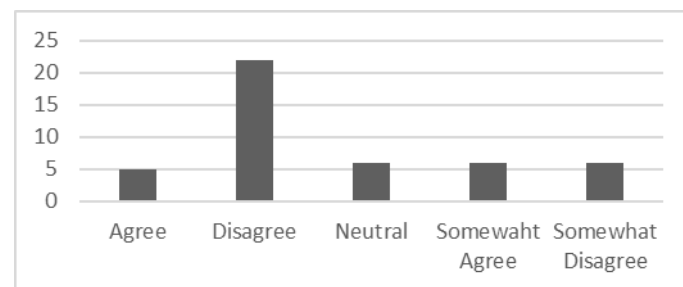


Figure 3: Responses to the statement: “Feminism can be seen as reverse discrimination”

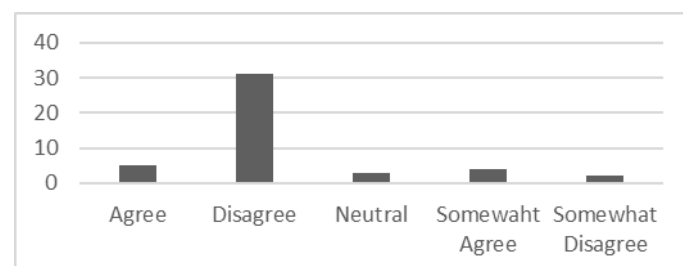


Figure 4: Responses to the statement: “Feminism works toward female superiority”

3.4 Statement 5: All men have the tendency to feel superior to other genders at times

Participants were asked to indicate the extent to which they agree with the statement that all men have the tendency to feel superior to other genders at times. As seen in Figure 5, the results were somewhat dispersed. Forty-four percent of participants either agreed or somewhat agreed with the statement, while 47% of participants either disagreed or somewhat disagreed with the statement. Sentiment related to feminism and the advancement of women does not necessarily equate to sentiment about how men may view themselves within society.

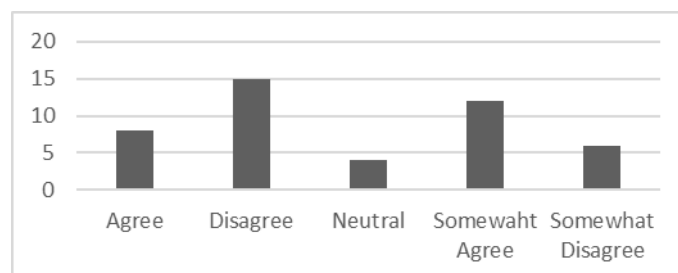


Figure 5: Responses to the statement: “All men have the tendency to feel superior to other genders at times”

3.5 Statement 6: Females should be employed in senior management positions because they were previously disadvantaged

In an attempt to determine whether respondents feel that feminism should address previous inequalities of female representation in senior management, respondents were asked to indicate the extent to which they agreed with the statement that females should be employed in senior management positions because they were previously disadvantaged. As seen in Figure 6, 66% of respondents disagreed to some extent with this statement, and 29% either agreed or somewhat agreed with the statement. The application of feminist principles would support the employment of females in senior management positions based on a reflection of an equitable society of equal opportunity. Pseudo-feminist principles see this employment as a rightful step in the journey towards advancing women ahead of other genders. Responses to this statement indicate that as many as one in three of the respondents support pseudo-feminist thinking, yet 95% of respondents consider themselves to be a feminist. Here too, the undermining influence of pseudo-feminism on feminism is seen.

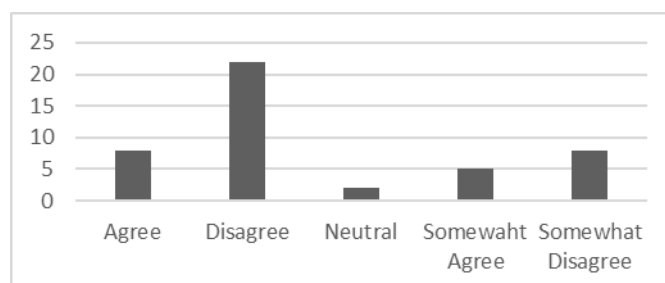


Figure 6: Responses to the statement: “Females should be employed in senior management positions because they were previously disadvantaged”

3.6 Statement 7: Feminism is about freedom, not judgment

Respondents were asked to indicate the extent to which they agree with the statement that feminism is about freedom and not judgment. The vast majority (89%) of respondents agreed that the feministic movement is about freedom rather than judgement. The interpretation of “freedom” and “judgement” was purposefully left open to interpretation. The former could refer to freedom to be true to oneself, to realise one’s potential, to choose, and to remove restrictions of the past; the latter could refer to a lack of judgment of past and or current behaviour, of choices made by individuals to follow societal norms, or of choosing a road less travelled. Regardless of interpretation, these responses, as depicted in Figure 7, indicate an overwhelming alignment with the sentiment of respondents that being a feminist has meaning. Perhaps a key aspect of this meaning is the promise of freedom without judgement. In the case of respondents who unknowingly support the principles of pseudo-feminism rather than feminism, the unapologetically loaded agenda for the advancement of women may be seen as the way towards this freedom as a lived reality.

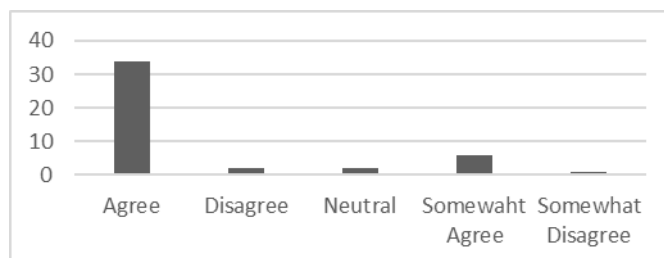


Figure 7: Responses to the statement: “Feminism is about freedom, not judgment”

3.7 Statement 8: Strong females do not participate in roles that were/are generally seen as feminine duties, such as cooking, cleaning, etc.

The final statement that respondents were asked to rate according to their level of agreement or disagreement was the statement that strong females do not participate in activities that are generally associated with feminine duties. These could include domestic duties such as cooking and cleaning. Eighty-one percent of respondents outright disagreed or somewhat disagreed with the statement, as shown in Figure 8. It is heartening that those in favour of equity and equality do not replace one set of expected roles and choices for females with another.

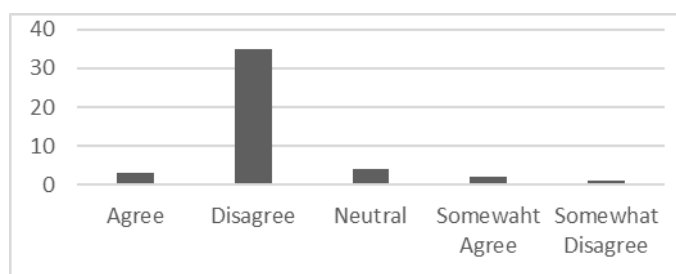


Figure 8: Responses to the statement: “Strong females do not participate in roles that were/are generally seen as feminine duties, such as cooking, cleaning etc.”

3.8 Perceptions and Experiences of Pseudo-Feminism

The final section of the questionnaire focused on aspects related specifically to pseudo-feminism. Respondents were provided with the following definition of pseudo-feminism by Jaya Chaudhary (2021) and asked whether they are familiar with the concept: “Pseudo-feminism implies that females deserve more respect than people of other genders due to past injustices. Pseudo-feminism wants to create a world where females hold all senior and leadership positions.” Based on this definition, 62% of respondents indicated that they are familiar with the concept of pseudo-feminism, and 38% indicated that they were not familiar with the concept.

Respondents were then asked to provide insight into any feelings they may have about the provided definition of pseudo-feminism. The common theme present in answers provided by all the respondents was a general sense of discomfort with the principles associated with pseudo-feminism. Respondents indicated that pseudo-feminism stands in direct opposition to the intentions of the feminist movement. According to Respondent 7: *“All genders should be respected equally. This pseudo-feminism can sometimes be the reverse of misogyny.”* Respondent 16 stated that *“Pseudo-feminism is a neologism that is oxymoronic. Feminism is, fundamentally, a movement that promotes equality. Proposing an agenda where one gender should be favoured over another gender is counter-active of feminist ideology.”* Whilst there was a general discomfort with the definition, a few respondents noted that they felt that pseudo-feminism had a valuable role to play in achieving equity as noted by Respondent 45: *“To some extent if we do not try to make the past right by using extraordinary measures how will we achieve equity?”*. This sentiment is also seen in Respondent 46’s feedback: *“In a perfect world where all genders were equal then Pseudo-Feminism would not exist but since we are trying to uplift women from grave disadvantages, I feel it is necessary.”*

Respondents were further requested to reflect on their involvement in, and experiences of, pseudo-feminism, both in their personal and professional lives and the impact this has had on them. Less than 1% of respondents reported ever having acted in a manner that embodied pseudo-feminism. Seventeen percent indicated that they had experienced pseudo-feminism in their home environment, and 24% indicated that they had experienced this phenomenon in their work environment. Interestingly, five percent of respondents indicated that they were unsure of whether or not they had engaged in or experienced pseudo-feminism. Given that 29% of respondents support female workplace advancement based on historical discrimination, it is evident that many respondents do not recognise their own pseudo-feminist thinking, or that this line of thinking has not been translated into action.

Based on their knowledge of pseudo-feminism, participants were asked to provide their insight into whether they felt that the movement has any impact on feminism and whether it has a place alongside feminism. Seventy-three percent of respondents indicated that pseudo-feminism negatively impacts feminism and that pseudo-feminism contradicts the work of feminism. The notion that pseudo-feminism negatively impacts the core values of feminism was echoed by Respondent 8 who stated: *“Yes. It portrays feminists as anti-male and tarnishes all men with the same brush e.g., the #menaretrash”*. Respondent 40 says: *“Yes, feminism for equality has been eroded. Past experiences cannot justify future undue gains. Everyone suffers, but one chooses to be a victim.”* Some respondents felt that, while pseudo-feminism is not ideal, it is a necessary approach to eradicate the injustices of the past. Says Respondent 43: *“It does because it is allowing females the equal opportunity to certain roles*

that were not possible previously”; and Respondent 45: *“The older generation understand the struggle and therefore have a right to fight against injustice.”* Many of the respondents indicated that they do not believe that pseudo-feminism has a place alongside feminism as it eradicates the values that the feminist movement stands for and leads to hatred and sexism. This sentiment is seen in comments by Respondent 7 who indicates that *“No. The mere name “pseudo” has negative connotations in that it is pretending to be something that it is not. It is a distorted view of feminism that contaminates what true feminism is supposed to be.”* Respondent 21 affirms: *“No, their ideals are opposites. The one believes in equality of all genders, while the other believes that women deserve more respect and senior positions because of the disadvantaged past women faced.”*; and Respondent 27: *“No. Pseudo-feminism destroys what feminism is trying to achieve”*. Some respondents felt that pseudo-feminism has earned a more temporary place in society as a method to equalise the injustices of the past as highlighted by Respondent 43: *“Yes, it assists in alleviating inequality”*, and Respondent 46: *“Yes to achieve feminism we need to undo the deep-set gender inequality which can only be achieved through Pseudo-Feminism”*.

There was a consensus from all respondents that all genders should be given equal opportunities based on their abilities and that the biological differences between men and women should be seen as a strength unique to that gender. As echoed by Respondent 36: *“We need to build societies that bring people together to understand and write true narratives that reflect equality for all because we are not male and female, but we are people and we should see each other as that to break stereotypes and learn and live with each other without one suppressing another”*. However, respondents felt that if we were to successfully eliminate stereotypical behaviour, we need to acknowledge the past inequity experienced by women and behave in a manner that eradicates those injustices before we can go on to experience equity. As reinforced by Respondent 8: *“Well-behaved women seldom make history. Coco Chanel. This statement still holds true. If women continue to behave, we will never break the bonds of stereotyping of women”*. Overwhelmingly then, respondents seem to support the concept of gender equity, and feminist principles to achieve this equity. However, it does appear that many who consider themselves to be feminists do share certain pseudo-feminist ideologies, often mistaking them for feminist ideologies. In addition, a strong sentiment seems to be that pseudo-feminism is in some ways a precursor to feminism – a more aggressive initial strategy that aims to first tip the scales in favour of females, before aiming for equity and bringing all back into equilibrium. Responses indicate that amongst those who consider themselves to be feminists, there is a degree of doubt as to the ability of feminists to garner the support needed for equity without first grabbing attention by over-correcting the status quo.

4. Conclusions and Recommendations

This study analysed male, female, and gender-neutral perceptions and experiences of feminism and pseudo-feminism. The intention was to ascertain how these two concepts relate to one another, and whether pseudo-feminism may deliberately or unintentionally be mistaken for feminist ideology, shattering perceptions and progress of the feminist movement.

A high level of awareness of feminism was found among respondents. Ninety-five percent considered themselves to be a feminist and reported finding meaning in this role. Further

responses, however, indicated recurring examples of pseudo-feminist thinking mistaken for feminist principles. Almost one in four respondents believed that feminism focuses solely on the upliftment of women. There were instances of the denigration of men, reverse discrimination, and pursuit of female superiority being mistaken for an evolution of the feminist movement rather than examples of the separate and distinct pseudo-feminist movement.

Feminism aims to, amongst others, recognise and eradicate past inequalities experienced by women. However, it does not follow that the past can be changed, or the future corrected, through methods that continue to encourage inequity. While many responses spoke to the meaningfulness of being a feminist, many also identified a necessity for a pseudo-feminist inequitable advancement of women to correct societal imbalances and past injustices, even as the vast majority of respondents agreed that pseudo-feminism negatively impacts feminism and contradicts the work of feminists. This speaks to a key area of risk to feminism – a belief that the feminist agenda can only be advanced through actions that violate the very core of the movement itself.

The continued progress of feminism and the reputation of the movement relies on the involvement of all genders for the advancement of equity and equality. Alienating non-female members of society who may believe that the feminist movement not only excludes them but actively works against them, poses a significant and sustained risk to decades of work carried out by feminists who believe in setting right injustices, but not in creating new injustices to do so.

It was heartening to note that the vast majority of respondents see feminism as a movement for freedom, not judgement. The findings from this study highlight that those aspects differentiating women and men, making each of us unique, should be encouraged and nurtured rather than criticised, shamed, or denied. Recognising the value of these differences is a sign of strength as each gender has a purpose for its uniqueness. Visible support for the feminist movement by all genders creates awareness of the fundamental aim of feminism, presenting a united front of all people advocating for equity and equality.

Based on the findings of this study, it is recommended that initiatives to mentor and prepare women for career progression be actively funded and promoted by feminist organisations and proponents of feminism. These initiatives would be seen to support women in earning senior positions based on skill and merit rather than as a correction of past ills. Providing increased support for those who have been negatively impacted by societal gender norms encourages a level of followership, supports understanding and tolerance for the conscious creation of sustainable equity and equality, and reaffirms the ideologies and identity of feminism as a movement for all.

In addition, it is recommended that the important role of education in facilitating acceptance of differences, inculcating a sense of strength within communities able to honour their differences, and providing opportunities across all contexts, is accessed and enhanced. Further to this, a higher level of support and encouragement is needed for all genders to engage in activities for which they are suited and to which they are drawn, regardless of whether these activities are in alignment with societal and cultural norms, discovering enjoyment and interests without fear of stereotypical judgment.

This study has highlighted that there is a lack of clarity around the true intentions of feminism, and there is a lack of understanding of feminism versus pseudo-feminism. There is a need for additional academic research into the topic of pseudo-feminism and for broader conversations about the damaging effects of pseudo-feminism on the work of feminism. More insight is needed into the threat that misinformation about pseudo-feminism poses to future generations of feminists. While the inherent beliefs and views of the meaning and purpose of feminism make it a sensitive and challenging topic to research, this study has delivered meaningful insight into perceptions of both feminism and pseudo-feminism, adding to the body of knowledge and forming a foundation for further research and investigation.

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