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Feminist men?: examining men's feminist self-identification, activism and the impact of language

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ABSTRACT

Men's participation is essential to achieving gender equality. This study addresses research gaps in the under-studied area of men's participation in gender equality activism. We demonstrate, among an online sample of US men, (a) a strong, independent association ($\beta = .60$) between degree of feminist self-identification and reported activism for gender equality and (b) the importance of survey *language* in assessing activism, with men being more likely to report activism when the term 'feminist', or related terms, is not used. The positive association between labelling and activism replicates in men a pattern consistently observed in women, and challenges the notion that men cannot be feminists. We also randomly assigned participants to report their degree of feminist identification either before or after reporting their level of activism. Whether feminist identification was reported first or last had no effect on activism rates. Overall, in spite of study manipulations (i.e. (a) modifications to scale language and (b) identity priming), activism rates remained low. Finally, an ancillary analysis demonstrated that feminist identification substantially mediated the association between sexual minority status and reported activism. Practical implications suggest the need to target stigma towards feminism in men in order to increase self-identification and, ultimately, activism.

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KEYWORDS
Feminism; feminist identification; masculinity; social activism; stigma

Introduction

Research on women in the US has consistently demonstrated the positive association between feminist self-identification and engagement in activism for gender equality which is defined in the present study as issues related to equal rights or access across gender, for instance socially, politically, or economically (see Ayres, Friedman, & Leaper, 2009; Yoder, Tobias, & Snell, 2011; Zucker, 2004). However, the relationship between feminist self-identification (willingness to accept the feminist label) and activism *in men* remains a significant gap in the literature. Theorists have argued that men view the term 'feminist' as particularly stigmatizing, often related to masculinity norms (Kimmel, 1998, 2005). Previous research has paid little attention to the impact of potentially stigmatizing language used in the assessment of men's activism. This lack of information is troubling given increasing recognition of the value of inclusive feminism within the third-wave feminist movement, or as Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie titles her Adichie, 2014 book and TedTalk of the same name, the idea that 'We Should All be Feminists'. We adopt this framework of inclusive feminism, drawing upon the key theme of diversity within modern feminist theory (Conlin, 2017; Enns, 2012). Recent empirical research suggests that modern definitions

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of feminists are more varied, often including men (Baily, 2015). Changing notions of feminism hold the potential to increase men's self-identification and in-group identification, which has been well-established as a key motivator for collective action (Van Zomeren, Postmes, & Spears, 2008). Thus, research on men's feminist self-identification and gender equality activism is both timely and overdue.

To address this gap, the primary aim of this study was to examine men's feminist self-identification as a predictor of activism for the cause. We also examined whether the use of the stigmatizing term 'feminist' impacts men's reporting of activism. To do so, we operated within the theoretical frameworks of both feminist theory and men and masculinity studies, with attention to social psychology and previous empirical research. Linear regression and ANOVA analyses (see Field, 2009) were used to analyse the data. Regression analyses were an ideal choice because (a) of the continuous nature of our dependent variable (scale ranging from 1 to 25) and (b) regression analyses are well-suited to examining magnitude of associations. On the other hand, ANOVA was used to analyse interaction effects when categorical variables (randomization to survey version 1 or 2) were involved.

Theoretical framework and cultural context

Feminist men?

The academic debate over whether or not men can be feminists has a long and, at times, controversial history, dating back to the early 1980s (see Jardine & Smith, 1987). There has been debate over whether men can be 'feminists,' as opposed to allies or 'pro-feminists' (see Ashe, 2007 for discussions of profeminism). To illustrate, Kimmel (1998) describes varied reactions over men embracing feminism, from hostility from other men, who have internalized stigma towards feminism, to hostility from women, who do not believe men can be true participants in the movement. Theorists acknowledge that men's relationship to feminist issues is complex and varied, even with respect to supportive attitudes and acknowledgement of privilege (Messner, 1997). Because of these complexities, scholars have advocated for increased research attention to men's relationship with feminism (Holmgren & Hearn, 2009). Past studies examining US men's participation in the feminist movement have often focused on ally-development/alliance-building, as opposed to self-identification as feminist (Bojin, 2012; Casey, 2010). Further, scholars in the US and Canada have addressed the perception that men cannot truly be 'feminists' (Leonard, 2014; Tarrant, 2009), countering this position by challenging essentialist views of feminism. Additionally, scholars have emphasized the need for *action* on the part of men who hope to be part of the feminist movement (Jardine, 1987) since previous research has found feminist *self-labeling* to strongly predict action in women (Yoder et al., 2011).

An additional barrier to feminist identification for men appears to result from perceptions of decreased masculinity in men who openly associate with feminism (Anderson, 2009). Perceptions of decreased masculinity likely reduce these men's social status, given the value placed on dominant, hegemonic masculinity, which produces and preserves gender-based power differences (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). In addition to the influence of hegemonic masculinity, recent research supports US men's experience of manhood as *precarious*, defined as a sociocultural requirement that manhood be earned and maintained, by enacting traditional gendered behaviour, or lost (Vandello & Bosson, 2013). The threat of precarious manhood, combined with the ostensible benefits of hegemonic masculinity, make feminist identification less appealing to men than to women and may make it difficult for men to accept the label as self-descriptive. Men who *do* self-label as feminists risk lost manhood and deprivation of the perceived benefits of male hegemony. On the other hand, theorists also posit that there are multiple forms of masculinity, and that masculinity, like feminism, is not a singular, fixed category (Whitehead, 2002).

Self-labelling labelling depends on how one defines the term 'feminist'. Taking the definition of Adichie (2014) – an individual who views our current approach to gender as flawed – and acknowledging that essentialist gender norms may also adversely affect men (Javaid, 2014; O'Neil, 2015), we argue that men have both a place, and a personal investment, in the cause. Previous research has compared

activism rates in men and women identifying as profeminist, feminist or antisexist and found that the 'feminist' identity was associated with significantly higher rates of activism than other identities (White, 2006). Recent research has advocated for men's role in creating change with respect to traditionally feminist issues (for example, violence against women; Flood, 2011). This study aims to address the gaps in the literature by directly measuring men's feminist self-identification, while also taking into account the term's stigma for men, and its relationship to activist participation.

Integrating social psychology

In addition to merging men and masculinity studies with feminist theory, we also draw from social psychology to support our research questions. The *social identity approach*, based upon the tenets of social identity theory (SIT; Tajfel & Turner, 1979) and self-categorization theory (SCT; Turner, Hogg, Oakes, Reicher, & Wetherell, 1987) has particular relevance here. This approach holds that when an individual takes on a particular social category (such as 'feminist'), a sense of in-group identity develops. In-group identification in turn increases likelihood of engagement in behaviours supporting the in-group, through mechanisms such as influencing individuals' self-esteem and perceptions of out-group members. In this way, personal identities, such as feminist self-labelling, carry with them broader implications for behaviour.

The social identity model of collective action (Van Zomeren et al., 2008) incorporates three primary motivators for behaviours associated with collective action: identity, injustice, and efficacy, based upon results of three meta-analyses, including 182 total effects (Van Zomeren et al., 2008). Again, identification with a specific group is theorized to lead to increased action on behalf of the in-group.

This theoretical framework strongly supports our prediction that degree of feminist self-identification will be positively associated with activism for gender equality, given that labelling is proposed to increase one's sense of duty to the in-group and that identity is thought to be one of the three most salient predictors of collective action.

Previous research: a limited view of men's feminist identification and activism

Published studies, that have included men and women residing within the US, have found that men less readily accept the feminist, and engage in less activism, or in a narrower range of activism, than women do (Breen & Karpinski, 2008; McCabe, 2005; Stake, 2007; White, 2006; Williams & Wittig, 1997). Although these studies had notable limitations, findings consistently suggest that men are less involved in the gender equality movement than women.

Previous research has rarely examined feminist self-identification and gender equality activism in US men. Not only are the studies few in number, but research in the area has been limited by scope and design. For example, Duncan (1999) found feminist identification to predict US women and men's level of activist engagement. However, the study sample included only individuals who already participated in activism and the type of activism assessed was geared towards 'women's rights', more specifically reproductive rights. Feminist identification was included in this study within a broader measure of feminist consciousness, so the unique effect of feminist identification was not examined. Studies by Williams and Wittig (1997) and Cowan, Mestlin, and Masek (1992), in samples including both US men and women, found that acceptance of the feminist label correlated positively with belief, though not participation, in collective action. The present study extends this research by assessing activist *participation*.

Other notable limitations of previous research include (a) skewed sample sizes (far fewer men than women: for example Breen and Karpinski (2008) included 18 men and 42 women in Study 1 and 17 men and 95 women in Study 2; Stake (2007) included 143 men and 519 women; and Williams and Wittig (1997) included 47 men and 94 women), (b) measures of feminist identification *or* activism, but not both or not the association between the two: Breen and Karpinski (2008) and McCabe (2005) measured labelling only: Stake (2007) measured activism only; White (2006) measured activism only in women

and men who already self-identified as feminist, profeminist, or antisexist, and (c) use of feminist scale language: White (2006) characterized all activist behaviours as explicitly for 'feminism'.

With respect to more recent research, Holland et al. (2016) examined the impact of feminist activism in a US sample of all-male office workers, finding that it correlated with increased sexual harassment at work but also with increased psychological benefits. Unfortunately, the authors did not examine feminist self-labelling or the impact of feminist survey language – the measure asked whether men had participated in any causes for 'women's rights', a term used within the 'feminist' category of words along with feminist and feminism in a study by Breen and Karpinski (2008), as opposed to 'gender equality', on their assessment of activism.

Several other recent studies have examined various aspects of US men's engagement with feminism. Topics have included: (a) predictors of men's endorsement of feminism, including liberal moral concerns (such as fairness; Precopio & Ramsey, 2017); (b) stigma towards men who support gender equality, including that they may be perceived as more feminine, weak, or gay (Rudman, Mescher, & Moss-Racusin, 2013), and; (c) the relationship between masculinity and feminist attitudes among men (Lemaster et al., 2015). Lemaster et al. (2015) found that traditionally masculine behaviours and greater identification with other men were negatively associated with feminist attitudes. These studies represent an important shift towards this under-studied area of research. However, the research questions of the present study were unanswered, including the plausible, but unexplored, possibility that the use of feminist or related *language* could lead to under-reporting of activist behaviours by invoking stigma. This hypothesis is especially relevant to men because both theory and empirical research has suggested that US men view the term feminist as stigmatizing (Anderson, 2009; Breen & Karpinski, 2008; Kimmel, 1998; Wiley, Srinivasan, Finke, Firnhaber, & Shilinsky, 2013). Taken together, our study attempts to: (a) examine the relationship between US men's feminist self-labelling and reported activism, drawing from previous research which focused on women (Yoder et al., 2011) and (b) assess whether reporting of activist behaviours in men is linked to the use of feminist scale language, a measurement concern unaddressed in previous literature.

The study aims

The purpose of this research is to expand our understanding of US men's feminist self-labelling and participation in activism for gender equality. Specifically, there are two gaps we hope to address: (a) the association between US men's degree of feminist self-identification and their participation in gender equality activism and (b) the effect of stigmatizing scale language on US men's reporting of activist behaviours (use of feminist or non-feminist language in assessment of activism).

Importantly, this study aims to advance our understanding of the barriers to US men's participation in activism promoting gender equality, both at macro-level (such as lobbying political representatives) and at micro-level (everyday activities such as speaking to friends about gender equality issues). We aim to spark a shift in attention towards this research area and examine the extent to which men's feminist self-identification predicts their participation in gender equality activism, taking the effect of stigmatizing survey language into account. Additionally we examine overall rates of activism in a large, modern sample of US men.

To explore whether stigmatizing language has an effect on reported activism, we modified a widely used tool; the Measure of Collective Action (Foster & Matheson, 1995). The first modified version assessed activism using non-stigmatizing language by characterizing behaviours as for 'gender equality', whereas the second modified version assessed activism using stigmatizing language, by explicitly characterizing the same behaviours as 'feminist' or for 'feminism'. The aim of our modifications was to reduce the potential confound between activism for gender equality and identification with the feminist movement or label, especially considering men's resistance to feminist self-labelling relative to women.

Hypotheses

Our first hypothesis predicted a main effect for feminist self-identification. Specifically, we predicted that self-identification would positively predict reported activism, measured using the modified Measure of Collective Action (Foster & Matheson, 1995), independent of, both, survey version (feminist or 'gender equality' language) and timing of reporting self-identification (before or after activism reporting). Second, we predicted an interaction effect between degree of feminist self-identification and survey version (feminism- or 'gender equality'-language) such that the positive association between feminist identification and activism would be strongest when feminist language (versus more neutral, 'gender equality' language) was used. Our third hypothesis predicted an interaction between timing of reporting self-identification and degree of feminist identification. To specify, we predicted that the correlation between identification and activism would be stronger when feminist identification was assessed before (versus after) activism.

Since previous research has demonstrated the importance of the feminist label to activism among women (Yoder et al., 2011), we predicted that study modifications that emphasized this label (feminist scale language and early identification reporting) would *enhance* reported activism for identifiers. On the other hand, participants with low feminist identification and those who reject the label were expected to endorse higher levels of activism on the 'gender equality'-language survey, where they could endorse activist behaviours without directly endorsing the feminist label.

Method

Participants

We recruited 229 men to participate through Amazon's Mechanical Turk (M-Turk) service. The mean age of our sample was 29.62 years old (standard deviation = 8.62 years). M-Turk is a data collection service that allows individuals to complete research surveys in exchange for Amazon credit. For completion, participants were compensated $0.20 in Amazon credit. Although concerns have arisen regarding the generalizability of M-Turk samples, leading researchers to examine concerns such as demographic characteristics and political affiliation, these same researchers have concluded that M-Turk should not be dismissed (Berinsky, Huber, & Lenz, 2011; Clifford, Jewell, & Waggoner, 2015; Huff & Tingley, 2015). It is argued that M-Turk remains a valid, useful, and accessible recruitment strategy, and may be even more representative than typical convenience samples (Berinsky et al., 2011; Clifford et al., 2015; Huff & Tingley, 2015). Other research has also suggested M-Turk to be comparable to both college student and social media samples, but also more diverse on key demographics (Casler, Bickel, & Hackett, 2013). Buhrmester, Kwang, and Gosling (2011) echoed the finding that M-Turk participants were significantly more diverse than American college student participants and that results were reliable. On the other hand, Berinsky et al. (2011) cautioned that M-Turk samples appeared slightly less generalizable than Internet-based panel or national-probability samples. Taken together, the data support the use of M-Turk, but suggests that, ideally, studies should be replicated using varied recruitment strategies.

Additional evidence for the generalizability of our M-Turk samples comes from comparing our sample to recent national and international polls found in popular media. For instance, a 2015 VOX poll found that 52% of Americans did not consider themselves feminist (answering 'no' to the question 'Do you consider yourself a feminist …'), and in our sample 56% of men would not (to varying extents) label themselves 'feminist' (Kliff, 2015). An international poll found that 53% of men in developed countries self-identify as 'feminist' to some degree (36% 'somewhat' and 17% 'very much'; Clark, 2014). Although the poll provided a definition of terms, our results were not far off: 44% of men in our sample agreed with the self-label *to some degree*, with complete agreement with the label being low.

For the current sample, only men residing in the United States were invited to participate. We chose to restrict this study to the US because the gap in the literature appears particularly strong for US samples, as evidenced by the studies reviewed above which did focus on US samples but lacked attention to our particular research concerns (Holland et al., 2016; Precopio & Ramsey, 2017; Yoder et al., 2011).

Our theoretical framework, attempting to operate at the intersection of men and masculinity studies and feminist theory, supports our decision to focus specifically on men. To illustrate, masculinity norms are indicated to be a key reason why men participate less in the feminist movement (Kimmel, 2005; Lemaster et al., 2015). Since men's barriers to feminist engagement differ markedly from women's, along with their levels of identification and activism (Breen & Karpinski, 2008; McCabe, 2005; Stake, 2007; White, 2006; Williams & Wittig, 1997**)**, we believe our theoretical framework and review of previous research supports a separate examination of men.

The mean age of participants was 29.6 years old (standard deviation = 8.6). 82.5% of participants were between the ages of 18–35. The correlation between age and participants' total reported activism score was almost zero, at $r = .016$. We report full demographic characteristics in Table 1.

Measures

Activism

We assessed activism using versions of the Measure of Collective Action (Foster & Matheson, 1995), minimizing feminist language (use of the term feminist or related terms) in one version and enhancing it in another. The Measure of Collective Action (Foster & Matheson, 1995) is a 25-item assessment of activism in support of feminism, or 'women's issues'. The scale does not directly use the terms 'feminism' or 'gender equality'. Items assess for a variety of behaviours, including: 'I have encouraged friends to collect information on women's issues', 'I have attended talks on women's issues', and 'I will correct other's use of sexist language' (Foster & Matheson, 1995). The total score represents a sum of scores on each individual item, with 25 representing the maximum possible total.

Our first modification of this scale (see Appendix A) changed all references to 'women's' issues to 'gender equality' issues (or related terms), and our second modification (see Appendix B) changed references to 'feminist' issues (or related terms). The aim of modified version 1 was to *minimize* stigmatizing (feminist) language, while the aim of modified version 2 was to *maximize* stigmatizing language. Cronbach's alpha assessed internal reliability, or the consistency of scale items with one another (see Field, 2009 for detailed discussion), for versions 1 and 2. For the 25-item feminism version, Cronbach's $\alpha = .83$ and for the 25-item gender equality version, Cronbach's $\alpha = .81$.

We randomly assigned participants to one of the two conditions via the Qualtrics survey software. The two groups were not quite equal in size [$n = 125$ (54.6%) vs. $n = 104$ (45.4%)] simply because of the vagaries of non-stratified random assignment.

Feminist self-identification

Feminist self-identification was assessed using a single item rating scale (a Likert scale), ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree)* to 6 (*strongly agree)*. Participants were asked to rate their level of agreement with the statement: 'I am a feminist' (see Appendix C). The presentation order, first vs. last, of this scale was

Table 1. Demographic characteristics.

Characteristic	Value
Participants (*n*)	229
Mean age (years)	29.62 (SD = 8.62)
Race/Ethnicity [*n* (%)]	
White/European American/Caucasian	176 (76.9)
Asian/Asian American	23 (10.0)
African/African-American/black	12 (5.2)
Hispanic/Latina/o American	9 (3.9)
Asian Indian	5 (2.2)
American Indian/Native American/First Nation	1 (.4)
Pacific Islander	1 (.4)
Other race or ethnicity	2 (.9)
Sexual orientation [% (majority/minority/no report	87.3/10.0/2.6

randomized across participants. Previous studies have successfully used single-item assessments of feminist self-identification, both on a continuous scale and as a dichotomous (yes/no) variable (Houvouras & Carter, 2008; Liss, Hoffner, & Crawford, 2000; Liss, O'Connor, Morosky, & Crawford, 2001; McCabe, 2005; Roy, Weibust, & Miller, 2007).

Procedure

Participants were randomly assigned through an online survey software platform (Qualtrics) to complete either the gender equality-language (modified version 1) or the feminist-language (modified version 2) survey. We also randomly assigned participants to complete the feminist self-identification measure either first or last. All participants provided informed consent and we recorded all responses anonymously. Demographic information was provided at the conclusion of the survey.

Results

Results involve statistical tools unfamiliar to cross-disciplinary readers who may wish to skip to the discussion section below.

We first assessed descriptive statistics of reported activism scores by level of feminist identification (1–6 rating scale), reported in Table 2. We report bivariate correlations of study variables in Table 3. Of note, a second dependent variable assessing activism (a modified version of Duncan's (1999) measure of political participation) was originally included in the present study but was omitted from all analyses because of its low internal reliability (or item consistency) in this sample.

Prior to analysing our hypotheses, we assessed the dependent variable (modified versions of the Measure of Collective Action) for normality. Both the Kolmogorov–Smirnov and Shapiro–Wilk tests – commonly used statistical tests to assess whether variables meet normality assumptions (see Field, 2009) – were significant ($p = .00$), suggesting non-normality. Visual inspection of relevant graphs (histogram, stem-and-leaf, and Q-Q plots) confirmed non-normality. We used Blom transformation – a rank-based normalizing transformation (see Field, 2009 for detailed discussion) – to normalize the variable. Although Kolmogorov–Smirnov and Shapiro–Wilk tests remained significant ($p < .01$) after transformation, graphical representation (histogram with imposed normal curve) and skewness and kurtosis *z*-statistics suggested improved normality.

Table 2. Descriptive statistics of reported activism scores by degree of feminist identification.

Label	Mean	Std. Deviation	*N*
1	61	1.33	1.54
2	32	2.44	2.27
3	35	2.83	1.96
4	51	3.33	1.92
5	30	4.93	3.07
6	20	8.50	5.83
Total	229	3.26	3.26

Table 3. Summary of bivariate correlations, means, and standard deviations for all study variables.

Measure	1	2	3	4	5
1. 25-item activism score (Blom-transformed)	–	.59**	.25**	.00	.23**
2. Degree of identification	.59**	–	–.01	.12	.20**
3. Survey version	.25**	–.01	–	–.04	N/A
4. Timing of reporting identification	.00	.12	–.04	–	N/A
5. Sexual minority status	.23**	.20**	N/A	N/A	–
M (Raw)	3.26	3.07	–	–	–
SD (Raw)	3.26	1.66	–	–	–

**Correlation is significant at the .01 level (2-tailed).

To analyse Hypothesis 1, which predicted that feminist identification would positively predict activism, we conducted a linear regression analysis (see Field, 2009). Results demonstrated that degree of feminist identification positively predicted ($p < .001$) activism, independent of timing of reporting identification and survey version. The effect size was large ($\beta = .60$) and the overall model, including all three independent variables, explained 41.6% of variance in reported activism ($R^2 = .42$). Visual inspection of the line graph confirmed this pattern of findings (see Figure 1).

To analyse Hypothesis 2, which hypothesized an interaction effect between feminist self-identification and survey version, we performed an Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) test (see Field, 2009). Levene's test – which tests for equal variance across groups – was non-significant [$F(11, 217) = 1.45$, $p = .15$], so we assumed homogeneity of variance (Field, 2009). The main effect of degree of feminist identification was again significant [$F(5, 217) = 27.39$, $p < .001$, partial eta squared = .39]. The main effect of survey version was also significant, independent of degree of identification [$F(1, 217) = 18.09$, $p < .001$, partial eta squared = .077]. The interaction effect was non-significant [$F(5, 217) = .74$, $p = .60$]. Graphical representations (Figures 2 and 3) of the interaction confirmed the main effect of survey version and the pattern of this effect, such that the largest effect of survey language occurred at identification level 1 (no identification; Figure 3).

To analyse Hypothesis 3, which predicted an interaction effect between timing of reporting self-identification and feminist self-identification, we again conducted a univariate ANOVA using the Blom-transformed dependent variable. Levene's test was not significant [$F(11, 217) = 1.18$, $p = .30$], so the assumption of homogeneity of variance was met. The main effect of degree of feminist identification remained significant [$F(5, 217) = 24.25$, $p < .001$, partial eta squared = .36]. The main effect of timing of reporting identification was not significant [$F(1, 217) = 1.50$, $p = .22$]. The interaction effect was also non-significant [$F(5, 217) = .35$, $p = .88$].

Finally, to clarify the relationship between sexual minority status and activism, given that the bivariate correlation in Table 3 was significant ($p < .01$, $\beta = .24$; only significant correlation among the demographic variables), we conducted an ancillary analysis testing degree of feminist identification

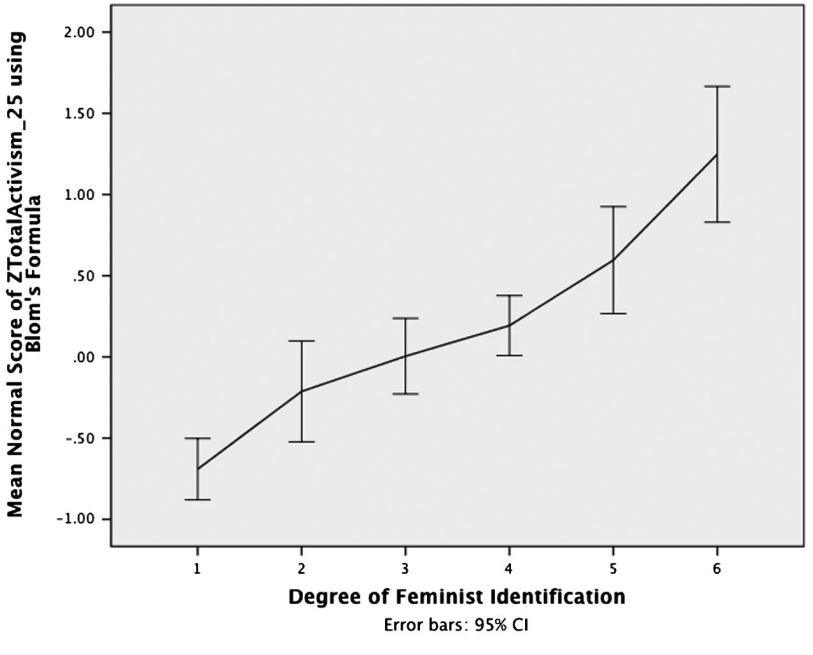

Figure 1. Comparison of Blom-transformed 25-item activism scores across levels of degree of feminist identification.

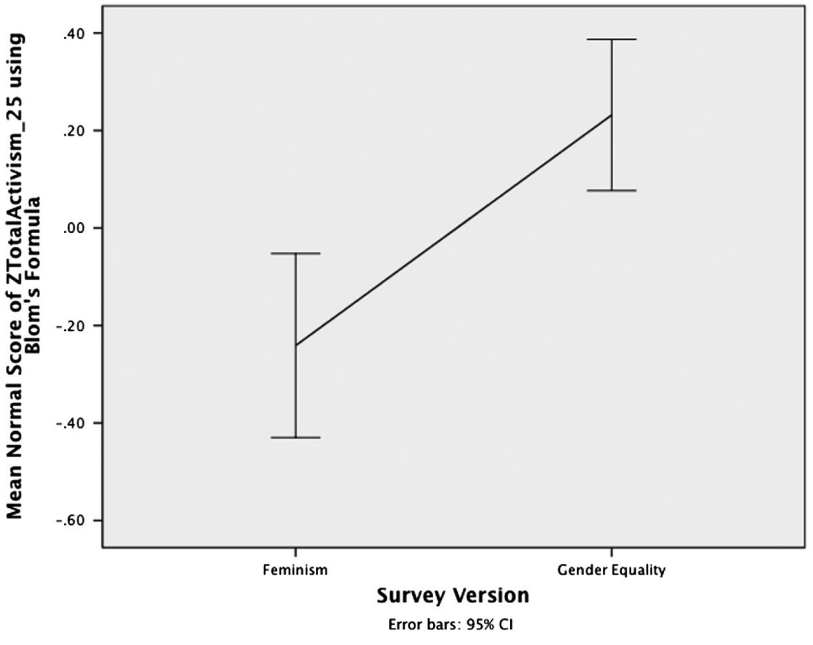

Figure 2. Main effect of survey version (feminism- or 'gender equality'- language) on Blom-transformed 25-item activism scores.

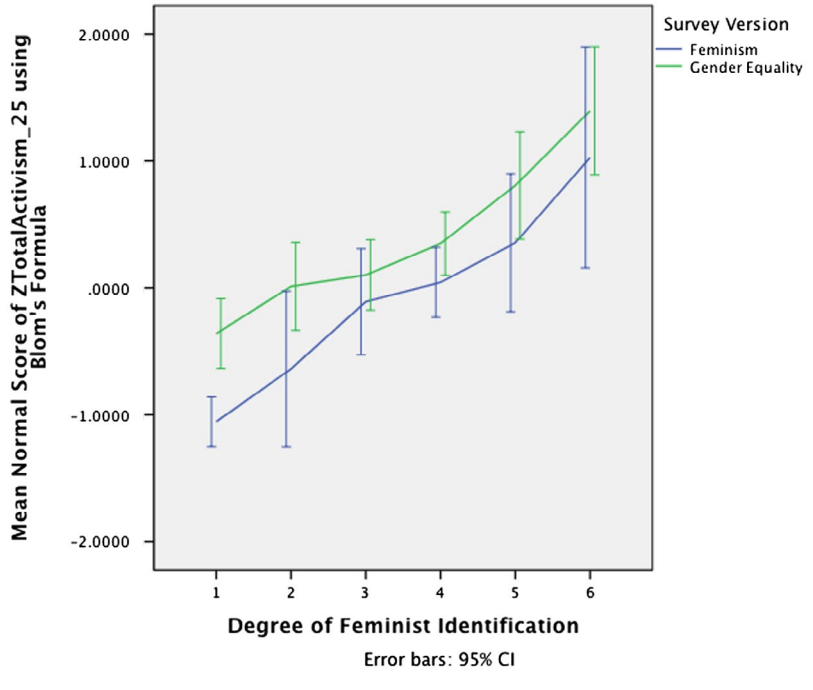

Figure 3. Comparison of Blom-transformed 25-item activism scores by survey version across degree of feminist identification.

as a mediator in the relationship between sexual minority status and reported activism. We conducted this analysis using Andrew Hayes' PROCESS macro, which allows for mediation analyses (Hayes, 2012). Results demonstrated substantial mediation. The total direct effect of minority status on activism was

$B = .36$, while the indirect effect through degree of feminist identification ($B = .35$) accounted for almost all of this.

Discussion

The present study considerably extends research into US men's participation in gender equality activism. We believe our findings support our framework of inclusive feminism, or the idea that men can be feminists (see Adichie, 2014; Leonard, 2014; Tarrant, 2009). Practically, these findings signal the potential for feminism to evolve – in turn expanding engagement and participation – towards a more diverse and inclusive movement. To illustrate, we found that when men adopted the label 'feminist', they were significantly more likely to report engagement in activism for the cause. However, we also demonstrated that survey *language* matters, with men reporting more activism on the survey version that used non-stigmatizing language. This version allowed men to endorse activist behaviours without endorsing the term 'feminist'.

This effect of language lends support to the notion that men consider the feminist label stigmatizing (Anderson, 2009; Breen & Karpinski, 2008; Kimmel, 1998; Wiley et al., 2013**)**, and highlights its wide-ranging effects. This finding suggests that the impact of stigma must be addressed not only when attempting to promote activism in men, but also when *assessing* men's activism. Based on our findings, successful interventions might increase education about the term 'feminism' and its meaning, or attempt to increase men's involvement by initially using less threatening synonyms, such as 'gender equality', and introducing the term 'feminist' later, after investment has increased.

The finding of a strong, positive association between feminist self-labelling and activism for gender equality not only replicates research conducted with women (Yoder et al., 2011), but also suggests that promoting self-identification in men may be especially effective for advancing gender equality in the US, given the as-yet-untested assumption that feminist self-identification *causes* increased activism. The findings of the present study fit well with the tenets of the social identity approach by demonstrating that increasing one's sense of in-group identification and commitment via self-labelling correlates highly with increased activism.

This finding sheds new light on whether or not men *should* label as feminist, or whether an ally or 'pro-feminist' role is better-suited to men. Since men's self-labelling strongly predicts their action for the cause, and theorists place emphasis on the need for action (Jardine, 1987), our results suggest that self-labelling as feminist is important. Taken together, we believe these results support broader, more inclusive definitions of the term 'feminist', supporting the argument of Adichie (2014) that 'we should all be feminists', along with others who have called for a similar shift towards inclusivity (Leonard, 2014; Tarrant, 2009). As mentioned, this shift fits well with the key tenets of modern feminist theory, which emphasizes diversity (Conlin, 2017; Enns, 2012).

The finding that the timing of reporting self-identification – before vs. after reporting of activism – was not related to the level of reported activism supports the argument that activism rates are not an artefact of priming. Additionally, we found that even when our scale used non-stigmatizing language, feminist self-identification at the highest degree was rare and reported activism for gender equality was consistently low. On our modified version of the Measure of Collective Action (Foster & Matheson, 1995), the mean level of reported activism out of 25 possible activities was 3.30 (see Table 3). In addition, only 20 out of 229 participants (8.7%) endorsed the highest level of feminist identification (level 6), which was the smallest number of participants in any label group. The highest number of participants (61 out of 229, or 26.6%) endorsed label level 1, which represented complete disavowal of feminism.

On the other hand, 44% of participants *agreed* with the label 'feminist' to some degree (scoring between 4 and 6 on the self-identification scale), whereas 56% *disagreed* (scoring between 1 and 3). This finding demonstrates that many men have the potential to become active in the gender equality movement, with nearly half of the sample already agreeing, to varying degrees, with the label. We believe that further increasing support for feminism and encouragement of self-labelling may be one necessary step in sparking increased activist participation.

The finding that a substantial portion of participants reported some degree of agreement with the feminist label demonstrates that men can be (and are) feminists supports the argument that the feminist movement has become more inclusive in recent years (Kimmel, 2005). Sociologist Michael Kimmel makes the argument for inclusivity, in 'Why Men Should Support Gender Equity' (Kimmel, 2005), partly through advocating a reconsideration of ideas about masculinity. As Kimmel states, 'We chafe against the edges of traditional masculinity, but seem unable or unwilling to break out of the constraints we feel […]. Thus, the defensiveness, the anger, the confusion that is evident everywhere' (Kimmel, 2005, p. 105). It follows that efforts aimed at challenging the link between feminist self-labelling and loss of manhood (in part by challenging *cultural definitions* of masculinity), along with challenging the belief that male hegemony is truly beneficial to men, could be especially effective in creating change. Returning to our framework of inclusive feminism, Duncanson (2015) has recently proposed that hegemonic masculinity is more susceptible to change than previously theorized. Moreover, even small increases in men's feminist identification could affect activism, because many of the assessed activist behaviours are relatively low-cost, 'everyday' actions, such as discussing gender equality issues with friends and monitoring the views of political representatives.

The ancillary finding that degree of feminist identification substantially mediated the positive association between sexual minority status and reported activism suggests that minority men likely report more gender equality activism as a result of higher levels of feminist self-identification. Because the effect of sexual minority status on reported activism became non-significant when the variance from feminist self-labelling was statistically controlled for, this finding adds support to the importance of feminist self-labelling as a pathway to activism in men.

Limitations and future directions

The present study suggests that future research geared towards promotion of feminist identification in men, with attention to the effect of stigma, may be important in increasing activism for gender equality. However, future research is also needed to establish the causal relationship between feminist self-identification and reported activism, since the present study is correlational. Experiments manipulating feminist identification and measuring subsequent gender equality activism would help clarify the relationship between the two variables. If feminist identification or activism cannot be experimentally manipulated, longitudinal research could provide insight into cause and effect, as could causal modelling analyses.

Future studies might also examine gender equality activism among non-labellers who nonetheless identified strongly with the value of gender equality. If such people exist in large numbers, feminist labelling may not be the only pathway to activism. However, if few people both reject the feminist label and strongly hold the value of gender equality, it would be more reasonable to focus influence efforts on de-stigmatizing the label.

Moreover, we recommend that future research examine how participants define terms such as feminism and gender equality, and explore what participants view as the goal(s) of feminism. Perceptions of feminism's aims likely differ so, for some, gender equality may not be equivalent to 'feminism', although this is the position we have taken here. Because we found an effect of language, we believe our results support the idea that men may find the term 'gender equality' less stigmatizing than 'feminism'. Future research should explore whether men consider gender equality to be one of feminism's key goals.

An additional limitation of this study is the lack of diversity of the sample: future research should assess whether these findings extend to samples that are more diverse with respect to variables such as geographic region, cultural background, race, ethnicity, SES, age, sexual minority status and gender identity. Future research should seek to confirm the generalizability of our sample by examining our hypotheses among different types of samples and using different recruitment strategies (social media recruitment, community samples and so on).

Conclusion

Taken together, the present study suggests that the feminist movement could benefit from an evolution, shifting towards inclusivity. Merging the frameworks of men and masculinities studies with feminist theory, our findings support the views of those who have advocated for a diverse and inclusive feminist movement (Adichie, 2014; Kimmel, 2005**)** and demonstrate the potential of men's participation for change. Feminist self-labelling matter for men, because it predicts activism, replicating previous research among women (Yoder et al., 2011). We demonstrated here that *language* matters when assessing men's activism, highlighting the need to address stigma towards feminism among men in order to fully realize their potential.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

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Appendix A. Full Modified Gender Equality Version of the Measure of Collective Action (Foster & Matheson, 1995)

(1) I have gone out of my way to collect information on gender equality issues.
(2) I don't let anyone treat me differently because of my gender.
(3) If others treat me differently on the basis of my gender, I assure them that it is not necessary.
(4) I make a conscious attempt to use gender-equal language.
(5) I keep an eye on the views of my political representatives regarding issues of gender equality.
(6) I have attended talks on gender equality issues.
(7) I will correct other's use of gender-biased language.
(8) I have discussed gender equality issues with family or friends, stressing the need to enhance gender equality in society.
(9) I have signed a petition advocating for gender equality on a social issue. (e.g. prochoice, pay equity, affirmative action)
(10) I have distributed information on gender equality issues around campus or work.
(11) I have lobbied my political representatives regarding gender equality issues.
(12) I have volunteered for groups aimed to promote gender equality.
(13) I have donated money to gender equality organizations or events aimed at gender equality issues.
(14) I have participated in discussion groups designed to discuss issues or solutions to problems that will promote gender equality.
(15) I have written letters to public media in instances where I believe it was necessary to speak about gender equality concerns.
(16) If, in a group of strangers (i.e. people who I haven't known for long or well), a comment against gender equality is made, I will make a point of arguing against it.
(17) I am a member of an organization that deals with gender equality issues.
(18) I have encouraged friends to collect information on gender equality issues.
(19) I have encouraged friends to take classes oriented towards gender equality issues.
(20) I have encouraged friends to join organizations that deal with gender equality issues.
(21) I have participated in protests regarding gender equality issues.
(22) I have organized events that deal with gender equality issues.
(23) I have organized support groups to promote gender equality (e.g. for women who are re-entering school, or the workforce, for single mothers, etc.)
(24) I have participated in fundraisers, consciousness-raising events, etc. that attempt to promote gender equality.
(25) I have given lectures or talks on gender equality issues.

Appendix B. Full Modified Feminism Version of the Measure of Collective Action (Foster & Matheson, 1995)

(1) I have gone out of my way to collect information on feminist issues.
(2) I don't let anyone treat me differently because of my gender, as I consider this to be an important feminist issue.
(3) In support of feminism, if others treat me differently on the basis of my gender, I assure them that it is not necessary.
(4) I make a conscious attempt to use feminist language relating to gender.
(5) I keep an eye on the views of my political representatives regarding feminist issues.
(6) I have attended talks on feminist issues.
(7) I will correct other's use of non-feminist language.
(8) I have discussed feminist issues with family or friends, stressing the need to enhance gender equality in society.
(9) I have signed a pro-feminist petition advocating on a social issue. (e.g. prochoice, pay equity, affirmative action)
(10) I have distributed information on feminist issues around campus or work.
(11) I have lobbied my political representatives regarding feminist issues.
(12) I have volunteered for groups aimed to promote feminism.
(13) I have donated money to feminist organizations or events aimed at feminist issues.
(14) I have participated in discussion groups designed to discuss issues or solutions to problems that will promote feminist concerns.
(15) I have written letters to public media in instances where I believe it was necessary to speak about feminist concerns.
(16) If, in a group of strangers (i.e. people who I haven't known for long or well), a non-feminist comment is made, I will make a point of arguing against it.
(17) I am a member of an organization that deals with feminist issues.
(18) I have encouraged friends to collect information on feminist issues.
(19) I have encouraged friends to take classes oriented towards feminist issues.
(20) I have encouraged friends to join organizations that deal with feminist issues.
(21) I have participated in protests regarding feminist issues.
(22) I have organized events that deal with feminist issues.
(23) I have organized support groups to promote feminist issues (e.g. for women who are re-entering school, or the workforce, for single mothers, etc.)
(24) I have participated in fundraisers, consciousness-raising events, etc. that attempt to promote feminist issues.
(25) I have given lectures or talks on feminist issues.

Appendix C. Degree of Feminist Identification Questionnaire

'I am a feminist'. Please rate how much you agree with this statement on a scale of 1 (*strongly disagree)* to 6 *(strongly agree*).
1 2 3 4 5 6