

Research on the Cognition of Generation Z University Students on Contemporary Feminist Ideologies in the Context of the Digital Society

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Abstract. This study, set against the backdrop of the digital society, focuses on the cognition of Generation Z university students regarding contemporary feminist ideologies. It aims to understand how these students comprehend, accept, and practice feminist concepts amidst the digital wave, and how these concepts influence their social perspectives and behavioral patterns. Through methods such as surveys, in-depth interviews, and online forum analysis, the research systematically collected cognitive data on Generation Z university students' understanding of feminist ideologies. The goal is to deepen the understanding of Generation Z's gender concepts and attitudes towards feminism, offering new perspectives and approaches for promoting gender equality and social justice, as well as providing valuable references and insights for future feminist education and research.

Keywords: digital society, feminism, patriarchy, gender equality

1. Introduction

Throughout history, feminism has undergone a long struggle and development. Beginning with the breakthroughs in productivity and social changes triggered by the technological revolution in the late 19th century, women gradually shed the singular label of "family" assigned by traditional values, stepping out from under the constraints of patriarchy and into society, becoming a visible and important force in the development of various sectors such as the economy, politics, and culture. The women's liberation movement and feminist ideologies emerged from this context.

In today's society, "feminism" has become a significant topic of attention and discussion across all sectors. Feminism, as a driving force for social change, has a profound impact not only on promoting gender equality, breaking gender stereotypes, and advancing social progress but also plays a pivotal role in leading the shift in social values and shaping a more just and inclusive social environment.

At the same time, as representatives of the knowledgeable youth in today's digital society, the cognition of Generation Z university students regarding feminist ideologies serves as a crucial reflection of society's overall perception of feminism. Their level of understanding of feminism not only determines their behavioral patterns and outcomes but also influences society's overall cognitive landscape. Given the significant social and academic value of understanding feminism from the perspective of university students, many scholars have conducted research and discussions on this topic.

Domestic scholars mainly explore the cognition of contemporary university students regarding feminist ideologies from the following three perspectives:

1. Focusing on gender equality and specifically on female university students, scholars seek to understand their cognitive deficiencies in feminism and explore solutions. For example, Wang Huilin (2018) argues that China currently lacks a social environment that fully reflects gender equality, which is primarily due to inadequate gender education, the influence of gender stereotypes within the family, and the unconscious self-deprecation observed in some female university students [1]. Wu Zhiyu (2017), on the other hand, points out that gender equality-related educational courses can have a significant positive impact on female university students at various stages of feminist identity development, while also enhancing their understanding and recognition of gender equality education and feminism (and feminists) [2].

2. In the context of the digital age, scholars analyze the impact of the rise of new media and the accelerated flow of information within the social environment on university students' cognition of feminism. For instance, Zhang Hanyan (2021) found that improving university students' social media literacy helps deepen their understanding and participation in the feminist movement.

Hence, society should pay more attention to promoting media literacy education, enhancing students' awareness and competence in media literacy, and increasing their enthusiasm for engaging in public issues [3]. Feng Jianxia (2023) suggests that in the current era, social media and other digital platforms have become crucial carriers for advancing gender awareness, promoting female solidarity, and advocating for social change. These platforms have reshaped the connections between individuals, collectives, and spaces, creating a new landscape for the politics of feminist transformation in contemporary China, with emotional factors playing a pivotal role [4].

3. Exploring the overall impact of the development of feminist ideologies on the formation of university students' values, gender identity, and perceptions of gender relations. Shi Chao (2017) notes that feminist ideologies have played a positive role in awakening the self-awareness of femininity among modern female university students. Women should establish a consciousness of safeguarding their rights and strive for women's rights, rather than being confined to feminism, thereby shaping the image of a new woman in society [5]. Li Ke (2023) focuses on the relationship between university students' identification with feminism and their own well-being. The study shows that under the mediating effect of feminist identity, the relationship between feminist attitudes and psychological well-being exhibits a "masking effect." Additionally, the sense of control significantly moderates the relationship between feminist attitudes and psychological well-being, as well as between feminist identity and psychological well-being [6].

In summary, domestic research on the cognition of feminist ideologies among Generation Z university students has covered various dimensions, ranging from topics of gender equality to the background of the digital age, and the comprehensive impact of feminist ideologies. Although some research achievements have been made, there are still gaps to be filled, such as the specific study and analysis of Generation Z university students' understanding of feminism and the cognitive biases that exist within this group.

Therefore, while analyzing the evolutionary trajectory of feminism and its impact in contemporary society, this paper focuses on Generation Z university students. It seeks to deeply understand their cognition and attitudes towards contemporary feminist ideologies, having grown up in a digitalized society. By revealing the current level of understanding and attitudes of young people towards issues such as female liberation, equality, rights, and social status, this study aims to explore the patterns of dissemination and influence of contemporary feminism within the youth demographic. Ultimately, it aspires to provide valuable references and suggestions for promoting the spread and advocacy of contemporary feminism in the digital society.

2. Research Rationale

2.1. Expanding the Understanding of Generation Z University Students' Cognition of Feminism

With the rapid development of the digital society, Generation Z university students, as a new generation of youth, have grown up in an environment where their values and worldview have significantly diverged from those of previous generations. They are exposed to a more diverse range of information channels and possess more open and inclusive ways of thinking. Previous research on feminism has primarily been rooted in the perspectives of earlier generations, particularly those born in the 1970s and 1980s, leaving a gap in understanding how newer generations view these issues. This study focuses on Generation Z university students, examining their level of cognition and acceptance of feminist ideologies from their perspective. It aims to fill the research gap concerning feminism within the "Generation Z university student" category and to provide new materials on feminist perspectives from the viewpoint of Generation Z students. This has significant theoretical and practical implications.

2.2. Supplementing New Data on Feminist Cognitive Biases within the University Student Population

Within the same demographic group, members can be further categorized according to different criteria, and individuals in different categories may hold varied opinions and views on the same issue. This study involves distributing questionnaires and conducting targeted interviews with Generation Z university students to deeply investigate the cognitive biases related to feminism within this group (such as cognitive differences across different genders and age groups). This research seeks to contribute new knowledge and empirical evidence to the field. The current incomplete understanding of the concept of feminism and the subjective avoidance of it by some individuals are key factors underlying these cognitive biases. Such biases are also one of the major reasons why feminism has not been more widely accepted and embraced. Therefore, this study plans to conduct a thorough investigation into the attitudes and cognition of university students towards feminist ideologies, with the goal of collecting and organizing the specific causes of these cognitive biases. Furthermore, we will analyze these causes in depth, exploring the social, cultural, and psychological contexts behind them, and actively seek effective solutions. The aim is to provide new data on feminist cognitive biases within the Generation Z university student population, offering valuable insights to promote the popularization and development of feminist thought.

2.3. Providing New Perspectives and Methods for Feminism Research

This study employs various research methods, including questionnaires, case interviews, and field research, to comprehensively and deeply explore Generation Z university students' cognition and attitudes towards feminism. It also thoroughly analyzes the underlying reasons for the avoidance of feminism in contemporary society. By adopting a unique perspective, this research offers new approaches and methodologies for the study of feminism. Additionally, this study utilizes sociological research methods to meticulously analyze the extent to which feminist ideologies have spread among university students, injecting new perspectives into feminism research with the aim of contributing positively to the advancement of social equality and rights.

3. Survey on the Cognition of Feminist Ideologies

3.1. Interview Survey Analysis

The qualitative experiential data for this study were primarily collected through formal interviews. The interview survey was divided by gender, with all information providers being first-year Generation Z undergraduate students who graduated from high schools in Hunan. The interview outline consisted of two main parts:

- (1) The level of cognition regarding gender discrimination and stereotypes.
- (2) Views, attitudes, and future prospects regarding feminism.

The interviews were conducted in written form, and during both the design of the questions and the interview process, efforts were made to create a relaxed and natural environment for participants to describe and comment on the issues mentioned above. This interview survey analysis focuses on a gender-comparative perspective, separating and refining the results based on gender differences.

Firstly, in terms of the word count of the interviews, the combined word count for the male respondents' answers was 1,378 words, while that for the female respondents was 4,016 words. This directly reflects that women have a higher level of attention and more to say regarding issues related to feminism.

Looking at the content of the interviews, the responses from both genders regarding the aspects encompassed by women's rights in daily life were as follows:

A: *The core of women's rights lies in gender equality and fairness across all sectors of society, meaning that women should enjoy the same rights and opportunities as men in social, economic, political, and cultural spheres. This includes equal treatment in wages, benefits, and promotion opportunities, the right to make decisions about their own bodies, including reproductive rights and abortion rights. It also encompasses the right to equal educational opportunities and the right to refuse gender-based violence and gender stereotypes.*

D: *Employment, language, etiquette, dress...*

From the above responses, it can be seen that the female interviewees' answers covered various key areas, including social, economic, political, cultural, employment, reproductive, safety, and lifestyle issues, presenting a relatively comprehensive view. In contrast, the male respondents provided fewer and more superficial answers, even including "etiquette" as part of "rights."

When extending from the content of women's rights to the "most overlooked and concerned issues of women's rights," the female respondents stated:

A: *From the perspective of whether there are substantial actions taken, I see two aspects as being the "most overlooked." The first is gender discrimination and unequal treatment women face in the workplace. While this issue hasn't been completely "ignored," it has been "downplayed." Currently, there is some awareness and empathy in society regarding workplace inequality for women, but very few actions or measures are taken to reject or change workplace gender discrimination. It's like society is aware of the harm but doesn't effectively address it. The second aspect is the rejection of gender stereotypes, which is truly being ignored. Gender stereotypes aren't just as simple and crude as "boys like blue, girls like pink." They manifest in all aspects of social culture. For example, the recent controversy over addressing accomplished women as "Mr.," e-commerce platforms targeting women with "Goddess Day" promotions, and the use of "he" or "man" in English to refer to non-specific genders. These are examples of the deep-seated discrimination and exploitation of women that have been embedded in human social culture for thousands of years.*

Of course, the area where I think the most progress has been made is in educational equality. Although many girls in remote areas still can't receive an ideal education due to family beliefs and other obstacles, the widespread implementation of compulsory education and the emergence of schools like Huaping Girls' High School prove that more and more people are recognizing the importance of women's education and are taking action to ensure equal educational opportunities for women. This includes providing better educational resources and improving school enrollment rates for girls, among other efforts.

On this issue, the male respondent's answer was:

D: *As for the most overlooked aspect, I personally feel that the ones mentioned above (referring to "employment, language, etiquette, dress") are quite popular topics. The most overlooked one might be something I haven't noticed either. Regarding the best progress, I lean towards dress. Nowadays, young people seem pretty open about it and don't let old-fashioned customs dictate how they dress.*

When it comes to more in-depth questions, there was a significant difference in responses between the genders. For instance, when mentioning “implicit discrimination” and the “Matilda effect,” the female interviewee had much more to say:

A: *Regarding implicit discrimination, one of the most significant things I personally felt was during middle school, where many teachers or parents would claim, “Boys are just more quick-witted and better suited for science,” or “Boys may not perform as well as girls in junior high, but once they mature, their grades will improve.” Such remarks, intentional or not, are a huge denial of the hard work of female students. From scientific research, there is no significant intellectual difference between genders in learning science. Besides this, there is also the default assumption that women should take on more household chores. In the marriage market, a man who can cook or do housework is seen as having extra points, while a woman who can’t do these things is considered unqualified. This is clearly an unfair phenomenon. Additionally, many proverbs position women as mere “pretty faces,” such as “A talented man and a beautiful woman” (郎才女貌), “A gifted scholar and a beautiful lady” (才子佳人), or the long-misinterpreted “A woman’s virtue lies in her lack of talent” (女子无才便是德). These subtle linguistic biases create immense pressure on women.*

Of course, regarding the “Matilda effect,” what left a deep impression on me was a viral post I saw on March 7th titled “They, Hidden in History” (《她们, 隐于历史间》). It talked about women like Rosalind Franklin, who photographed the DNA double helix structure, and Chien-Shiung Wu, the “Queen of Nuclear Physics,” who have made significant contributions to the scientific knowledge we have today, yet are absent from our textbooks. In fact, even today, many of the achievements of women are still overlooked, which is why we must actively uncover the contributions behind every scientific or cultural achievement. I’m also very glad to see that this post went viral. As more posts like this appear, I believe the public will gain a deeper understanding of the unfair treatment women have endured, as well as their own talents and courage.

The male interviewee fell silent:

D: *I don’t know...*

Regarding the topic of “benevolent discrimination,” the female and male interviewees responded differently:

A: *First of all, I think that even when actions stem from good intentions and care in everyday interactions, we cannot ignore their subtle negative impact on women. For example, during school, many girls experienced teachers only asking boys to move books or equipment. While this may have been out of concern for the girls, it actually deepened gender stereotypes. Girls who volunteered to help might even be labeled as “tomboys” or “mannish.” In reality, the books that needed to be moved weren’t so heavy that girls couldn’t handle them. Even if they were heavy, more girls could have been asked to help together. I believe that excluding girls from such physical tasks is unfair to both genders.*

Secondly, although certain individual actions may be considered benevolent discrimination, the more critical issue lies in structural discrimination and systemic problems. Addressing structural discrimination requires broader measures and policies to drive change. The unequal treatment of women at the social, institutional, and cultural levels cannot be resolved without such change, and this will only foster the growth of superficial benevolent discrimination.

D: *In my opinion, the person performing the action is most likely unaware that the action is discriminatory. So, since the person’s intentions are good, we shouldn’t criticize them morally but should acknowledge their good intentions. However, the behavior itself should be severely criticized—but it’s important not to resort to personal attacks. Harmonious communication can be used to make the person aware of the discriminatory nature of the behavior, ensuring that their good intentions aren’t in vain.*

From the above responses, it is evident that the male interviewee focused on the “benevolent” aspect of the concept and the protection of the person performing the action, while the female interviewee concentrated on the “discriminatory” aspect of benevolent discrimination. She considered the inherent unfairness of discrimination itself, delved into deeper structural and systemic issues, and proposed the possibility of reform.

3.1.1. Personal Experiences with Gender Issues

The social nature of gender issues inevitably leads to varying degrees of gender confusion, challenges, and dilemmas for both sexes. This section focuses on the interviewees’ personal perceptions in their daily lives, which in turn bring gender issues to light.

When asked if they had ever experienced gender-related troubles in their lives, both male and female interviewees responded affirmatively:

A: *Of course. For me, the most recent gender-related issue occurred during the Qingming holiday when I took an overnight train back to school after a trip. I had a sleeper ticket, and the other three passengers in my compartment were middle-aged men. Although it turned out that they had no ill intentions, the moment I entered the compartment, I was overwhelmed by intense fear. Their appearance, the way they moved, and even the smell of sweat in the compartment made my skin crawl. That night, I almost always faced the wall, and I woke up two hours early, packed my things, and sat in a seat outside the compartment to catch up on sleep. This incident made me acutely aware that no matter how much I know the chances of danger are small, I cannot avoid feeling afraid when I’m alone with men. This aligns with what has often been mentioned in the aftermath of many violent incidents against women—a “structural fear.”*

D: *Yes, yes, yes. Just the other day, my mom said that when we go out to eat, the boy should pay the bill and such (though she understands when I don’t do it).*

It can be observed that the most recent gender issue faced by the female interviewee was an inexplicable “structural fear” of three middle-aged men in an enclosed space. On the other hand, the male interviewee faced a situation of benevolent discrimination, which he had not fully recognized as unfavorable in his previous responses. A comparison reveals that when dealing with gender issues, one is in the position of the subject facing the dilemma, while the other is in the position of the object, reflecting Beauvoir’s concept of the male as the “first sex” and the female as the “second sex.”

3.1.2. Views and Attitudes Towards Feminism

The views and attitudes of both genders towards feminism also shape their behaviors, making this an important focus of the interview.

When asked about their understanding of “the feminist movement,” the male interviewee responded directly:

D: *I haven’t really looked into it...*

In contrast, the female interviewee had much more to say:

A: *This is an inevitable trend driven by economic development, as well as the result of the collective efforts of feminists throughout history. Regarding the current feminist movement, the capitalist patriarchal trap has become more concealed and harder to dismantle. The mainstream entertainment culture today is saturated with misogyny and the male gaze (a social and cultural phenomenon where, within traditional Chinese power and division of labor models, women are placed in an absolutely subordinate position, while men possess fame, wealth, and power, gazing at women from a top-down perspective. This gaze and the relationship of being gazed upon are normalized by social norms and reinforced through detailed and pervasive “verbal teachings,” which limit the range of vision and perspective available to women while encouraging dominant male behavior. On this basis, if a woman exhibits any “deviation in behavior,” she is “naturally” subjected to this gaze, creating a profound external and internal pressure [7]). This tendency not only permeates popular culture but also subtly influences societal thinking. Women, in the course of historical progress, have started to reflect on themselves and observe society, but at the same time, this reflection has been keenly exploited by capitalists, turning it into a tool for inciting division and profiting. From what I’ve observed, many women are overwhelmed by the need to cope with and discern the hidden oppression masked by a glamorous façade. Or they feel their living space has been squeezed under the pretense of so-called great thought, leading them to embrace a “free” feminism that says, “The freedom I choose is freedom, and as long as I’m happy, that’s enough.” This phenomenon is clearly sad, but also a wake-up call. Under the pressure of economic strain and cultural encirclement, the development of the feminist movement is progressing in an unstoppable but uncertain direction. What we need to understand is that revolutions often require the destruction of the old to make way for the new. The difficulties we face today are inevitable obstacles on the road to progress, and we are confident that the future of the revolution is bright.*

When discussing the concept of gender equality, the male interviewee stated:

D: *I believe that gender equality should mean that, in areas where conditions allow, opportunities should be distributed without regard to gender. In other words, no one should have more or fewer opportunities just because they are male or female.*

Regarding the issue of attention to or neglect of women’s rights in daily life, the male interviewee added:

D: *Honestly, I don’t pay much attention to this aspect, but if I come across something, I’ll take a look. To be honest, as a guy, there’s not much I can do to help.*

When it came to the stigmatization of feminism (such as feminism being labeled as “punching”) and the challenges feminism faces, the interviewees exhibited divergent views:

A: *Feminism is sometimes described as “punching,” which often stems from the deeply rooted “male punch” mentality in society. The core of feminism is to pursue gender equality and eliminate gender discrimination. This doesn’t mean excluding men or seeking special privileges for women. On the contrary, feminism advocates for an inclusive and equal society where both men and women can enjoy the same rights and opportunities. However, to achieve this goal, feminists often need to be more sensitive to subtle forms of discrimination and have the courage to call them out. To some, this might seem like a distortion of a supposedly “gender-neutral” social issue, but in reality, gender narratives are often a crucial angle when discussing social issues. In a patriarchal society, people are accustomed to male-centered narratives and often overlook the importance of emphasizing gender narratives.*

The difficulties and challenges faced by feminism include ingrained cultural and societal biases. Although feminism aims to promote social progress and equality, it often encounters resistance from conservative views, traditional beliefs, and the inertia of the status quo. Deep-rooted gender stereotypes and discriminatory attitudes in many cultures not only affect women’s lives and development but also hinder the advancement of the feminist movement. With the widespread use of the internet, feminists often become targets of online violence and hate speech. This kind of violence not only harms women’s dignity and safety but also weakens the voice and influence of the feminist movement.

Of course, a bigger challenge comes from obstacles in political and economic power. In these fields, women still face less representation and fewer opportunities, limiting their influence and voice in decision-making. As feminism evolves, the movement has also diversified into different branches and perspectives. This diversity sometimes leads to internal division and controversy, making it harder to advance common goals.

D: *First of all, let me say this: online arguments are often incredibly stupid.*

For those feminists whose pursuit of women's rights goes beyond equality, or those who exhibit low standards of conduct in their struggle, I believe that when they are labeled as "punching," they probably deserve it.

However, if a legitimate pursuit of rights is criticized, then the problem lies with the person making the comment.

In some cases, people are fighting for legitimate rights, but due to perhaps inappropriate language or the listener being overly emotional, misunderstandings arise. I can understand the passionate reactions of women resisting inequality, but this spirit shouldn't be directed at those around them. Although there are men present, as long as they haven't made discriminatory comments or actions, they aren't the source of this oppression and can even be considered allies.

From this, it can be observed that women attribute the stigmatization of feminism to men's inherent acceptance of a male-centric narrative and the denial of female gender narratives. The sensitive insight and courage required to practice feminism are easily distorted under patriarchal narratives. Meanwhile, the pursuit of gender equality still faces resistance from conservative cultural and societal forces, a lack of political and economic influence in decision-making, and internal disunity. On the other hand, men believe that these challenges may be due to issues within the feminist movement itself or overly aggressive expressions. If men do not express or engage in discriminatory behavior, they can be considered potential allies for women.

3.1.3. Future Outlook on Women's Rights

When discussing the future of women's rights, both genders mentioned certain measures to enhance their recognition:

D: *On one hand, legal protection is crucial; on the other hand, changing people's mindset through long-term education is necessary. It's challenging to achieve this quickly, especially since the older generation isn't as open-minded in this regard, and changing their thinking is particularly difficult. I support people discussing these topics online because truth becomes clearer through debate.*

A: *First, I believe we must prioritize education and awareness, including the feminist content and female-perspective films I mentioned earlier, such as the recent widely-discussed *The Fall Trial* (《堕落的审判》). These works of art, which focus on women's self-growth and social experiences from a female perspective, can truly guide societal consciousness and cultural change, eliminating stereotypes and discriminatory attitudes toward women and moving the balance toward a more equitable environment for women.*

Additionally, it is necessary to establish and implement relevant laws and policies to protect women's rights, such as laws against domestic violence, human trafficking, and provisions in labor and marriage laws that focus on women's rights. Many women still suffer from physical and even psychological violence, and the persistence of outdated beliefs makes it difficult for them to escape these situations. Effective policy interventions can provide physical assistance, because without removing physical shackles, there can be no talk of spiritual upliftment.

Of course, I think the most important point is to encourage and support women's participation in decision-making across various fields. Just like the policies in some Western countries, where a certain percentage of women must be represented in administrative departments and corporate management, only by ensuring that women have equal leadership roles and equal voices at the leadership level can feminism be more than just an idealistic pursuit by women. It can truly become a reality at the societal level.

The male interviewee focused on legal protections and changing societal attitudes, while the female interviewee emphasized education, awareness, legal policies, participation in decision-making, and gaining a voice in leadership. This difference highlights the female interviewee's emphasis on the importance of women's involvement in various domains.

Despite the challenges faced by feminism, both genders still shared their outlook on its future:

A: *In fact, I've already mentioned much of what I wanted to say earlier. Regarding the future development of feminism, in the short term, given the current economic downturn and the increasingly sharp and conservative social and cultural trends, I can only encourage fellow feminists to continue to embrace courage and ideals while loving and protecting themselves as they advocate for their beliefs. In recent years, the emerging "6b4t" movement, although I don't fully support all of its ideas, has aspects like "detaching from idols" and "detaching from otaku culture" that are worth considering. Of course, this is undoubtedly difficult; I also find it hard to completely detach from them. But when you shift your focus more toward real life, you'll feel a more fulfilling and peaceful self. In the longer, more distant future, I hope to see more women on higher stages, and this will eventually become a reality, etched in history.*

D: *I wish you all the best; the world will be better because of your endeavors.*

Based on the above interviews, we gain a glimpse into the awareness of feminist thought among both genders. The lack of understanding and relatively low interest and participation from men also calls for more women to start from within themselves, to activate their agency, and to enhance their sensitivity and awareness of gender equality.

3.2. Research Results and Analysis

3.2.1. Survey Overview

This study employed a stratified sampling method, distributing questionnaires to students enrolled in humanities, social sciences, natural sciences, engineering, agriculture, and medical sciences at various universities. A total of 249 questionnaires were distributed, with 231 valid responses collected. The Cronbach's α coefficient for the questionnaire reached as high as 0.982, demonstrating the high reliability of the survey.

The basic demographic information of the respondents is shown in Table 1, Table 1 (Appendix).

Table 1. Basic Demographic Information of Respondents

Category	Option	Number	Percentage	Category	Option	Number	Percentage
Education Level	Employed	2	0.8%	Gender	Female	143	61.9%
	Unemployed and Not Studying	2	0.8%		Male	88	38.1%
	Doctoral	1	0.4%	Gender	Yes	106	45.89%
	Graduate	9	3.61%		No	125	54.11%
	College/Undergraduate	231	92.77%				
	High School	4	1.61%				
Major Type	Humanities	48	20.78%	Household Registration Type	Agricultural Household Registration	88	38.1%
	Social Sciences	79	34.2%		Agricultural Household Registration Transferred to Residential Household Registration	9	3.9%
	Natural Sciences	19	8.23%		Agricultural Household Registration Transferred to Non-Agricultural Household Registration	6	2.6%
	Engineering	63	27.27%		Non-Agricultural Household Registration	128	55.41%
	Medicine	20	8.66%				
	Agriculture	2	0.87%				

Table 1. (Appendix) Basic Information of Survey Participants

Item	Option	Number	Percentage	Option	Number	Percentage
Apps you frequently browse during leisure time	Tiktok (including Lite version)	113	48.92%	Zhihu	58	25.11%
	Kuaishou (including Lite version)	20	8.66%	Douban	14	6.06%

Table 1. (Appendix) Continued

(multiple choices)	Little Red Book	134	58.01%	Tieba	25	10.82%
	Bilibili	175	75.76%	Tencent and other video platforms	42	9.09%
	MicroBlog	86	37.23%	QQ, WeChat	11	4.76%

3.2.2. Survey Results on Gen Z College Students' Understanding of Contemporary Feminist Ideologies in the Context of the Digital Society

In the survey, the researcher focused on the following aspects of Gen Z college students' understanding of feminist ideologies: their level of knowledge, sources of information, personal interpretations, experiences with various types of social stereotypes, the difficulties and challenges women face, gender discrimination, gender participation, and thoughts on specific measures.

3.2.2.1. Understanding of Feminist Ideologies: Level of Knowledge, Sources, and Personal Interpretations

The extent to which different genders understand feminist ideologies, the sources through which they obtain this understanding, and their personal interpretations reflect their definitions and perceptions of feminism. This, in turn, has a significant impact on subsequent responses from the researcher and on practical societal decisions. The survey results on the level of understanding, sources, and personal interpretations of feminist ideologies are presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Understanding of Feminist Ideologies: Level of Knowledge, Sources, and Personal Interpretations

Item	Option	Number of People	Percentage
Question 1: Are you familiar with feminist ideologies?	Yes	140	60.61%
	No	91	39.39%
	Social Media	129	92.14%
Question 2: Through which channels do you learn about feminist ideologies? (Multiple Choices)	Books	73	52.14%
	Friends and/or Family	61	43.57%
	School Education	39	27.86%
	Others	2	1.43%
Question 3: Feminism/feminist theory refers to "social theories and political movements created and initiated to promote gender equality." Do you agree with this definition?	Agree	219	94.81%
	Disagree	12	5.19%

The statistical results from Table 2 indicate that over 60% (60.61%) of the respondents are familiar with the concept of feminism. Analysis reveals that among the 140 individuals who are aware of feminist ideologies, the channels of understanding are diverse, with social media being the most prevalent (92.14%), followed by books (52.14%). Although nearly 40% (39.39%) of the respondents have limited understanding of feminism, almost all respondents (94.81%) agree with the mainstream definition of feminism.

It is noteworthy that among the 12 respondents who disagreed with the definition of feminism, the keywords and responses in the open-ended section designed for them included terms such as "extreme," "a social thought aiming for equality between different genders and in social, economic, and academic status," "women seeking personal interests," "women gaining more rights due to their disadvantaged position," "should and cannot be related to politics," "unknown," "unclear," "equivalent to male chauvinism," "a concept equivalent to male chauvinism," "an ideology emphasizing women's power on the basis of gender equality, I oppose extreme feminism under the guise of feminism!," and "not class equality, but gender equality." Analysis of these responses reveals the following issues among some respondents: 1. Doubts about the equality pursued by feminism; 2. Disagreement with the definition of feminism; 3. Confusion between feminism and male chauvinism; 4. Consideration of whether feminism (movement) involves class issues; 5. Reservations about the scope of feminism (movement).

3.2.2.2. Awareness of Different Types of Gender Stereotypes in Society

Stereotypes primarily refer to generalized and fixed views formed about a particular thing or object, and these views are extended to the entire thing or group, often ignoring individual differences. From being traditionally considered as “mental pictures” of specific groups (Lippmann, 1922) to being defined as general beliefs about the characteristics, attributes, and behaviors of individuals belonging to a particular social category (Eagly & Koenig, 2021), research on stereotypes has expanded from race (Garg et al., 2018) to gender (Ellemers, 2018), sexual orientation (Hancock et al., 2020), and other areas, making it one of the frequently discussed topics in gender studies [8].

This study organizes commonly recognized and different types of gender stereotypes in society (including aesthetics, family, academics, career, and daily life), and designs a matrix scale with values ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree) (with reverse scoring for “couples should share household chores”). The survey results are presented in Table 3.

Table 3. Awareness of Different Types of Gender Stereotypes in Society

Item	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree	Average Score
Women prefer pink, men prefer blue	76(32.9%)	67(29%)	53(22.94%)	35(15.15%)	0(0%)	2.2
Compared to men, women should be gentle and have a ladylike demeanor	91(39.39%)	70(30.3%)	35(15.15%)	32(13.85%)	3(1.3%)	2.07
Compared to women, men should not cry easily	83(35.93%)	74(32.03%)	26(11.26%)	40(17.32%)	8(3.46%)	2.2
Compared to men, female drivers are not good at driving	117(50.65%)	53(22.94%)	38(16.45%)	19(8.23%)	4(1.73%)	1.87
Women are better at the humanities; men are better at the sciences	73(31.6%)	76(32.9%)	31(13.42%)	50(21.65%)	1(0.43%)	2.26
Men prioritize careers, women prioritize family	134(58.01%)	56(24.24%)	29(12.55%)	12(5.19%)	0(0%)	1.65
Men are naturally more capable than women	149(64.5%)	51(22.08%)	23(9.96%)	7(3.03%)	1(0.43%)	1.53
Doing well is not as important as marrying well	151(65.37%)	35(15.15%)	25(10.82%)	15(6.49%)	5(2.16%)	1.65
In economic downturns, female employees should be the first to be laid off	161(69.7 %)	37(16.02%)	27(11.69%)	5(2.16%)	1(0.43%)	1.48
Couples should equally share household chores	16(6.93%)	24(10.39%)	30(12.99%)	88(38.1%)	73(31.6%)	3.77
The ideal aesthetic for women is “white, young, and slim”	149(64.5%)	49(21.21%)	26(11.26%)	6(2.6%)	1(0.43%)	1.53
Talking about menstruation is a shameful thing	154(66.67%)	40(17.32%)	29(12.55%)	6(2.6%)	2(0.87%)	1.54
Subtotal	1354(48.85%)	632(22.8%)	372(13.42%)	315(11.36%)	99(3.57%)	1.98

Based on the information above, a total of 2,772 responses were collected. The sum of “Strongly Disagree” and “Disagree” for all stereotypes is 2,107 respondents, accounting for 76.01%. This indicates that, although a certain proportion of people (13.42%) are indifferent to or dismissive of stereotypes related to aesthetics, family, career, and life, the majority (76.01%) of respondents hold a negative attitude towards stereotypes overall.

Among those who accept stereotypes (including “Strongly Agree” and “Agree”), the most prevalent areas and themes of stereotypes are: the academic domain, “Women are better at the humanities, men are better at the sciences” (22.08%); daily life, “Compared to women, men should not cry easily” (20.78%); and “Couples should equally share household chores” (17.32%). The least prevalent stereotypes are in the employment domain, “In an economic downturn, female employees should be the first to be laid off” (2.59%); the aesthetic domain, “The ideal aesthetic for women is ‘white, young, and slim’” (3.03%); and the physiological determinism domain, “Men are naturally more capable than women” (3.46%).

3.2.2.3. Awareness of Challenges Faced by Women in the Workplace

Occupation refers to the work an individual engages in to serve society and as a primary source of livelihood, and it is a crucial means for women to achieve economic independence. As the world's largest developing country, data from the 7th National Census show that from 2011 to 2020, the labor force participation rate for women in China has remained close to 60%. However, despite the increasing role of women in economic activities, [9] employment gender discrimination remains a persistent issue in labor markets globally. As the "second sex" in terms of social gender, women continue to face workplace challenges. Additionally, women's physiological makeup often means they may juggle roles as employees and mothers, impacting their promotions and job retention. This study enumerates the major challenges women face in the workplace, as shown in Table 4.

Table 4. Perceptions of Challenges Faced by Women in the Workplace
What do you think is the biggest challenge women face in the workplace?

Options	Subtotal	Percentage
Gender discrimination and sexualized performance	141	61.04%
Balancing family and career	49	21.21%
Unfair salary treatment	13	5.63%
Lack of promotion opportunities	17	7.36%
Other (please specify)	11	4.76%

The survey data results show that nearly all (97.40%) respondents recognize that women face unique challenges in the workplace. Over 60% (61.04%) of respondents believe that gender discrimination and sexualized performance are major issues for women in the workplace. Balancing family and career is the next most noted issue (22.51%) (with responses such as "maternity leave issues," "leaving the workplace due to childbirth," and "pregnancy and menstrual periods" included). Among the 11 responses to "Other, please specify," four individuals answered "don't know," "not sure," "none," or "how would I know," and others mentioned "too emotional" or "lack of competitiveness." This reflects a small portion of respondents' attitudes: 1. Lack of attention to the issues faced by women; 2. Unwillingness to address or selective ignorance of the challenges faced by women; 3. Acknowledgment of challenges faced by women but attributing them to the women themselves, etc. The results are understandable in the context of reality.

3.2.2.4. Perceptions of Social Gender Issues

Gender inequality does not only oppress women; it affects both genders within society. Both genders face certain dilemmas under the structural challenges of gender inequality.

Discrimination, a term in social psychology, refers to the unequal treatment of individuals based on perceived deficiencies, flaws, abilities, or backgrounds, leading to varying degrees of harm, often with a negative connotation, and is a distortion of personality caused by external factors. This section presents various topics on discrimination, sexual harassment, gender perception confusion, and stereotypes as matrix scale questions, with the results shown in Table 5.

Table 5. Perceptions of Social Gender Issues

Item	Always	Often	Sometimes	Rarely	Never	Not Applicable (No Related Experience)	Average Score
Discrimination in Political Participation	15 (6.49%)	18(7.79%)	46(19.91%)	23 (9.96%)	20 (8.66%)	109 (47.19%)	4.48
Gender Discrimination in Employment	18 (7.79%)	37(16.02%)	46 (19.91%)	18 (7.79%)	12 (5.19%)	100 (43.29%)	4.16
Gender Discrimination in Employment	13(5.63%)	22(9.52%)	48(20.78%)	25(10.82%)	18(7.79%)	105(45.45%)	4.42
Appearance and Body Discrimination	37(16.02%)	43(18.61%)	66(28.57%)	45(19.48%)	15(6.49%)	25(10.82%)	3.14
Sexual Harassment (Physical or Verbal)	12(5.19%)	23(9.96%)	66(28.57%)	48(20.78%)	37(16.02%)	45(19.48%)	3.91
Gender Identity Confusion (Feeling uncomfortable with one's gender and strongly identifying with the other gender)	4(1.73%)	6(2.6%)	37(16.02%)	58(25.11%)	80(34.63%)	46(19.91%)	4.48

Table 5. Continued

Gender Identity Confusion (Feeling uncomfortable with one's gender and strongly identifying with the other gender)	29(12.55%)	46(19.91%)	68(29.44%)	52(22.51%)	18(7.79%)	18(7.79%)	3.16
Subtotal	128(7.92%)	195(12.06%)	377(23.31%)	269(16.64%)	200 (12.37%)	448(27.71%)	3.97

The analysis of the above table reveals that a significant portion of the respondents (47.19%, 43.29%, 45.45%) chose “Not Applicable” for discrimination in political participation, employment, and salary, as they are all university students and may not have experienced these issues directly.

When aggregating all the options, nearly 60% (59.92%) of college students believe they have faced gender-related challenges. Among the options reflecting social gender challenges, stereotypes emerged as a problem experienced by most (84.42%) respondents, with a high percentage of women (90.21%) having encountered stereotypes. Appearance and body discrimination and anxiety are also challenges faced by the majority (82.69%) of respondents, with 90.21% of women having experienced appearance and body discrimination. Among women, 72.73% reported facing this issue “sometimes” or more frequently, with 16.02% always feeling that they face appearance and body discrimination, and 18.61% frequently experiencing this issue. Surprisingly, sexual harassment also emerged as a prevalent issue, with over 60% (64.5%) of respondents and 73.43% of women reporting experiences of physical or verbal sexual harassment.

3.2.2.5. Perceptions of Gender Equality Participation Concepts, Willingness, and Content

Gender Equality refers to the condition where every individual, regardless of gender, enjoys equal opportunities to realize their human rights and can participate equally in political, economic, cultural, and social development activities and benefit from them. The gender equality movement is widely recognized as an effective means of empowering women. This section of the research focuses on the perceptions of both genders regarding participation in gender equality, their willingness, content, and concepts, with the results presented in Tables 6, 7, 8, and 9.

Table 6. Research on Gender Participation Concepts Regarding Gender Equality
Do you believe that men should make more efforts to promote gender equality?

Option	Total	Percentage
Of course, they should	136	58.87%
They can participate sometimes, but men's involvement should not be overly emphasized	76	32.9%
Uncertain or neutral	17	7.36%
Not needed; this is a women's issue	2	0.87%

Table 7. Willingness to Participate in Gender Equality Activities
Are you willing to participate in activities or organizations that promote gender equality?

Options	Subtotal	Percentage
Very willing	117	50.65%
Sometimes willing	58	25.11%
Uncertain or neutral	47	20.35%
Unwilling to participate/not supportive	9	3.9%

Table 8. Survey on the Participation Content of Both Genders in Gender Equality
What activities have you actually participated in to promote gender equality?

Options	Count	Percentage
Discussion of gender equality topics online	172	74.46%
Offline protests/demonstrations/equal rights exhibitions	9	3.9%
Publishing equal rights articles	26	11.26%
Providing advice to official departments in any field	24	10.39%
Posting posters	15	6.49%
Sanitary pad assistance bags	80	34.63%
Others, please specify	25	10.82%

Table 9. Survey on the Participation Ideas of Both Genders in Gender Equality
What measures or actions do you think can help promote gender equality?

Options	Count	Percentage
Education reform, starting gender equality education in schools	196	84.85%
Formulating more laws and policies to protect women's rights	167	72.29%
Raising public awareness and understanding of gender equality	205	88.74%
Implementing more measures within companies and organizations to promote gender equality	163	70.56%
Others, please specify	12	5.19%

Based on the results above, the vast majority (91.77%) of respondents believe that men should or can participate in gender equality movements. Additionally, 75.76% of respondents are willing to participate in organizations related to gender equality. In the survey on specific gender equality activities, most respondents (74.46%) have participated in online discussions on gender equality issues, with the next most common activity being the menstrual pad donation drive (34.63%). In the survey on conceptual measures for gender equality participation, the highest support rate is for “raising public awareness and understanding of gender equality,” at 88.74%. Support rates for ideas such as education reform, legal formulation, and company policies also exceed 70% (84.85%, 72.29%, 70.56%), indicating that most respondents believe that implementing gender equality measures can help advance gender equality.

It is noteworthy that among the 25 respondents who chose the “Others, please specify” option in the survey on gender equality participation content, 20 responses were “none,” “not applicable,” “not yet,” “never participated,” “not involved,” or “do not wish to participate in any gender-related activities,” which accounts for 8.66% of all respondents. This suggests that there is a segment of the population who: 1. Refuse to participate in gender equality movements; 2. Lack interest in gender equality movements; 3. Lack opportunities and initiative to engage with and learn about equality information; 4. May hold some degree of gender bias.

The number of text responses for conceptual measures for gender equality participation is the highest. Many of these responses are innovative and representative, as shown in Table 10.

Table 10. Open-Ended Responses on Conceptual Measures for Gender Equality Participation

No.	Response
1	Start with educating people to respect differences. Reform digital media push/social algorithms to avoid group fragmentation and enhance equal communication among individuals.
2	Help people better understand feminism as opposed to radical feminism.
3	Economic independence is the most crucial form of independence; women must work and be economically independent. Radical feminism should not target lower-class men or create gender antagonism.
4	Implement genuine socialist education. In a truly socialist society, women should be able to “hold up half the sky.” This requires women to strengthen their sense of agency and men to respect and drop prejudices. One alarming issue is that some women lack self-respect and fail to recognize their own subjectivity, such as degrading themselves for quick financial gain. The sex industry is a significant barrier to gender equality.
5	View gender equality issues objectively.
6	1. At the educational stage, there is no difference between genders. 2. Current Chinese laws actually provide advantages to women, such as protections for women and children, and in criminal/civil cases, women often receive lighter penalties compared to men. 3. Gender conflicts in domestic society are often instigated by so-called “feminist” groups. 4. The ultimate goal of businesses is profit; they will not discriminate based on gender if it brings them revenue, and companies have significant freedom in recruitment, with the public having no right to interfere in their hiring standards.
7	Women should participate in more job roles and social divisions of labor.
8	I hope that in the future, we will not need to emphasize respect for women through such measures, as there should be a social consensus on this matter, similar to how there is no specific regulation to protect men.
9	Women need to become stronger and develop their own internal strength. If you believe there are problems in the external society, prove what true goodness should be.
10	Not sure.
11	Society should organize more educational initiatives to help people understand that we are no longer in a male-dominant society. We should now build a harmonious, beautiful, and equal society.
12	Citizens should improve their own awareness, actively learn about the practical aspects of gender equality in real life, and become advocates for gender equality.

From the common themes extracted, the keywords that appeared are: “radical feminism,” “antagonism,” “subjectivity,” “digital algorithm reform,” “society,” “awareness,” “practice,” “consensus,” “objectivity,” and “independence.”

The analysis reveals the following tendencies within certain groups: 1. They have a broad and relatively deep consideration of women's rights; 2. They pay considerable attention to the development of feminism; 3. They refute the measures taken for feminist development; 4. They focus more on the development of women's autonomy and pay less attention to external measures; 5. They stigmatize actions aimed at gender equality; 6. They perceive empowerment measures for women as biased in favor of women; 7. They doubt the reliability and effectiveness of these empowerment measures for women.

4. Reflections and Recommendations

According to the above survey results, feminism still faces multiple social obstacles in modern society. As the main force in the future society, today's university students should take on the task of developing feminism and advocating for gender equality, breaking gender stereotypes more effectively, and making greater efforts towards social equality. Based on this survey, the author has considered how to develop feminism and offers the following recommendations:

4.1. Enhance Awareness of Feminism and Cultivate Women's Self-Consciousness

Women's self-consciousness is the foundation for their agency and autonomy, as well as the starting point for recognizing and pursuing their own value. Women's self-consciousness refers to their conscious awareness of their independent and autonomous status in social and family life. It embodies the agency, autonomy, and creativity that women demonstrate in their activities as subjects [10]. Feminist epistemology plays a fundamental role in feminist philosophy, guiding and supporting women's pursuit of fairness and justice in political life. Each woman should cultivate a basic understanding of feminism and enhance self-awareness through education and learning.

In daily life, women should focus on and understand existing gender inequality issues, including gender discrimination, domestic violence, and labor discrimination. By analyzing the root causes and impacts of these issues using feminist thinking, women can develop critical thinking skills to analyze imbalances in social phenomena, uncover unfairness and prejudice, and propose constructive criticisms and solutions. Additionally, expanding the field of study to deeply understand feminist theories and ideas, learning about different schools of thought and viewpoints, and establishing a personal feminist framework can be beneficial. Combining feminist thinking with knowledge from other disciplines, such as sociology, psychology, and cultural studies, will help understand gender issues from multiple perspectives, enhance comprehensive analysis and thinking skills related to feminism.

4.2. Actively Participate in Feminist Activities and Boldly Defend Women's Rights

With the increase in women's rights and the expansion of social activity spaces, organizations such as women's liberation associations and feminist movements have emerged. This reflects the image of women as group participants in the political and cultural spheres. In the process of social development, women have been labeled with gender-specific occupational tags, such as female students and female bosses, indicating that women are gradually being accepted as members of society. The differentiation of women in the media reflects, to some extent, the social recognition and acceptance of women moving from the private sphere of family life into the public sphere.

To defend women's rights, one can seek out local or online feminist organizations, such as women's rights groups or gender equality institutions, and participate in their feminist activities or projects. Additionally, hosting feminist discussion forums or seminars can provide opportunities to share and exchange views on gender equality and women's rights with other feminist thinkers and explore popular topics related to women. Participating in community projects that support and provide services for women, such as women's shelters or health service centers, can also offer assistance and support to vulnerable women and boldly uphold their rights.

4.3. Advocate for Gender Education and Promote the Progress of Gender Equality

Promoting gender education is crucial for advancing gender equality and eliminating gender discrimination. Gender education content should be incorporated into school curricula at all levels, including elementary, middle, high school, and university. Emphasis should be placed on cultivating students' awareness of gender issues and concepts of gender equality from a young age, enhancing their understanding and recognition of gender topics across different age groups. However, the existing educational system often exhibits severe gender differentiation, which not only reinforces traditional gender discrimination and stereotypes but also hinders the advancement and depth of gender equality education.

As the backbone of higher education, universities have the responsibility to nurture future talent and uphold civilized values. They should consistently integrate mainstream ideologies, such as Marxism, throughout gender equality education, continuously enhancing students' awareness of gender equality, and solidifying the foundation of mainstream social ideology. In the great journey of building a socialist modernized country, gender equality must be systematically achieved. Innovative approaches to ideological and political education should be explored, combining online and offline methods, integrating education and practice,

and unifying guidance and service. Enhancing the ideological and political education capabilities of organizations like university women's federations can create a harmonious gender environment and guide students to establish correct gender views and values. Gender education training should also be provided for teachers, social workers, and other related professionals to improve their gender awareness and educational levels, thereby better imparting concepts of gender equality. Only in this way can the theory and practice of gender education be unified, contributing to the development of a harmonious gender culture in society and making universities exemplary models for gender equality education, injecting more positive energy into the development of gender equality and gender parity in society.

4.4. Focus on Feminist Policies and Promote the Improvement of the Gender Legal System

The Chinese government continues to focus on gender equality and uphold women's rights. Several feminist policies have been established, including: The Anti-Domestic Violence Law of the People's Republic of China, which addresses the rights of women and children in the family and protects them from domestic violence. The Law on the Protection of Women's Rights and Interests of the People's Republic of China, which explicitly prohibits gender discrimination and promotes gender equality. The Labor Law of the People's Republic of China, which stipulates those male and female workers should enjoy equal rights in terms of labor remuneration, vocational training, and labor protection, and prohibits gender discrimination. Additionally, policies related to employment, education, and family planning actively safeguard women's basic rights.

Moreover, not only university students but all citizens should consciously adhere to fundamental legal principles of gender equality, increasing their awareness of legal gender equality through ongoing self-awareness. Attention should be paid to issues where women's rights are not protected, not valued, or harmed at the legal level. Gender laws should emphasize the cultivation of societal gender civility to help citizens establish a modern gender equality consciousness and take legally friendly actions towards wives, daughters, mothers, and all other women.

Today, feminist policies still need improvement. The legal system and policy framework should be designed to effectively safeguard women's rights, establishing a comprehensive legal system that supports feminism and advocates gender equality. Support and promotion of gender statistics and research are necessary to gain a deeper understanding of gender inequality phenomena and their causes, providing scientific evidence for formulating and adjusting gender equality policies, and advancing the development and implementation of gender equality laws and policies. Relevant departments and institutions should fulfill their responsibilities for gender equality to ensure the effective implementation of policies.

4.5. Support Positive Social Opinion and Promote the Transformation of Social Gender Concepts

In an era of rapid digital development, feminist thought is one of the focal points on internet platforms. Due to the expanding influence and differences in gender education, there are significant divergences in this thought within online society. Conflicts between different social groups, especially between male and female groups, and between feminists and anti-feminists, are particularly pronounced. These conflicting viewpoints clash and collide in the self-media environment, exacerbating social tensions.

Social opinion reflects the public's acceptance of gender equality, women's empowerment, and feminist ideals, as well as their critical attitude towards unequal treatment and discrimination. With the increasing complexity of the online society and the noisy environment of online opinion, some internet users attempt to disrupt the online environment and attract attention through malicious provocations, promoting opposition, and making irrational attacks. Therefore, proper social opinion is needed to guide the atmosphere of feminism and gender equality. Mainstream media and online platforms can guide public opinion by reporting on women's successes and the protection of women's rights, raising awareness of women's issues and improving the recognition of women's status and rights. For example, creating films about figures like Zhang Guimei, the headmistress of Huaping Girls' High School, can draw attention to heroic efforts in safeguarding women's rights. Publicizing feminist ideals and advocating for gender and sex equality through media can foster an atmosphere of respect and support for women's rights. Opinion platforms can provide opportunities for women to voice their stories and viewpoints, encourage their participation in social issue discussions, and advance the realization of women's rights.

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