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A Content Analysis of the Women Against Feminism Tumblr Page

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**A Content Analysis of the
Women Against Feminism Tumblr**

by

Lyndsey S. Collins

A Thesis

Presented to the Graduate and Research Committee

of Lehigh University

in Candidacy for the Degree of

Master of Arts

in

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A Content Analysis of the *Women Against Feminism* Tumblr Page
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Date Approved

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ABSTRACT

Feminism has been fraught with backlash since its onset, primarily by men's rights activists. Women's anti-feminism, however, is a more complex issue. One popular Tumblr blog, Women Against Feminism (WAF), began on July 3, 2013 and became a viral sensation in the summer of 2014. The purpose of this thesis is to understand the fundamental reasons why women identify as anti-feminist. *A Content Analysis of the Women Against Feminism Tumblr* analyzes the prominent motives of women's anti-feminist identities on WAF from July 3rd 2013 to August 31st 2014. Five major themes of anti-feminism emerge including common feminist stereotypes, feminism as anti-male, feminism perpetuates victimhood, feminism as a threat to traditionalist values, and the idea that equal opportunity between men and women already exists. Many of these themes confirm that men's rights activists (MRA's) influence the *Women Against Feminism* Tumblr page. There are also connections between WAF rhetoric and organized religion and neoliberal theory. WAF members are unable to place their personal experiences, or the personal experiences of others, into larger patterns of sexism or oppression. Rather, WAF views these experiences as isolated experiences and thus rejects the premise of a women's movement. Therefore, WAF bloggers use rhetoric from MRA's, organized religion, and neoliberalism as tools to combat feminist ideologies due to their hyper-individualistic nature.

BACKGROUND & LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

Throughout feminism's history the movement has faced waves of backlash. Anti-feminists have primarily been men who view the women's movement as a threat to male privilege. Today, anti-feminism is once again a popular trend, but this time its disciples include an unexpected demographic: women. Women are the new face of anti-feminism and they are spreading their message on social media. Social media is an outlet for individuals and groups to communicate and connect. And advocacy groups, like feminist organizations, use the Internet and social media to reach their organizational goals. Obar et al. (2012) notes that over the past decade Internet and social media sites have had a positive impact on advocacy campaigns by "increasing the speed, reach, and effectiveness of communication and mobilization efforts" (Obar 2012: 5). Consequently, as advocacy groups successfully broaden their messaging efforts across social media platforms, backlash to such campaigns are likely to expand accordingly. Therefore, as feminist groups engage in social media advocacy, they will continue to encounter anti-feminist backlash.

Backlash: The Men's Rights Movement

Susan Faludi posits, "The antifeminist backlash has been set off not by women's achievement of full equality but by the increased possibility that they might win it" (Faludi 1991: 11). To prevent this possibility from becoming a reality, men shifted the tide. Men's rights groups argued the women's movement had gone too far and now

men were the ones in trouble. In the early 1970s the 'men's liberation movement' was born to spread awareness of male discrimination and female privilege. The men's rights movement first focused their energies on the constrained 'sex role' of men. Men's rights advocates (MRAs) claimed that feminism had given women the right to indulge in 'masculine behavior' but men were still restrained to perform only masculine traits (Messner 1998: 255-276).

If men cannot play freely, neither can they freely cry, be gentle, nor show weakness-because these are "feminine," not "masculine." But a fuller concept of humanity recognizes that all men and women are potentially both strong and weak, both active and passive, and that these human characteristics are not the province of one sex (Sawyer 1970: 1).

MRAs stressed the importance of men to be able feel both masculine (strong) and feminine (weak) (Messner 1998: 255-276). Kimmel (1996) notes that the 'contemporary crisis' for men involves the loss of white male privilege due to the women's movement and civil rights movement. There is no longer a sacred space for white men; instead they are competing for what was once seen as a natural right of economic autonomy and patriarchal dominance (Kimmel 1996: 405). Kimmel argues that even if white males are still the most dominant demographic, the threat of losing power makes them feel powerless (Kimmel 1996: 406-408).

In contrast, Farrell (1993) claimed that male power was a myth. The feminist movement had successfully made women the dominant sex and now men were suffering. He claimed that words such as 'power,' 'sexism,' and 'dominance' were codes for 'men's disposability' (Farrell 1993: 67). Farrell also discussed the exploitation of men's bodies for dangerous jobs like the military draft and women's

unpaid ‘bodyguards’ (Farrell 1993: 106). Additionally, he critiques society’s focus on women’s health issues while neglecting men’s health, despite men’s lower life expectancy. Men’s rights groups quickly followed Farrell’s footsteps to highlight men’s plight.

Young school boys were part of this new victimized male class. Educational equality was a focal point for feminist movement during the 1970’s and 1980’s. A decade later, a new discourse of ‘failing boys’ emerged. Girls were said to outperform boys in English and were also making great strides in technology, math, and science, subjects that had been previously deemed as ‘boy subjects’ (Ringrose 2007: 474).

Girls have reached unparalleled levels of success and feminists’ interventions into schooling have been met, and may have gone ‘too far,’ so that girls’ achievements are continuously positioned as won at the expense of boys (Ringrose 2007: 471).

As girls continued to excel in academics, it seemed that there was no longer a space for boys to advance. Throughout the late 1990’s reports from major news outlets such as BBC, Time, and The Guardian claimed that young men’s lag behind girls in school had become one of the “biggest challenges facing society today” (Ringrose 2007: 475). Schools became a gendered racetrack for success with a limited amount of A’s to go around.

Men’s rights groups also purported the pervasive social issue of ‘Husband Abuse.’ The term originally stemmed from ‘wife abuse,’ which later transformed into domestic violence, and eventually evolved into ‘husband abuse’ (Minaker 2006: 753). In the 1970’s, there was a feminist outcry to stop the widespread and widely accepted

practice of 'wife abuse.' Shortly thereafter, husband abuse came into question. If there was a systemic problem of violence against women, there needed to be an investigation of possible violence against men (Minaker 2006: 754). In 1980, a study of questionable merit by Murray Strauss and Richard Gelles 'confirmed' female on male abuse was as much of an epidemic, if not more so, than male on female abuse, greatly undermining years of feminist research. Even worse, the feminist movement was charged with keeping 'husband abuse' hidden from the public. Feminists were accused of perpetuating a 'double standard' that women hitting men was less important compared to men hitting women (Minaker 2006: 757-760). Did the feminist movement go to extreme measures to keep this epidemic under wraps or was the sudden emergence of 'husband abuse' the sign of something else?

[This] countermovement led by pro-men's rights groups and anti-feminist women's groups aimed at re-appropriating male power and privilege lost to second-wave feminism. In an attempt to reclaim lost ideological power, husband abuse discourse denies that the familial home is patriarchal...result in a focus on individual cases of violence, ignoring the systemic reality of male violence against women (Minaker 2006: 759).

Men's rights advocates (MRAs) transformed the societal issue of violence against women into individualized problems, subsequently delegitimizing the need for the women's movement.

Backlash: Women and Anti-Feminism

Given the threat to male privilege, men's backlash to feminism is not entirely surprising. Conversely, women's motivations behind anti-feminism are not as clear.

Well-known anti-feminist Christina Hoff Sommers (1994) warned her readers of the cult-like movement of feminism, describing it as a “powerful kind of religion that often favors hysteria and untruth over logic” (Sommers 1994: 47). Hoff Sommers argued that the hysteria and lies were targeted at innocent men. “A surprising number of clever and powerful feminists share the sincere belief that American women still live under an oppressive patriarchy in which men collectively keep women down” (Sommers 1994: 16). Here, Hoff Somers attempts to draw sympathy for men and paint a picture of delusional, angry feminists. But why, in this gendered power seesaw, is she unabashedly putting more weight on the other side?

Unlike Hoff Sommers, some women are more surreptitious about their anti-feminism. Socially Conservative Feminists identify as feminists but contradict the movement’s values and defining attributes. Conservative feminists argue for pro-life policies, anti-gay legislation, and abstinence-only sex education (McCarver 2012: 64). Feminist writer Amanda Marcotte states, “Social conservative and feminist are fundamentally opposed on the basic issues of gender roles and women’s rights” (LA Times 2008). Not only do socially conservative feminists manipulate the meaning of feminism, but they also reinforce negative stereotypes of mainstream feminism. This new brand of feminism is family oriented, religious, and attractive. The ‘other’ outdated brand of feminism is an angry, man-hating, promiscuous group of ugly women. “[Conservative feminists] craft liberal feminism as a particular brand of feminism-an undesirable one at that-and construct conservative feminism as a more

inclusive and palatable feminism, not only free from stereotypes that have long plagued it but a direct counterpoint to those stereotypes” (McCarver 2012: 66).

This division leads women to believe there are two types of feminist identities: a kinder, prettier, less ‘whiney’ version or an ugly, mean, anti-male, victim version. While these two options are proposed as two different identities of feminisms, in truth, the choice is between feminism and anti-feminism. While there are many different types of feminism, socially conservative feminism does not fall under its expansive umbrella. Its sole purpose is to undermine feminism’s ideals and perpetuate negative stereotypes that scare women away from the real movement. The question remains, why? How does advancing this faulty imagery of feminists help these women? If the feminist movement falls, what will these women gain?

Ariel Levy (2005) answers this question by focusing on the ever growing ‘raunch culture’ among America’s young female population. These women seem to be experiencing the sexual liberation that radical sex-positive feminists of the 1970’s only dreamed about. Finally, women were having sex like men, and they liked it, right? Wrong, according to Levy. This guise of sexual liberation was nothing more than a male sexual fantasy coming to life (Levy 2005: 17). Finally, women were there, willing and ready to have sex whenever men pleased. This so-called era of female sexual liberation was not an attempt to have sex like a man, or enjoy sex like a man, but an attempt to *be* a man. Levy writes, “Why throw your boyfriend’s Playboy in a freedom trash when you could be partying at the Mansion? Why worry about disgusting or

degrading when you could be giving-or getting a lap dance yourself? Why beat them when you can *join* them?" (Levy 2005: 93). While many of these women considered themselves the feminists of the modern age, in reality they were feeding into the ultimate patriarchal utopia. While many of the 'raunchy' women in Levy's book believe they have unlocked the door to modern feminism and sexual liberation, Levy strongly disagrees:

How is resurrecting every stereotype of female sexuality that feminism endeavored to banish good for women? Why is laboring to look like Pamela Anderson empowering? And how is imitating a stripper or a porn star-a woman whose job is to imitate arousal in the first place-going to render us sexually liberated? (Levy 2005: 4).

Levy argues that just because a woman chooses to engage in 'raunch' culture does not mean she is sexually liberated or a feminist pioneer. On the contrary, 'choice' is a highly contested topic within the feminist movement.

'Choice feminism' is the idea that women should have an increasing number of lifestyle choices and be able to select from these options without outside judgments. Choice feminists often focus on the 'choice' of leaving the workforce to care for their children and the home (Kirkpatrick 2010: 241). Many other feminists question the validity of choice feminism; feminist scholar Jenet Kirkpatrick (2010) questions whether choice feminism is 'selling out.' Choice feminism is just one of the countless topics of debate within the feminist movement. In fact, feminism is simply an umbrella term for many different, and often contrasting viewpoints.

Diverse Perspectives of Feminism

It is important to touch upon feminism's diverse range of theoretical

perspectives to understand the internal disputes within the feminist movement. Recognizing these differences helps clarify anti-feminist positions and specifically which feminism(s) the backlash is coming from.

Liberal feminism evolved from the 19th century during the suffragist movement and its influence is still found in contemporary feminist groups like the National Organization of Women (NOW). Liberal feminism focuses on legal restrictions that perpetuate inequality between the sexes (Tong 2009: 2).

Radical feminists do not believe liberal feminism is drastic enough to stop the systematic oppression of women. Instead, radical feminists not only want to change the legal and political systems, but social and cultural practices as well. Even within the radical feminist camp there are various perspectives on sex, gender, and reproduction (Tong 2009: 2-3). Conversely, Marxist and socialist feminists focus on the oppressive nature of capitalism on women. Marxist feminists believe men control the means of production and thus women must be economically dependent on men. In order to have women's liberation, Marxists maintain that the capitalist system must be transformed into a socialist system where everyone controls the means of production. Socialist feminists argue that capitalism is inherently patriarchal, and so in order to stop women's oppression both systems must be overturned (Tong 2009: 4-5).

Psychoanalytic feminists concentrate more on the individual and claim that female oppression is found in women's psyche. Many psychoanalytic feminists draw their inspiration from Freudian concepts (Tong 2009: 6). Care-focused feminists seek to understand why women are the predominant caregivers in almost every society and not men. In general, care-focused feminists provide suggestions on how men can share

this important responsibility (Tong 2009: 7).

Post-colonial, global, and multi-cultural feminists study the causes of women's oppression worldwide. These feminists reject the idea that all women are all exactly the same and even highlight important differences such as race, socio-economic status, religion, age, education level, and many more. These factors play a role on how and why women from different backgrounds are oppressed, which is often overlooked by more 'privileged' feminists (Tong 2009: 8-9).

In the 1990s third-wave feminism gained traction but never became a unified group. Third-wavers focus on a variety of issues involving women-of-color in feminism, sexuality, and sexual orientation. Their diverse thinking and range of focuses reflects the movements' desire to be all-inclusive (Tong 2009: 9).

These are just a fraction of the types of feminism, and not all feminists fall neatly into one of these specified categories. Clearly, women experience and understand their oppressions in different ways and often feminists are other feminists' biggest critics. For the purposes of this study, however, I will examine critiques from a group that rejects feminism altogether, the *Women Against Feminism*.

METHODOLOGY

Sample

I conducted a content analysis of a blog called *Women Against Feminism*. Though the blog includes pictures, the analysis is limited to word content for both theoretical and practical reasons. An analysis of race, age, and other demographics could be inferred from the posts, however, it would be impossible to make definitive conclusions about these demographics simply by looking at the pictures. Likewise, further analysis on how women present themselves in their posts (pose, dress, parts of body/face shown, etc.) could be insightful, however, given time restraints this simply was not feasible.

The analysis included posts submitted to *Women Against Feminism* from July 3, 2013 to August 31, 2014. During my first review of the data I removed posts that did not fit the screening criteria such as posts not in English, illegible posts, or duplicate posts. After removing these posts I had 793 posts remaining in the sample, which were subsequently labeled, 1-793.

Data

Women Against Feminism is hosted on the popular social media site called Tumblr. Tumblr is a micro-blogging platform that allows users to post multi-media content and follow other users' blogs. The Women Against Feminism (WAF) page began on July 3, 2013 and became a viral sensation in the summer of 2014. Every media outlet and blog had an opinion on these 'women against feminism.' While little is actually known about the blog's creator, she did write on the Tumblr site, "The focus

of this page is just to post women's responses to feminism and those photos should speak for themselves. If that starts a 'movement' then great!"

The blog received hailing praise in addition to a fair share of ridicule and mockery. Time.com pleaded with feminists to stop "Fem-Splaining" away the validity of Women Against Feminism while the Huffington Post responded, "Hey, Women Against Feminism, Your Privilege Is Showing." "Confused Cats Against Feminism" became a wildly popular parody as it mocked the Women Against Feminist bloggers. The issue of feminism seemed more divisive than ever.

There is also an accompanying Facebook page stemming from the Women Against Feminism Tumblr account. This study will only focus on content from the Tumblr account. The Facebook account receives a lot of backlash and commentary from men and dissenting feminists because it is a less moderated format than Tumblr. In this study, I am interested solely in anti-feminist female voices in order to answer the question, 'why women identify as anti-feminist.' The Tumblr account creator chooses to publish submissions that comply with the purpose of the blog by expanding upon its anti-feminist discourse. Therefore, the creator of the blog acts as a filtering system only allowing posts from fellow anti-feminist women.

Analysis

After removing posts based on the exclusion criteria I reviewed the remaining posts using a grounded theory approach, using multiple coding methods to ensure the data is observed comprehensively and holistically (Saldana 2009: 152). Open coding was used to create a list of categories and corresponding definitions for the entire dataset and repeated twice to check for accuracy, refine original codes, and possibly add

overlooked categories. Once this first process was finished, I took note of how many codes fall into each category. These frequency counts were used to calculate basic descriptive statistics about the sample (Saldana 2009: 152).

When the initial coding scheme was complete I moved to the second coding cycle, which included a more analytical approach to the data. I used focused coding to find the “most salient” categories from the initial coding scheme and assessed the importance of infrequent codes to determine if, despite their scarcity, they are still meaningful to the study (Saldana 2009: 155). Pattern coding was used to help formulate major themes and discern interrelationships, “rules, causes, and explanations” from remaining codes (Saldana 2009: 152). From the frequency counts and further analysis I eventually chose five major themes prevalent in the data. Some codes, such as anti-male and superiority seemed connected and were placed under one theme. Similarly, codes such as ‘EqualOpp,’ ‘Patriarchy,’ and ‘Othering’ were related and I combined them into one theme as well. Once the data was synthesized into broader themes, theoretical coding aided in linking all the categories to a “core” theory (Saldana 2009: 152).

RESULTS

Table 1: Code Descriptions	
Code	Description
Anti-Male	Feminists dislike men
Different	Men and women are different and should be treated accordingly
EqualOpp	Men and women have equal opportunity, rights, etc.
Humanist	Identify as humanist, egalitarian; Advocate for both men and women
Individual	Personally not oppressed
Label	Do not want feminist label
MaleApproval	Women enjoy male approval (commenting on physical appearance)
NoReason	No reason provided
Othering	Women in 'third-world' nations need feminism; Feminism is not needed in U.S.
Patriarchy	Patriarchal society does not exist
PayMyth	Pay gap is a myth
Race	Feminism does not represent non-white women
RapeMyth	Rape culture is a myth; Rape (and/or) sexual assault statistics are exaggerated
StereoFem	Feminist stereotypes (angry, mean, ugly, lesbian, crazy, unhygienic)
Superiority	Feminism is about superiority over men, not equality
Tradition	Feminism is anti-traditionalist-against marriage, motherhood, domestic life, chivalry
Victim	Feminism perpetuates victimhood
?	Reason is unclear

Table 2: Code Frequency		
Code	Frequency	Percent (%)
StereoFem	292	36.80%
Anti-Male	269	33.92%
Victim	161	20.30%
Superiority	116	14.63%
Tradition	101	12.74%
Individual	96	12.11%
Equal Opp	67	8.44%
Patriarchy	64	8.07%
Different	48	6.05%
RapeMyth	44	5.55%
Othering	34	4.29%
No Reason	31	3.91%
Male Approval	27	3.40%
PayMyth	22	2.77%
Label	18	2.27%
Race	12	1.51%
?	11	1.39%

Table 2 shows the frequency of posts containing each code and the corresponding percent of posts in the sample. Going forward, the study focuses on the most frequent codes including ‘StereoFem,’ ‘Anti-Male,’ ‘Superiority,’ ‘Tradition,’ ‘Individual,’ and Patriarchy. ‘StereoFem,’ or the idea that feminists are angry, crazy, lesbian, and/or ugly, is the most frequent code found in 36.8% of posts. The ‘Anti-Male’ code, which states that feminism is inherently discriminatory against men, is found in over a third of posts. I linked ‘Superiority,’ which is found in over 14% of posts, with the ‘Anti-Male’ theme because of its implication that feminists want to dominate men. Next in popularity is the ‘Victim’ code, found in 20.3% of posts, which states that feminists perpetuate a society of victims. ‘Equal Opp,’ or the idea that equal opportunity already exists is represented in 8.44% and similarly, ‘Patriarchy,’ or the belief that patriarchal society is a myth, is found in another 8.07% of posts. And finally,

‘Tradition’ is found in 12.74% of posts in the sample. Using more focused qualitative analysis, I study some the more salient themes mentioned above in further depth.

Findings

Feminist Stereotypes

Second-Wave feminism of the 1970s and 1980s facilitated important discussions about sexuality, reproductive rights, and workplace inequality. Unfortunately these accomplishments were not the only legacies left by second-wave feminists. Today’s archetypal view of the bra-burning, man-hating, angry, militant feminist emerged during these decades, and ‘feminist’ became a household f-word. Despite great efforts to debunk these stereotypes they have remained at the forefront of the feminist movement’s perception by the public. Over 38% of the sample on the Women Against Feminism tumblr page cite negative feminist stereotypes as proof of feminism’s radicalism and lunacy.

One of the most iconic feminist stigmas is the ‘lesbian feminist.’ The lesbian feminist is not only gay, but also repulsed by men.

I need ¹feminism because I'm so lesbian men disgust me (#49).*

Figure 1 (#49)



In addition to lesbianism, WAF followers perceive feminists as angry, overly sensitive, oppressive, and hypocritical. Anyone who disagrees with an angry feminist will be harassed and shamed.

*They [Feminists] **get offended too easily** and make women look crazy (#251).*

*I don't need your feminism because: Feminists have told me to kill myself. Feminists have called me a cunt. **Feminists have made me feel like shit more times than men.** And that's saying a lot, coming from someone who has been sexually assaulted several times (#331).*

*I don't need feminism because it is a **movement full of hypocrisy and hate.** Feminists only see what they want and the use of logic and critical thinking with them is useless (#19).*

-
- An asterisk (*) indicates the blogger is being ironic or sarcastic.
 - Women Against Feminism Tumblr quotes are all italicized. I bolded some words and phrases within the quotes to highlight common themes and patterns.

*I don't need feminism because I don't need to **bully** someone to share my opinions with others (#183).*

*I don't need feminism. I refuse to join a **hate movement**. Feminists have: Told me to kill myself, threatened me, and told me **I was a disgrace to women** (#302).*

Like the angry feminist, the militant feminist is aggressive and oppressive.

Angry and militant feminists will try to silence anyone who opposes feminism.

*I don't need feminism because I can hold my own beliefs without an **army of angry vaginas** backing me (#189).*

*Your **vaginas can't silence my voice** (#193).*

*I feel more **oppressed by other women** than I do by men cops (#336).*

*I don't need feminism because **I have been labeled a 'bitch,' a 'cunt' a 'misogynist,' and 'stupid' for not supporting your corrupt gender movement** (#527).*

*I don't need feminism because I feel **more oppressed by feminists** than I do by men (#22).*

*Modern **feminism** doesn't make me feel empowered...it makes me **feel afraid** (#160).*



Figure 2 (#189)

The militant stereotype is often traced back to the image of ‘bra-burning,’ which no known feminism has ever claimed to do. Despite the inaccuracy surrounding ‘bra-burning,’ the image has persisted since the late 1960s (Houvouras 2008: 234-256). Some of the quotes above reduce feminist women to ‘angry vaginas,’ perpetuating feminist ideology that women are seen as nothing more than objectified bodies. Fredrickson and Roberts’ ‘Objectification Theory’ speculates that women “internalize an observer’s perspective as a primary view of their physical selves” (Fredrickson, Roberts 1997: 173-206). If the image of bra burning, militant feminist has been imprinted in women’s minds, they in turn believe a feminist identity will lead others to view them as bra-burning militants as well.

‘Feminazi’ describes an extreme version of the ‘militant feminist.’ Conservative political commentator Rush Limbaugh first used the term in the early 1990s and quickly made it one of his favorite catch phrases; “I prefer to call the most obnoxious feminists what they really are: feminazis.” He then said, “I often use it to describe women who are obsessed with perpetuating a modern-day holocaust: abortion” (Limbaugh 1992: 194-195). Crazy with both anger and intolerance, the feminazis symbolize the ultimate army of angry, vindictive women. WAF is filled with posts warning readers of femanzis and their plans for female domination.

Figure 3 (#789)



Feminists do not own a monopoly on equal rights activism. Telling someone they cant be an mra/egalitarian/etc. and if they support equal rights they're automatically a feminist is not right, factually or morally (#789).

*Please someone start The Movement Against Feminism organization before **the country turns into a feminazi-based dictatorship** (#368).*

*I don't need feminism because **I can't imagine a world ruled by feminazis** (#69).*

*OMFG **Feminazis** just shut the fuck up for one moment you make my gender look like shit!!! (#514).*

The 'unhygienic' feminist perpetuates the perceived imagery issue further. Anti-feminists on WAF believe feminists are unhygienic and thus unfeminine, giving feminists an unsanitary and masculine impression.

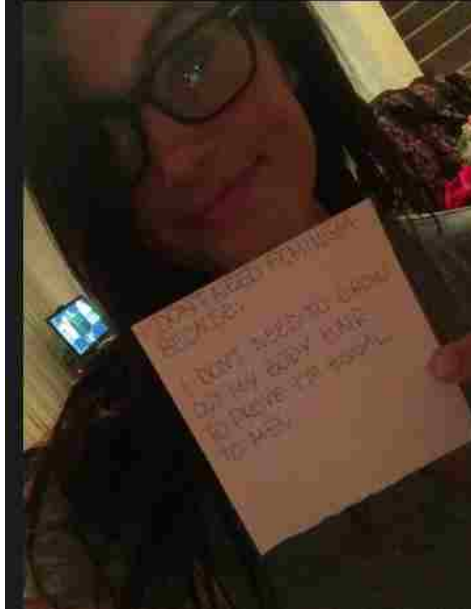
***What's so bad about the whole shaving arms things?** I shave my arms everyone that is upset should shave their arms and it will change your life (#329).*

***I will never not shave my hair or not pluck my eyebrows for equality, or liberation whatever you wanna call it** (#783).*

*If you find things like shaving to be tiresome, **by all means, don't shave**, but if you start acting like any woman who picks up a razor blade is so brainwashed by the patriarchy she's incapable of making her own **grooming** decisions, you can take your **condescending bullshit** elsewhere (#508).*

*I don't need feminism because: **I don't need to grow out my body hair** to prove I'm equal to men (#246).*

Figure 4 (#246)



Taking Fredrickson and Roberts's objectification theory into consideration, WAF followers who believe feminists fail to 'groom' properly would want to distance themselves from feminists as much as possible. Interestingly, aside from the writer's concern with body hair, she does imply that women must 'prove' their equality to men. With this statement the author simultaneously attributes men as a threshold of equality and authorities on whether women have proved worthy of equality. The writer unknowingly embodies the inherent problems associated with gender and power that feminists strive to dislodge.

Women Against Feminism bloggers also credit feminism with the “free-bleed movement.” According to WAF, free bleeding is the refusal to use sanitary napkins or tampons because they are oppressive. Moreover, WAF attributes the rise of this movement to feminism.

*All the **gross freebleeding, armpit hair, and other unhygienic feminist bullshit** I have to silently put up with on my dashboard, no one better dare tell me I have no self-control.*

*Feminists never cease to amaze me. **First free-bleeding and now menstrual art.** You touch your own dead uterus lining and old blood with your fingers and call it art. Someone throw me into an active volcano (#460).*

*If you're at home, bleed all over the fuck you want in your OWN space. Go fucking crazy. Paint the walls red, but don't be bleeding all over public property because you're a feminist and **you think free bleeding is going to stop some kind of oppression.** Bleeding has nothing to do with equality to men. Wanna know why? Because men don't go around bleeding once a month. Sorry to break your hearts, but it's completely pointless (#475).*

Free-bleeding's connection to feminism may stem from feminists' attempts to remove stigmas associated with menstruation. Feminists encourage women to be free of shame and embarrassment throughout their cycle. Some feminists like Jessica Valenti even advocate for free tampons. Both the United Nations and Human Rights Watch have connected menstrual hygiene to human rights (Valenti 2014). There are many countries where sanitary products are not accessible or are too expensive, causing girls to miss school and leading to increased dropout rates. Women without sanitary products are also at risk for repeated vaginal infections. In the United States, low-income women cannot use their food stamps to buy menstrual products. Valenti concludes:

This is less an issue of costliness than it is of principle: menstrual care is health care, and should be treated as such. But much in the same way insurance coverage or subsidies for birth control are mocked or met with outrage, the idea of women even getting small tax breaks for menstrual products provokes

incredulousness because some people lack an incredible amount of empathy, and because it has something to do with vaginas.

Throughout Women Against Feminism's page, bloggers were eager to share their fears about angry, militant, and uncleanly feminists. In denouncing these feminists, they separated themselves from these unflattering stereotypes in order to maintain a positive public image. While these stereotypes are consistently found in the sample, the most popular feminist stereotype is 'man-hating,' and feminists' desire to be superior to men. The next section explores this stereotype in-depth and the roots behind feminism's man-hating stigma.

Feminists Hate Men

'Man hating' is a common stigma surrounding feminism. In fact, over a third of the posts in the sample criticize feminism due to its pervasive anti-male stereotype. Another 15% of posts claim feminists do not want equality with men, but superiority over men. WAF bloggers use the Women Against Feminism Tumblr page to show concern and support for their male counterparts.

*I don't need feminism because **I don't hate all men** (#27).*

*I don't need feminism because **I refuse to demonize the entirety of the male gender** (#21).*

*I don't need feminism because **men are not our enemy**. They are our fathers, sons, and brothers. Belittling them helps no one (#220).*

*I don't need feminism because **I am heterosexual and so a world without men would suck** (#73).*

Figure 5 (#73)



Women on WAF reference the men in their own lives who are kind and caring as proof that men do not deserve feminist rejection.

*I don't need feminism because **my BEST FRIEND is a guy!** He respects me and loves me as I respect and love him! Not all men are bad. This is what happy looks like. #WomenAgainstFeminism (#71).*

***My four sons respect women** and girls because their dad is an excellent teacher (#32).*

*I don't need feminism because...**I love my BF-and he loves me too!** (#128).*

*I don't need feminism because **my boyfriend treats me right** (#165).*

Figure 6 (#165)



‘Rape’ is a central theme on the WAF page and is discussed in a few different contexts. Most often, WAF followers are defending men against rapist stereotypes. WAF bloggers believe feminism categorizes all men as rapists and that this stigma is hurting the men they know and love.

Not all men are rapists (#13).

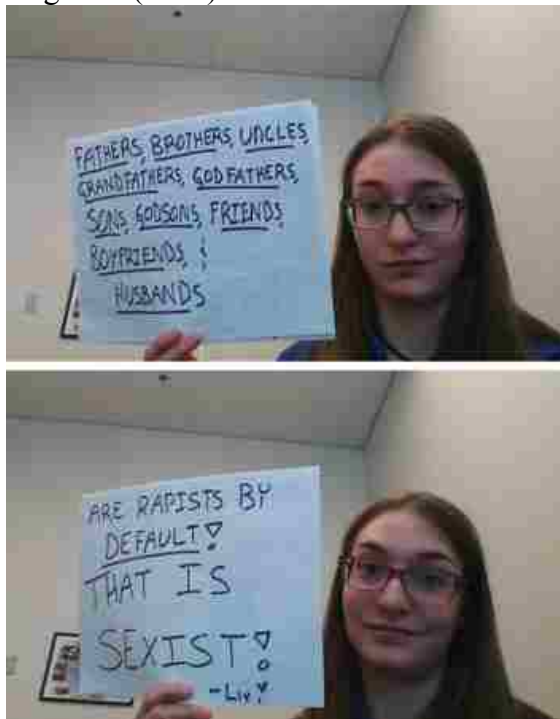
*I do not need feminism because **our sons are not inherent rapists** and our daughters are not perpetual victims (#235).*

*I need feminism...to tell me **men are all potential rapists and abusers** (#536).**

*I don't need feminism because: **I don't think all men are rapists** even though I have been raped/abused (#61).*

*Fathers, brothers, uncles, grandfathers, godfathers, sons, godsons, friends, boyfriends, and husbands are **rapists by default**. **That is sexist!** (#265).*

Figure 7 (#265)



While statistics show most rapists are men most feminists would agree that most men are not rapists. Despite this notion, WAF bloggers perceive rape statistics as personal

attacks on the men in their lives. Feminists exaggerate rape statistics to demonize men and create a movement of women are scared of all men. Men's Rights Advocates (MRA's) believe this is part of a larger issue of male discrimination, or "misandry." Anti-feminists posit that feminists use misogyny as an excuse for "misandry" and WAF uses "reverse-sexism" to portray feminism as a sexist, man-hating movement.

*I'm against feminism because I'm against sexism, including **sexism toward men** (#28).*

*Fighting misogyny with **misandry** is just fucked up (#373).*

*I don't need feminism because I don't choose to ignore the fact **men have issues too!** (#579).*

*I don't need feminism because **discriminating against men** and treating all men as scum is not 'being strong and independent,' it's being a **sexist bigot** (#85).*

*I don't need feminism because I refuse to rub elbows with **bigots and misandrists**. I want equality between the sexes (#134).*

Figure 8 (#134)



Clearly, WAF regards feminism as an expression of anti-male sexism. In the picture below, we can assume that Feminist Barbie has had a fun-filled day of stocking her fridge and killing her fill of men. Transforming man hating into man killing is a large

leap. The picture insinuates more than a hatred of men, but a desire to hold complete power over them.

Figure 9 (#682)



As such, WAF is consumed with posts about feminism's desire for control over the male gender. Anti-feminists believe feminists want superiority, not equality between the sexes.

*I don't need feminism because I don't have to **push men down** to feel equal to them (#53).*

*I don't need feminism because: **Feminism is the irrational fear of men disguised as 'equality'** (#86).*

*I don't need feminism because the world needs equality, not **superiority**. How would people react is '**masculinism**' were a thing? Not well. (#175).*

*I need feminism because equality isn't enough. **I want control** (#748). **

*Feminists don't want equality anymore, they want **superiority**, and that's my problem with it (#433).*

*I don't need feminism because I believe in equality, not **entitlements and supremacy** (#257).*

Figure 10 (#257)



Hundreds of posts in this sample argue feminists are man hating, power-hungry sexists. In the 1970s the women's movement was divided by 'lesbian separatism,' an idea that women should live in a society apart from men. Lesbian separatists rejected heterosexuality on all levels and believed true feminists did not need men physically or emotionally (Tong 2009: 71-72). Radical lesbian separatist Mary Daly once wrote, "God's plan' is often a front for men's plans and a cover for inadequacy, ignorance, and evil" (Daly 1973: 30). Daly and other separatists at the time urged for a society without men and patriarchal oppression. While the separatist movement was somewhat small, its legacy is found in the posts on Women Against Feminism.

A study published in 2009 set out to empirically study if feminists do in fact, dislike men. Researchers surveyed a representative sample of 488 college students on statements from the *Ambivalence Toward Men Inventory* (Glick & Fiske 1999) and

found feminists reported lower levels of hostility toward men than those who did not identify as feminists (Anderson 2009: 216-224).

Conversely, Paul Nathanson and Katherine Young, authors of *Spreading Misandry* (2001), believe feminists are the primary culprits for a society of man-hating women. The prevalence of “misandry” on WAF confirms the strong influence of MRAs on the blog and its followers. Nathanson writes:

According to them [feminists], feminism is only about equality and opportunity. They are sincere, no doubt, but also naïve. Fortunately, most women do not read feminist literature based on conspiracy theory of history. But they do absorb hostility toward men when it is filtered down to their level on shows [and other] productions of popular culture (Nathanson 2001: 66).

Nathanson argues feminist propaganda has taken over the media and created the taboo problem of misandry. The book notes that women who were once voiceless in the media are now the ones silencing men (Nathanson 2001: 67). Bloggers on WAF defend voiceless men who can no longer defend themselves. In this case, WAF serves a dual purpose. First, WAF women affirm their power by publicly voicing their beliefs and then act as allies to men, who are in desperate need of help.

WAF and the men’s rights movement are closely aligned, both criticizing feminism’s relentless quest for control. AVoiceForMen, a popular MRA blog, aims to expose ‘misandry’ and end ‘rape hysteria’ (Fell 2014: *TIME*). There is a section on the website specifically where women post videos denouncing feminism and supporting MRA’s. One woman labeled her video entry “*From Feminist to Egalitarian: My Journey Away From Ignorance.*” Similar to WAF, AVoiceForMen focuses on the ‘pervasive problem’ of ‘false rape,’ and society’s perception of men as inherent rapists.

Warren Farrell, a leader of the men's movement and author of *The Myth of Male Power*, explains what he believes are misconceptions of male dominance. Farrell challenges women to understand men's 'powerlessness' in society. He asserts women are 'overprotected,' while men are consistently 'under protected.' For example, Farrell notes that some government agencies exist to protect women from rape and sexual assault, which lead to an increased prosecution of men.

[A man's actions] are illegal if a woman decides [it creates a hostile environment], and if a man committed the 'offense'... Who defines 'hostile environment'? The woman. Not even the man's intent makes a legal difference. In all other criminal behavior, intent makes all the difference. Even in homicide. Sexual harassment legislation in its present form makes all men unequal to all women. It is in blatant violation of the Fourteenth Amendment's guarantee of equal protection without regard of sex. Thus the political will to protect only women prevails over the constitutional mandate to protect both sexes equally" (Farrell 1993: 288).

WAF bloggers highlight this message in their discussion of rape. They believe feminists frame rape as an epidemic caused and perpetuated by *all* men and because of this, all men are wrongfully persecuted. Farrell suggests that because men are seen as powerful this problem is disregarded, but in reality, he believes women hold the power because women define what constitutes a 'hostile environment' and receive more protection from the government. While WAF suggests that feminists strive for supremacy, Farrell claims that women are already in the dominant position. Both WAF and MRA's believe feminism's hatred of men drives feminists to exaggerate rape statistics to demonize men and frame them as women's ultimate adversaries.

Feminism Perpetuates Victimhood

This next section explores Women Against Feminism's critique of 'victim feminism,' or the idea that feminism perpetuates a class of powerless women. The

Women Against Feminism page portrays feminists as lazy, irresponsible, helpless, sensitive, and petty. WAF supporters believe feminist grievances are major exaggerations and WAF disregards feminism as a movement for those who won't help themselves. In contrast, WAF promulgates self-reliance and accountability and consequently, 'responsibility' is a common theme found in the WAF victim rhetoric.

*Taking **responsibility for your actions/choices** is not oppression (#9).*

*I am **responsible** for my actions (#13).*

*I don't need feminism because I take **responsibility for my actions** and my choices. I am not a victim (#99).*

*I don't need feminism because **I can take responsibility for my insecurities** and I don't need to blame other people for my problems (#218).*

Figure 11 (#218)



WAF emphasizes the importance of responsibility, specifically owning up to one's mistakes and accepting your failures as consequences due to specific choices. According to the WAF page, women who lack accountability for their actions are weak

or looking for excuses for their unacceptable behaviors. Women of WAF believe feminism encourages weakness, dependency, and excuses for unacceptable behavior. Consequently, feminists develop a ‘victim mentality,’ or a psychological disorder that causes a perpetual victimhood status.

*I don't need feminism because I don't see women as **weak and pathetic victims** of the non-existent patriarchy (#34).*

*I need feminism because it's easier to **blame my insecurities and undoings on the 'patriarchy'** than on myself (#66).*

*I don't need feminism because I am not a **weak-minded** person (#132).*

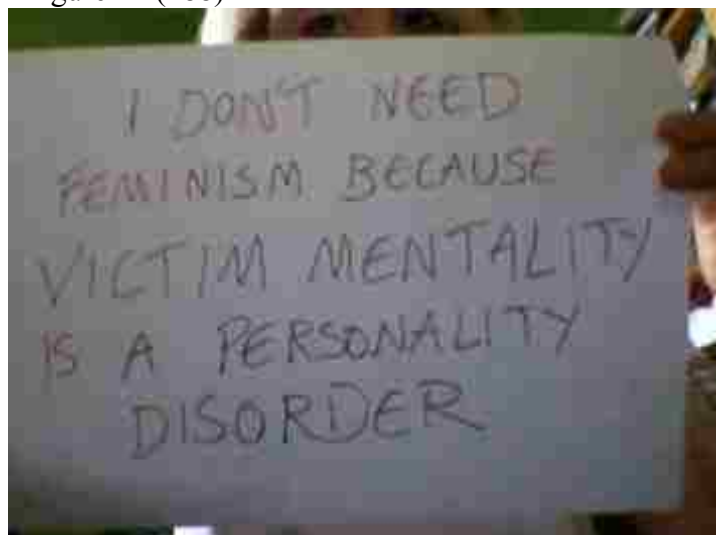
*I don't need feminism because I'm not a **manipulative idiot playing victim!** (#584).*

*I need feminism because **I need an excuse for when I act like a drunk, empty-headed slut and cheat on my boyfriend** (#44).*

*I need feminism because a **boy said something mean and sexist** to me and rather than tell him to **FUCK OFF, I prefer to play the victim** and have people protest and write laws and social policy that punishes anyone who might offend me (#563).*

*I don't need feminism because **victim mentality is a personality disorder** (#88).*

Figure 12 (#88)



Individualism is a major motif in the anti-victim posts on Women Against Feminism. WAF supporters assert their independence with an “I can do it myself” attitude. This statement is taken quite literally, as WAF women deny the need for help or assistance of any kind. Independence is achieved through hard work, but more importantly, *individual* hard work.

*I don't need feminism because **I am not a victim** (#256).*

*I don't need a **helping hand** to succeed (#240).*

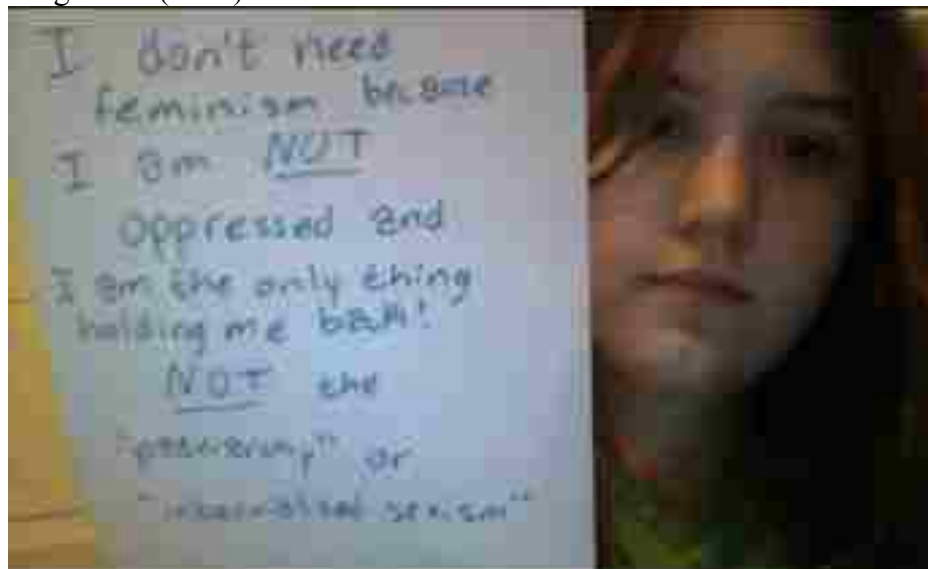
*Wherever I want to be in life, I will become through **my own hard work** (#201).*

*I have **earned my privilege** (#567).*

*I am not oppressed. And **I can do anything I want if I work for it**. Sincerely, an actual **independent female** capable of making her own life choices. (#714).*

*I don't need feminism because **I am NOT oppressed and I am the only thing holding me back**, NOT the 'patriarchy' or 'internalized sexism' (#123).*

Figure 13 (#123)



Themes of individualism and choice extend to discussions about the wage gap.

Since the second wave of feminism, the wage gap between men and women's salaries

has been at the forefront of feminist issues. Feminists view the wage difference as systematic oppression toward women in the work force. There seems to be a strong influence of neoliberalism on WAF discourse, specifically regarding the pay gap. Neoliberals and women on WAF believe the gender gap is the result of women's individual choices. If women are unhappy with their personal situation in the workforce, they should take it upon themselves to make a change.

*The **wage gap** is a result of **choice**, not sexism (#185).*

*If I'm unhappy with my wage, **I'll re-negotiate my salary** or find another employer (#38).*

*The **pay gap is women's choice**, not sexism (#223).*

*Feminists refuse to acknowledge that the **gender pay gap is the result of women's choices**, not sexism (#252).*

On Women Against Feminism, there is very little dispute about if the pay gap exists. Almost all of the bloggers acknowledge that there is a difference in men and women's income. Despite this recognition, WAF supporters believe this gap is due to individual choices, and now the women who have made these choices must live with the consequences. More importantly, WAF expects women to live with these consequences quietly because True Victims suffer in silence.

Anti-victim sentiments are not special to anti-feminists. In fact, anti-victimhood rhetoric is quite common in United States and can be attributed to the rise of neo-liberal politics during the 1980s. During that time, neoliberalism posed that victimhood was a choice; one could choose to be a victim or one could choose to rise above victimhood and be a survivor (Cole 2007: 3). Alyson Cole's, *The Cult of True Victimhood*, uses the term True Victim to explain the dichotomous relationship between victims and the

neoliberal expectations of victims, which is the True Victim. True Victims are noble and hard working, whereas most victims are looking for excuses to get out of tough situations. According to Cole, a True Victim has propriety and endures pain and suffering in silence; there are no public displays of weakness. True Victims are also responsible and determine their own fate, for better or worse. And finally, True Victims assume individuality; “A True Victim is not a victim by affiliation or by engaging in ‘victim politics’” (Cole 2007: 5). WAF rejects feminism because it conflicts with the traits of a True Victim. Robert Hughes’ *The Culture of Complaint* charges feminists with “abandoning the image of the independent, existentially responsible woman in favor of woman as helpless victim of male oppression” (Hughes 1993: 12). Feminism embodies everything a True Victim is not, including public displays of grievances and asserting the importance of social structures on victims’ future success. Finally, according to feminism, the issues women face are not individual problems but the result of systematic oppression against the female gender. Therefore, feminists fail to be categorized as True Victims and in the eyes of WAF, remain helpless and pitiful.

Anti-victim politics gained popularity with the rise of neoliberalism in the 1980s. Rebecca Singer’s ‘neo-liberal victim theory’ suggests victims lack the drive for hard work and perseverance. Singer describes neo-liberal victim theory as a “victim blaming conception of victimization,” which is “subjective and psychological rather than social and political” (Singer 2014: 9). The onus is on the victim; when individuals fail it is due to their own shortcomings and outside institutional forces are irrelevant. Consequently, WAF rejects the need for a feminist movement. Women who are suffering have no one to blame but themselves. The feminist movement cannot and

should not solve individual problems. Furthermore, if these were True Victims, they would not be asking for help in the first place.

Neo-liberal victim theory affirms that victimhood is a state of being. Bad situations do not make people victims; rather ‘victim personalities’ make people victims. Women suffering from a victim mentality are unwilling or unable to help themselves. When feminists ask for help, WAF sees that as another sign of weakness. For neoliberals and WAF supporters, the only acceptable form of help is helping oneself instead of asking for a handout or free ride.

Feminism Threatens Traditionalism

Nearly 14% of the Women Against Feminism posts cite traditionalist values as their reason to identify as anti-feminist. These posts fall into two separate categories, first, defending traditional families, and second, defending traditional courting practices, like chivalry. ‘Defense,’ is very important here, because these women do feel as though these traditional values are being threatened by feminism. The question then becomes, which feminism? During the second wave of feminism, liberal feminists made controversial critiques on institutions such as traditional marriage and motherhood.

In contrast, Women Against Feminism considers traditional marriage the bedrock for all healthy families. WAF bloggers perceive feminism as the ultimate threat to heterosexual marriage, and society as a whole:

*I don't need **feminism** because it has **weakened marriage**, the building block of civilization (#43).*

Feminism is also conveyed as damaging and vicious:

[Feminism] demonizes traditional family constructs. (#194).

[Feminism] destroys families (#43).

WAF's concern likely stems from radical feminism's advocacy for lesbianism. In 1970, the National Organization of Women (NOW) endorsed resolutions by the Gay Liberation Front Women and Radical Lesbians, advocating for the recognition of lesbianism as a legitimate form of love (Tong 2009: 27). Some radical feminists argue heterosexuality is inherently oppressive because it is dictated by patriarchal norms and expectations. These feminists encourage lesbianism instead of heterosexual relations. Women Against Feminism narrowly defines family as those in committed heterosexual relationships. WAF believes feminism causes the destruction of families, but more specifically, feminism causes the destruction of heterosexual traditional families. Larger religious institutions define traditional marriage expectations:

The Judeo-Christian ideal embodied in law is one of a monogamous heterosexual union... This traditional marriage contract recognizes the husband as head of the family, holds the husband responsible for support, and holds the wife responsible for domestic and child care services (Weitzman 1975: 540).

While feminism is perceived as a direct threat to traditional marriage, a broader contextualization insinuates that WAF supporters are protecting sacred institutional rituals. Patriarchy is embedded in Judeo-Christian doctrine with references like Lord, King, Father, and the presupposition of God's male identity. "Patriarchal structures have been considered ahistorical, eternal and (for religious believers), sanctioned and ordained by God" (Rakoczy 2004: 29). As the Bible directs, patriarchal religions presume men to be the dominant member of a family and women to act as obedient servants. When women are obedient, husbands 'reward' this behavior with care; when

wives violate these marital rules, their husbands may punish them. The Bible commands, “Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as unto the Lord” (Ephesians 5:22). The Bible sometimes justifies violence by using phrases like ‘God wills it’ (Rakoczy 2004: 30). Accordingly, if women breach the marital laws of God, it is ‘God’s will’ to rectify that wrong (Rakoczy 2004: 31). Many feminists fear that patriarchal religions employ ‘God’s will’ to confine women to a system of subservience and gender violence. As we look back at Ephesians 5:22, the Bible commands women to ‘submit’ to her husband, an idea that is inherently anti-feminist, as it embodies a man’s control over a woman, physically, mentally, and emotionally.

There is also an assumption of heterosexuality in the above quote, which many feminists, especially radical feminists, would take issue with. Third-wave feminists are known for their outward acceptance of different sexual orientations and encourage women to partake in any sexual experiences they prefer; the presumption of heterosexuality, however, leaves little room for preference. Secondly, some radical feminists argue that “patriarchal heterosexuality is an institution bent on sapping women’s emotional energies and keeping women perpetually dissatisfied with themselves,” and believe a monogamous lesbian relationship is the fulfilling relationship women can have (Tong 2009: 67). On the contrary, the traditionalists of Women Against Feminism embrace both female submissiveness and heterosexuality.

*Is it too much to ask for a society with **clearly defined gender roles**? For a **man** to dedicate his life to **protecting and providing** for his family, while his **wife**, in return takes **good care of the home and children** and tries to make life easier for him (#397).*

*I enjoy my **role** as a **supportive wife**. I love that **my man** is the **head of the household** (#244).*

I don't need feminism because I want to promise my man to love him, honor him, and obey him (#1).

Figure 14 (#1)



Submissiveness often entails a woman's economic dependence on their husbands. While men work, traditionalist women show their appreciation by cooking and cleaning for their male counterparts.

I love to watch my Teddy bear eat food prepared by me (#205).

Hey, just because I WANT to cook and clean for my boyfriend/husband doesn't mean I'm a mindless drone. I enjoy doing so, it makes me happy. I like messaging his feet, and feeding him his favorite food, and folding his underwear (#394).

I don't need feminism because I'm going to make my husband lots of sandwiches and I'll have a smile on while I do (#688).

I love to be sexy for my man [and] cook for him in the kitchen. (#236)

WAF women also take great pride in their roles as mothers and caregivers.

They view these duties as privileges and sacred responsibilities.

I don't need feminism because without my husband I wouldn't have the joy of raising my kids (#29).

*I don't need feminism because my **daughter is a privilege, not a choice** (#203).*

*My **fertility is a blessing** of Womanhood, **NOT a disease to be cured** (#101).*

*I am a **happily married** wife and mother with traditional values, working in the home as the **heart of my family** (#40).*

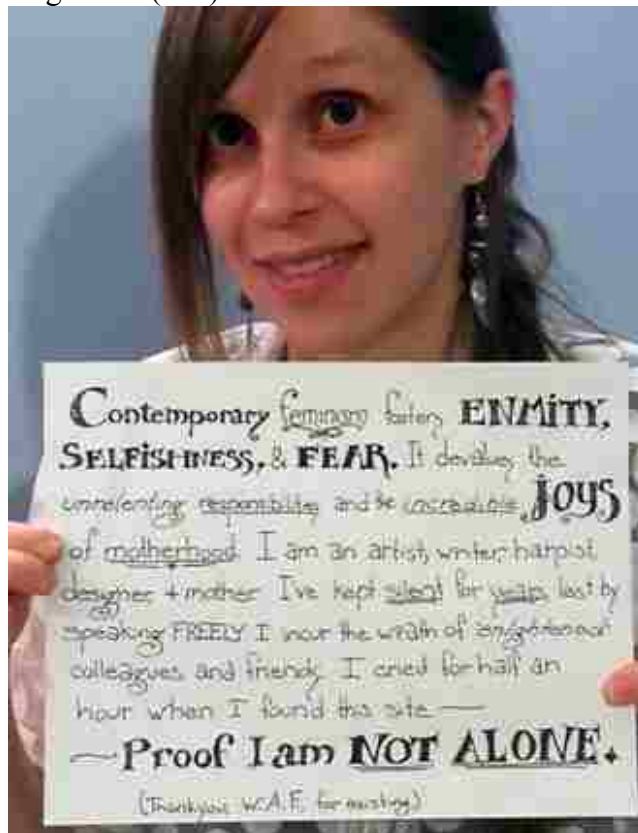
*I **enjoy cooking and cleaning** for my family (#79).*

*I reject feminism because **being a wife and mother is the greatest source of joy** in my life (#105).*

*I **love being a fulltime wife and mother**, living every single moment of growth of my daughter (#108).*

*Feminism fosters **enmity, selfishness and fear**. It devalues the **unrelenting responsibilities and the incredible joys of motherhood** (#24).*

Figure 15 (#24)



These posts are filled with themes of “joy” and bliss and illustrate exuberance for domesticity. Conversely, liberal feminists of the 1960s and 1970s opened the controversial door of critiquing women’s role in the home. These feminists questioned the status quo of women’s domestic responsibilities and expectations of child rearing. Some even viewed pregnancy and motherhood as “inherently oppressing for all women” (Jeremiah 2006: 22). “Few tasks are more like the torture of Sisyphus than housework, with its endless repetition: the clean becomes soiled, the soiled is made clean, over and over, day after day” (Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*). Likewise, Friedan describes the suburban housewife as “suffering a slow death of mind and spirit” (*The Feminine Mystique*). Unlike de Beauvoir and Friedan, WAF women find pleasure in their wifely duties of cooking and cleaning. Women Against Feminism supporters believe there are genuine rewards of care giving. Cooking and cleaning are not relentless chores, but experiences that bring satisfaction.

Not all feminists reject motherhood and domestic life as adamantly as feminists like de Beauvoir and Friedan. Sara Ruddick, for example, believes mothering is not an experience to be trivialized, but a job with a specific set of skills that should be respected (Tong 2009: 181). Moreover, like the mothers on Women Against Feminism, Ruddick believes home life can be rewarding for mothers. She states, “Loving, competent, and appreciated, a mother need not experience her work as oppressive. When their children flourish, mothers have a sense of well-being” (Ruddick 1989). Adrienne Rich’s classic, *Of Woman Born*, argues motherhood is much more complicated than Ruddick’s recipe of appreciation and satisfaction. Rich explores the contradictions found in the institution of motherhood and motherhood as an experience.

Rich argues that motherhood, as an institution, is designed and preserved by a patriarchal system. This institutional motherhood provides a set of rules and expectations on how to nurture and mother appropriately. Unrealistic expectations of perfect mothering, however, creates unrelenting guilt and self-doubt. Despite Rich's love for her three sons, she daringly speaks about the occasions when motherhood is far from perfect. Rich struggles with the patriarchal control over motherhood and her personal desire to raise her children the best she can. She writes, "It is the suffering of ambivalence: the murderous alternation between bitter resentment and raw-edged nerves, and blissful gratification and tenderness (Rich 1976: 21). Unlike Rich, WAF mothers do not share experiences about the hardships of motherhood. As Sara Ruddick suggests, WAF women have found complete fulfillment in childrearing.

Women Against Feminism also defends traditional courting, also known as chivalry. According to WAF, chivalrous men embody both physical strength and emotional sensitivity, making them the ideal mate.

*I don't need feminism because I would prefer to have a seat on the tube and have **doors opened for me** or a **helping hand** when I am struggling with a heavy suitcase. **Gentlemen were crushed and killed by feminism** (#187).*

In general, feminists contest chivalry, or as some theorists call it, "benevolent sexism" (Becker 2011). In a chivalrous relationship, women are viewed as, "creatures that ought to be protected, supported, and adored and whose love is necessary to make a man feel complete" (Glick and Fisk 2001: 109). In this supposed symbiotic relationship, women receive protection in exchange for their adoration. While this seems transactional in nature, WAF sees chivalry as synonymous with respect and honor.

*I don't need feminism. I **need a man** who will **respect me** (#184).*

*I believe in **chivalry and honor** (#40).*

*I don't need modern feminism because **I like to be treated like a lady by a gentleman** (#153).*

Figure 16 (#153)



Becker 2011 argues that chivalry, masked as caring and protective, placates women into accepting their “situation” as second-tier to men. The anti-feminists of WAF, almost entirely, accept their fate as the ‘weaker sex,’ both physically and emotionally. Men’s chivalrous action, fill practical needs with their strength, and WAF bloggers encourage women to welcome men’s help. A WAF writes states:

*How the fuck am I supposed to **open jars or lift heavy things** without my husband?! (#212).*

*In my opinion **feminism ends when [a] feminist has to bring a heavy wardrobe on the fourth floor** (#205).*

*I will gladly stick to the cooking and cleaning and planting flowers if the **men** will stick to **killing spiders and lifting heavy things and mowing the lawn**. I'll admit **its nice being taken care of** sometimes (#501).*

*I don't believe in feminism, because the second that women are treated equally as men, is the second we get **talked to with disrespect**, we don't get our **doors opened for us**, or asked if we **need help when carrying something heavy**. The*

truth is that women are weaker than men, physically and emotionally, and we need them. That's how we were created (#12).

“That’s how we were *created*,” circles the discussion back to the religious themes found on Women Against Feminism. This quote suggests men and women are inherently designed for different tasks; men should do the heavy lifting while women can partake in gentler activities. In fact, the image of the “weak” woman comes directly from the Bible. “Husbands, in the same way be considerate as you live with your wives, and treat them with respect as the weaker partner” (Peter 3:7). Both the Bible and the quotes above conclude that women are weaker and are in need of special protection. This special protection is equated with respect. In contrast, feminism promotes equality between the sexes, rejecting the idea that women inherently need protection from men. Therefore, when feminism openly rejects chivalry, WAF perceives this as a promotion of disrespect against women from men. In this case, feminism threatens seemingly honorable dating rituals and the likelihood of women finding suitable (respectful) husbands.

Equal Opportunity Already Exists

Another important theme that arises on Women Against feminism is the existence of equal opportunity. These women are not defending certain sexist actions, or upholding traditionalist beliefs; instead, they simply do not see a problem. Traditionalists uphold women’s expected gender roles while this group argues that gender norms are a thing of the past. Instead, this group of women on WAF affirms equality of opportunity exists, and therefore the feminist movement is obsolete. Most acknowledge feminism was essential at some point but that time has since passed, and

feminism is now an outdated, unnecessary movement. In the sample, 8.77% of posts reference equality between the sexes and another 8.34% of posts specifically deny the existence of a patriarchal society.

*I don't need feminism because: I all ready have the same **equal rights as men** (#6).*

*I am my **husband's equal** (#32).*

*The best evidence that **you're not living in a patriarchy** is that you're not being arrested for trying to overthrow it (#690).*

Figure 17 (#11)



*I don't need feminism because **equality of opportunity already exists** (#11).*

WAF uses patriotism and modernity as evidence of the movement's irrelevance. According to WAF bloggers, living in the United States during the millennium is essentially a barricade against sexism.

*I don't need feminism because men and women already have **equal rights where I live** (#38).*

*In the **United States** women have the **same opportunities** as men (#145).*

*I don't need feminism because **it's freaking 2014** (#161).*

*I don't need feminism to perpetuate the **myth that twenty-first century women are oppressed** (#212).*

*I do not need feminism. **I am equal in America.** I can vote, I receive equal pay, I can get an equal education, I can run for office (#302).*

*I don't need feminism because I don't need a label defining me. It's **the 21st century in America and being female is seriously THE BEST** (#241).*

Figure 18 (#241)



In the quotes above there are consistent themes of 'patriotism and the 'modernity,' and 21st century America acts as an impenetrable wall through which sexism cannot pass. In

contrast, these women imply other countries do not have such defenses against sexism. They criticize feminism for wasting time on frivolous issues in the United States rather than spending their time in developing nations where feminism is actually needed.

*Oppressed? Really? Living in a country like America and acting like you're oppressed is **really disrespectful to women in other parts of the world** that get their heads cut off just for showing their faces. Maybe instead of complaining because a man called you pretty or because you didn't get an undeserved promotion/raise, why don't **you spend that time and energy on helping women that have no rights?** (#483).*

This post uses violent and brutal imagery to insinuate street harassment and workplace discrimination as insignificant. The writer chastises feminists for not spending their efforts on women in 'other parts of the world' who face horrifying cruelty. WAF uses 'othering' to address non-specific oppressed women, in unspecified countries, who are in desperate need of help in order to illustrate what 'real' oppression looks like. These 'othering' examples are used as proof that the feminist movement is consumed with unimportant issues and ignoring real problems elsewhere.

*Children are dying everyday because their parents can't afford treatment. **Tell me again about your birth control 'crisis.'** #priorities #IDontNeedFeminism (#232).*

*I am not a feminist because **there are women out there getting acid thrown on them** for rejecting a marriage proposal but all I ever see are outcries against school dress codes (#36).*

*I'm so **fed up** with 'why I need feminism' posts, **particularly from women in North America. There are countries out there so horribly backwards** that a man can legally beat his wife for being disobedient, and then there are women here posting, "I need feminism because when I play video games online, people always tell me to play healer." **If that's your idea of oppression, you don't need a social movement, you need some basic control over your own emotions** (#696).*

Figure 19 (#521)*



These examples all paint images of oppressed, beaten women in less developed nations and are used to highlight the frivolity of feminism and shame the movement for its ignorance of global problems. In her groundbreaking work, Chandra Mohanty (1988) argues the ‘archetypal oppressed woman,’ affirms a superior status rather than expressing concern for marginalized peoples. Ironically, Mohanty is actually criticizing ‘western feminists’ for perpetuating the image of ‘third-world’ women for their own benefit instead of the well being of these oppressed individuals. Mohanty writes:

I argue that assumptions of privilege and ethnocentric universality on the one hand, and inadequate self-consciousness about the effect of Western scholarship on the "third world" in the context of a world system dominated by the West on the other, characterize a sizable extent of Western feminist work on women in the third world... Western feminisms appropriate and "colonize" the fundamental complexities and conflicts which characterize the lives of women of different classes, religions, cultures, races and castes in these countries (Mohanty 1988).

Mohanty condemns Western feminists for grouping third-world women’s oppression into one cohesive subjugation instead of understanding the individual complexities of each society and how each system of oppression has evolved. While Mohanty directs her critique toward Western feminism, it seems to have relevance for the WAF Tumblr

page as well. Both Western feminists and Western anti-feminists have fallen into the trap of creating and perpetuating the ‘cultural and ideological composite Other’ (Mohanty 2003: 19). For Western feminists, the consequence is failing to acknowledge differences in oppression in various international settings. For anti-feminists, the consequence is a source of diversion from discriminations happening today in the United States. Imagery of ‘veiled’ women or female genital mutilation leads to conclusions that America is nothing like those places, and therefore, is free of sexism altogether.

It is also worth noting the pattern of ‘feeling oppressed’ in this section and the previous sections. WAF bloggers consistently refer to ‘feelings of oppression.’ There are two common statements; first, WAF writers do not feel oppressed as women and therefore do not need feminism, or WAF bloggers feel oppressed by feminism itself and thus reject feminism. Whether or not someone feels oppressed, however, does not prove or disprove the existence of oppression. Feminist theorist Marilyn Frye explains that oppression cannot be seen or experienced microscopically; “But when you look macroscopically, you can see it—a network of forces and barriers which are systematically related and which conspire to the immobilization reduction, and molding of women” (Frye 2000: 13). Participants on WAF view their experiences microscopically and fail to recognize patterns of disadvantages among women. Instead, one woman’s failure is personal and completely disconnected from another woman’s similar struggle. In this particular section, WAF bloggers refuse to recognize similarities among women internationally and use ‘othering’ to further distance themselves from connected oppressions.

According to WAF, equality between the sexes is a fact of life; women, in America, are equal to men. This perspective can be explained by the idea of ‘subtle sexism,’ which is “characterized by openly unequal and harmful treatment of women that goes unnoticed because it is perceived to be customary or normal behavior” (Swim 1997: 103-118). Swim’s argument is based on the idea that sexism and gender role expectations are so ingrained in our socialization that we do not perceive them as prejudiced. Thus, men and women who identify as egalitarians may be perpetuating behavior that is harmful to women and the women’s movement. Swim writes, “Subtle sexism is also consistent with research demonstrating that stereotyping can reflect automatic cognitive processes that may be unintentional or outside of the stereotyper’s awareness” (Swim 1997: 103-118). Therefore, supporting the feminist movement would be improbable if someone is unable to see ‘subtle sexism,’ or if they were unaware of their own sexist behavior. Additionally, while some of these women might be unaware of the sexism around them, others may not believe certain behaviors are sexist at all. For example, many women on WAF reject street harassment as sexism. So, while they may witness, or even experience this behavior, they do not define the behavior as sexist. Swim notes, “Those who endorse modern sexist beliefs may not be hiding their prejudices; instead, they do not perceive that certain beliefs or behaviors are indicative of prejudice (Swim 1997: 103-118). This perception of equality is reinforced when women compare their own experiences to those living in developing nations. Images of beaten and abused women affirm the superior status of women living in the United States. How could American women be suffering from inequalities when their lives are so much better than ‘other’ women elsewhere?

Discussion

As the women's movement progressed, many men felt their power and privilege were at stake. The Men's Rights Movement developed to ensure men remained the dominant gender in society. Recently, women have also joined the backlash against feminism but the impetus behind women's anti-feminism is not as clear. To examine this phenomenon, I conducted a content analysis of a viral Tumblr page called *Women Against Feminism* and it became clear that the numerous rationales of anti-feminism are as varied as the myriad feminist ideologies. WAF blog posts address multiple perspectives of feminism resulting in different motivations. Overall, five overarching anti-feminist themes emerged including typical feminist stereotypes, feminism perceived as anti-male, feminism equated to victimhood, feminism seen as a threat to traditionalist values, and the belief that equal opportunity between the sexes already exists. Within these five themes, two strands of rhetoric become apparent. The first strand reflects a regressive ideology with posts admonishing the advancements brought on by the women's movement and a desire to return to a time before feminism. The other strand illuminates an extensive misunderstanding within WAF of feminism's principles and objectives. This is possibly the result of the feminist movement's diverse perspectives and disagreements among feminist ideologies. Ultimately, both strands of rhetoric use the public nature and far-reaching abilities of social media to silence feminist efforts.

Regressive Rhetoric vs. Misconceptions of Feminism

The traditionalism theme is exclusively regressive. In this section, anti-feminists claim feminism is to blame for the demise of traditional marriages and families. Traditionalists wish to maintain conventional gender norms in which women are responsible for domestic duties and men are responsible for protection and financial support. On the contrary, much of the second-wave feminist movement dedicated its energies to contesting women's role in the home in favor of financial independence and equal opportunity in the workforce. Feminism is charged with weakening the institution of heterosexual marriage and tainting the sacred responsibility of motherhood. WAF traditionalists want to return back to a time before second-wave feminism when women were expected to remain in the home and raise their children.

Stereotypes regarding feminism use misconceptions and misunderstandings about feminism to facilitate regressive discourse. When feminists are alleged to be unattractive, mean, and unhygienic, many women may prefer an image of delicacy and beauty and thus reject a feminist identity. Feminists are given these negative stereotypes because they publicly protest inequalities; this public expression is labeled as overly angry or fanatical. Instead, women before the feminist movement were attractive, or in other words, before the feminist movement women were quiet and knew their place. Consequently, stereotypes help feed the notion that feminism makes women undesirable and encourage a rejection of feminism in order to seem more attractive. This rejection, however, comes at the cost of silence.

There are examples of both strands of rhetoric within the anti-male theme. Much of the anti-male posting mimics MRA discourse, including the usage of 'misandry' and 'reverse sexism.' The primary objective of MRA's is to maintain men's

dominant role in society. As WAF mirrors their messages they help MRA's gain traction for their movement while simultaneously stripping away at feminist voices. MRA discourse is specifically designed to contest misogyny with the idea that men are the real victims of sexism. WAF, convinced by MRA's messaging, believe feminists are pining for superiority, and subsequently encourage women to keep quiet about their own grievances because men are the actual sufferers. The anti-male posts also reflect a lot of confusion regarding the feminist movement and its perceptions of men, especially in their discussion of rape. WAF charges feminism with accusing all men of being rapists when in fact, feminists would vehemently agree that most men are not rapists. That said, statistics show most rapists are men, and when feminists repeat this fact, it is manipulated into feminists' hatred of men. Feminist terminology, such as 'rape culture,' and 'consent,' however, are prominent throughout WAF's posts, verifying that feminism has firmly rooted itself in conversation about sexual assault and rape.

Like the anti-male theme, the anti-victimhood theme contains regressive language but also clear confusions regarding feminism. Many of the anti-victim posts disparage feminists for outwardly expressing their grievances about sexism. Instead, WAF bloggers believe true victimized classes take their victimhood in silent stride. This clearly illustrates the regressive element within the anti-victim theme by again silencing women's voices, reminiscent of a time when women were not allowed to challenge the status quo.

In other ways, however, WAF bloggers seem to embody feminist ideals without realizing it. Anti-victim WAF bloggers encourage women to take action if they are unhappy with their situation, such as their salary at work. Likewise, feminism would

support such action and in general, feminism is a movement about being a proactive advocate for change. The major difference between WAF's encouragement of action and feminist advocacy is perspective. WAF internalizes one woman's pay gap issue as her own personal problem, whereas feminism views the issue in a broader context. Therefore, action may take on different definitions; WAF bloggers may suggest speaking to an employer while feminism is looking to larger social institutions for more expansive changes.

Finally, the equal opportunity theme contains some regressive elements similar to those in the stereotyping and anti-victim themes. The equal opportunity section attempts to persuade women to keep their grievances inside by asserting equal opportunity already exists. These anti-feminists essentially tell women there are no issues left to protest against and subsequently encourage women to keep quiet. This section also illustrates some feminist ideals as well. Posts within the equal opportunity theme seem to have a 'pro-women' sentiment. In other words, these bloggers are very proud to be women and are thrilled about the rights and freedoms they enjoy in today's society. And so, it seems that many WAF women simultaneously appreciate the freedoms feminism has brought to women, but also want to restrict these rights, like the right for women to speak openly about gendered issues. Accordingly, these women enjoy the right to publicly denounce feminism but then attempt to silence feminist voices.

Why these women want to silence feminists is the ultimate question, and it comes down to hyper-individualism. WAF women are unable, or unwilling to look beyond their personal experiences. So, while many seem to embody feminist ideals,

such as taking action against victimization, WAF does not recognize the larger structural forces which influence personal struggles for women. Even WAF's regressive rhetoric is highly individualized. As traditionalists shame other feminists for stepping outside of their expected gender roles, they are not making individualized attacks, but rather perpetuating overarching social norms and stigmas about women's limited role in society. At the risk of sounding cliché, *Women Against Feminism* lacks 'sociological imagination,' or as C. Wright Mills' explains, the "vivid awareness of the relationship between experience and the wider society" (Mills 1959). Hyper-individualism prevents WAF members from connecting personal experience to the social world and resulting in a rejection of feminist framework. To combat feminism, WAF has embraced MRA rhetoric in attempts to delegitimize and bully feminists into silence. If feminism wishes to win over anti-feminists, they must convey how personal experience is linked to larger social trends.

Limitations and Future Study

This study focused solely on the Tumblr page *Women Against Feminism*, and therefore its findings are limited to participants of the blog and not generalizable to the larger anti-feminist population. Furthermore, I recognize that there is a common phenomenon of 'Internet trolling,' in which an Internet user posts controversial content on a particular site simply to witness the reactions the post receives. For the purposes of this study, I treated each post as a genuine piece of anti-feminist content, though it is impossible to be absolutely certain that the post was not from an Internet troll.

Given time restraints, there were certain areas of this project I was unable to study in-depth. Future research could focus on the posts' image content in accordance,

or in place of just the verbal content. It would also be interesting to analyze the way the women pose, dress, and present their verbal content within the image. If possible, future research on this Tumblr may want to note the approximate age of the bloggers along with their race and ethnicity. There are also some verbal and visual clues within the posts that could inform researchers about bloggers' countries of origin. Furthermore, researchers may want to track posts that contain other people, such as significant others or children.

While I primarily used qualitative analysis for this study, future research might want to analyze which codes tend to correlate with one another. For example, quantitative analysis might examine whether those who post about traditionalism are also more likely to post about pay gap myths. And finally, further research could also spend more time on the social media aspect behind anti-feminism and how this changes the dynamic of the movement. Does a social media presence seem to legitimize anti-feminism? How do other anti-feminist blogs compare to *Women Against Feminism*? How does Women Against Feminism compare to men's rights social media pages? How does content from *Women Against Feminism* translate to other social media sites like Twitter and Facebook?

Conclusion

Feminism is a movement of diverse and often contrasting perspectives. Tumblr pages like *Women Against Feminism* reflect this diversity with backlash that is equally diverse. Overall, anti-feminists on WAF found five major motivations for rejecting feminism. Their use of social media, however, evidences anti-feminists simultaneous criticism of the feminist movement and participation in the movement's benefits.

Women Against Feminism is a platform of public expression and women are likely allowed to express their opinions on this blog due to the advances of the women's movement. Ironically, it is now used as a platform to silence the same movement that made *Women Against Feminism* possible.

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