Where are all the Majors in Women's Studies:

How Two Online Modules Shape the Major Selection Process

by

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ABSTRACT

In this convergent mixed methods research project, I address the question of why large numbers of college students take women's studies courses yet are reluctant to major in the field. Using availability bias and intersectionality as my theoretical framework I hypothesized that the reluctance to declare women and gender studies as a major stems from 1) the failure to see the applicability of the major to career goals and aspirations, 2) social stigma associated with feminism, 3) social location. As a part of my intervention I designed and tested two 10-minute video modules; one on job applicability featuring women studies alumni discussing their career paths and their decision to major in the field, and a second on deconstructing stereotypes about feminism. The control group was shown a generic video on cinematic representations. Students were randomly assigned to one of the three groups and administered a pretest and posttest survey designed to measure job applicability, social attitudes about feminism and social location. Interviews were conducted with 6 students. My goal was to better understand perceived practicality of the women's studies degree, social attitudes about feminism and the impact of these perceptions as they relate to a student's selection of the major.

My research questions include:

RQ 1) Among students taking a course in women's studies, how and to what extent does participation in a module on job applicability influence a student's perceptions of the potential career applicability of the women's studies degree?

RQ 2) Among students taking a course in women's studies, how and to what

extent does participation in the module regarding feminism impact a

student's perceptions of the value of the women's studies degree?

RQ 3) How does one's social location interact with the findings of RQ's 1 & 2?

My sample (n=115) was drawn from students enrolled in online and hybrid

courses I taught in the WST program at Arizona State University, the largest such

program in the country, drawing over 6,000 students annually. However, the number of

majors at 84 students is not commensurate with the growth we are experiencing in terms

of enrollment or the popularity of the courses. These research addresses these

My findings showed that the job applicability module increased student

knowledge about the applicability of the women and gender studies major and that

students had a better overall understanding of the degree in relation to career

applicability, while the module about feminism did not have an effect on the choice of

major. My findings suggest that students lack of previous career knowledge in terms of

job paths available to WST graduates proved to be an obstacle for our program and

intervening may allow for the increase of majors.

DEDICATION

To my parents who always encouraged me to reach for the stars and to my children, Braden and Kiley, who I hope never stop.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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CHAPTER 1

LEADERSHIP CONTEXT AND PURPOSE OF THE ACTION

The first Women's Studies (WST) program was established at San Diego State in

1970, one year after the very first women's studies course was offered at Cornell

University. WST is an interdisciplinary program that emerged from a feminist movement

and uses an intersectional framework to critique institutional structures and address issues

of social inequality. While the field of women's studies is still relatively new, it has

continued to thrive and is taught in colleges and universities nationwide.

Despite the readily recognized and agreed upon significance of this problem of

practice as it relates to WST programs nationwide, there is a dearth of scholarly research

on the decision-making process as it relates to declaring a major in Women's Studies.

Choosing a major is an important decision and there are likely multiple, competing

factors that contribute to that decision. Existing literature on major selection for college

students in general suggests a variety of factors, ranging from parental influence to the

perceived value of the degree as it relates to the job market. Student perceptions (and

misperceptions) about particular career paths, and the skills needed to succeed at those

careers are known to play a role. Beggs, Bantham and Taylor (2008), for example, found

through a survey study that students chose a major based on perceived job characteristics

associated with that field, and that those perceptions were often completely inaccurate.

This suggests that we need to know more about where students draw their information about potential majors and career paths even prior to their entry into college.

Situated Context

Established in 1984, the Women and Gender Studies (WST) program at Arizona State University now has the largest WST program in the nation. Our program offers an in-person and online degree, a minor, and a certificate at the undergraduate level as well as a master's degree, graduate certificate, and doctorate. The B.A. degree prepares students for a variety of professions in non-profit, corporate, governmental, teaching, and service sectors, as well as preparation for entrance into graduate and professional programs including law, medicine, and public health. Our majors have entered into a variety of occupations at the local and national level, including employment in international non-governmental organizations (NGOs), local civil service and government, and leadership in the non-profit sector. The divergent career paths followed by our graduates demonstrate the applicability of the degree to a wide range of professional and advanced degree placements.

Situated within a large, Research One university, our program each year teaches, on average, well over 5,000 students. Our courses are extremely popular. Not only do most courses fill to capacity, students often take multiple classes in the field out of interest in the curricular content and then find themselves considering a minor or major. We offer a variety of courses with wide ranging topics from domestic violence, women's health, and sexuality to popular culture, film, and science and technology, to name just a few. Given the interest in courses offered within the field, it is concerning to program

faculty that the number of majors at the undergraduate level is relatively low. Unfortunately, this is not just a problem specific to the WST program at ASU but is seen in WST programs nationwide.

At ASU, the number of undergraduate students majoring in WST has declined over the past decade while the number of students taking classes in the field, particularly within the online environment, has grown significantly. WST courses attract a wide and impressive audience, often teaching more students than programs with considerably more majors. For instance, in 2016-2017, we taught over 6,000 students with 75% of those students taking our courses online. However, the number of majors is not commensurate with this growth and represents less than 0.01% of the total number of students enrolled in our courses. What accounts for this reluctance to major in WST, and how can program faculty address this reluctance?

Currently, in WST we have 84 undergraduate majors. That compares with Justice Studies, whose program is housed within the same school as WST and has nearly 500 majors, but whose courses do not reach even a fraction of the students we teach. WST is situated within the School of Social Transformation (SST) that houses four academic programs. The total number of undergraduates for 2017-2018 within the school equals 605 students, with 43% of these incoming freshman being first generation students. Of these 605 students, 52% are students of color and 25% are male. For the majors in WST alone, 46% are students of color and 6% identify as male.

As a lecturer, internship coordinator, and former advisor in this program for over fifteen years, I have a solid foundation of experience upon which to explore this problem of practice: the obvious and significant disparity between the number of students we

teach in and the number of students who declare a WST major. As a lecturer, I teach almost 2,000 students annually. These students come from diverse backgrounds, majors, and range in terms of their academic year. Teaching a broad range of courses through a variety of platforms (hybrid, in person, online), I see their satisfaction not only through their written work but also in their course evaluations. Students often tell me or write in those course evaluations that our courses are transformative for them. As a former academic advisor, I witnessed our majors' love of our field and the wonderful career opportunities available to them upon graduation. I helped develop and expand our curriculum to meet the demand of the number of students enrolling in our classes. As the former internship coordinator, I oversaw professional placements and the diverse and competitive jobs that are attainable for our graduates. However, despite all of this positive feedback in my various roles, students have historically been reluctant to choose WST as their major. Thus, my two primary goals with this project were as follows: 1) to identify factors which discourage students from selecting a major in our program; and 2) develop and test innovations that have the potential to ameliorate this disparity.

Potential Factors

My personal expertise in the field facilitated how I chose to frame this particular problem of practice. My professional experience suggested that there were at least four factors that account for the discrepancy between our overall high enrollment numbers and the small number of students who declare a WST major. These included the following: 1) late exposure to the field; 2) a perceived lack of applicability to one's career; 3) limited

flexibility in shifting one's program of study; and 4) social attitudes towards feminism as a political movement. First, our students typically declare majors late in their academic career, as opposed to more traditional majors, for they usually are not introduced to our courses until sophomore or junior year when trying to fulfill general studies requirements. Thus, a lack of exposure to the field until more advanced studies commence could contribute to the lack of students able to shift their major to women's studies. Late exposure represents an institutional roadblock that could be addressed in a variety of ways, including ensuring widespread exposure to the field during the first year. Second, students appeared to be reluctant to declare a major in the field due to their own preconceived notions of its lack of applicability to career development. Parents may exert additional influence on students who take an interest in the field. Declaring a major in business, for example, may be seen as more practical. In an unstable economic climate, students might see declaring a major as impractical. Third, institutional and administrative decisions may limit flexibility and discourage a shift in one's program of study, particularly at more advanced stages. One key example is the implementation of a requirement to declare one's major prior to their first semester. And finally, there may be an additional factor relevant to this problem of practice - that of the cultural climate, and more specifically, social attitudes towards feminism as a political movement which have the ability to shift in relationship to the current political discourses and its threats to (or support of) women's rights. This political discourse around feminism may affect how readily students claim the "f" word, feminism.

My professional experience suggested that these four factors played a role in this problem of practice, though I was unsure as to what degree each factor played. Currently,

there are no published research studies on the topic to help support this claim in terms of the WST degree. In recognition of the fact that not all students carry with them the same assets, liabilities, pressures, values, and interests, I needed definitive evidence that demonstrated what factors were the most influential. In other words, I needed to develop an understanding of the relative influence of these factors in relation to one another, if there were factors in play that had yet to be recognized, which of these factors can be influenced by one's own practices and beliefs, and finally which, if any, had the most influence on major decisions to help design innovations to be most influential.

Preliminary Research

Hoping to gather more pertinent information as to how students draw their information, why they chose the majors they did, and why they were so reluctant to declare a WST major, I created a survey that was delivered online to students who were enrolled in my WST classes in Spring and Fall of 2016. As the literature on major choice in general suggests, the survey results also demonstrated that students perceived a strong connection between the choice of major and career preparation. For example, as to why students choose their majors I found the same 3 common reasons in similar order: 1) job/career preparation, 2) interest in area, and 3) preparation for graduate/medical/law school. The most popular reasons for selecting a major revolved around job opportunities, advancement within their current jobs, and career preparation, with 37% stating this in one earlier cycle, and 31% in a second. Common answers included "I wanted to further my career" or "I felt this is a good career where I can make money and support my family." In terms of what is most important about their future careers, many students

focused on money, stating priorities such as "financial stability," "high salaries" and "financial freedom."

It was also evident from previous cycles that the field of WST is *not* seen as a practical degree (particularly from those unwilling to commit to an answer) and that students perceive very few, limited, or low-paying career paths for WST majors. For example, in Spring 2016, 76% of students taking my survey said they would never or have never considered a major, using reasons tied to prospective careers: "I want a career based major," "I want a good paying job," "it's not realistic," or "It wouldn't help in attaining career goals." More than half of the students saw the degree as relevant to understanding issues facing women in society but not practical. Similarly, in the same survey, 59% of students said they did not know what kind of job opportunities arise from a WST degree. The few respondents who did mention careers in the field mentioned research, teaching, and women's rights.

Of these students, 75% of these students had already taken a WST class, demonstrating an interest in the field and its related coursework, but without declaring the major for one or all of the reasons stated above.

Essentially, these surveys clearly supported some of the preliminary speculations I had about why students are reluctant to major. Further, the semi-structured interviews I also conducted revealed identical findings. First, when asked what they viewed their degree as a route to, all of the interviewees cited "a job." Second, they indicated that feminism still has a stigma attached to it, for even if they were willing to claim it many of their peers, friends and family were not. These findings helped to solidify the importance

of my innovation in two key areas: attitudes about feminism and job applicability. These

two areas seemed to be the most salient based on my survey and interview results.

Innovation

To increase the attractiveness of the degree and majors in the field of Women and

Gender Studies, to address the many misperceptions of feminism, and to help students

understand the practicality of the degree, I developed two online modules that consisted

entirely of videos, one on job applicability and a second on feminism. Both of these

modules helped to address my research questions in terms of practicality of the degree,

social attitudes about feminism, and the impact of both perceptions on major selection.

Job applicability, according to the literature as well as my survey results, remains

one the most important factors in major selection. As I mentioned above, it is evident that

the field of WST is not seen as a practical degree and that students perceive very few or

limited career paths for those who choose to major. This online module teaches students

about the practicality of the degree. Considering questions like, "What is in demand for

corporate America?" or "What do I need to do to obtain these jobs?", the module focuses

on transferrable skills. It teaches students about the value of such a degree and

demonstrates the wide array of jobs alumni have secured. I expected that exposure to this

module would influence student perceptions about the potential career applicability of a

WST major.

The second module focuses on feminism and attempts to dislodge myths about it

so often perpetuated by society and the media. It demonstrates the importance of the

feminist movements and the relevance of feminism in today's society. It evaluates if

students consider feminism a pejorative word, if they are willing to claim the title, and if they see the important connection to the degree. I expected that exposure to this module would influence student perceptions about the importance of incorporating or even accepting feminist principles into their lives and to further increase the understanding of why students major in WST.

Before and after these modules I administered surveys to measure changes in students' attitudes. One group completed the module on feminism, a second group completed the module on job applicability, and a third group became a control group exposed to a module unrelated to either concern. The results derived from participation in these modules helped to both inform and determine where resources should be invested in terms of major recruitment.

Purpose of Study

My research is unique in that it explored why those who take courses in WST) and find interest in the content are so reluctant to declare women's studies as their major field of study. The purpose of my study was to develop and test innovations that might redefine these misconceptions and address the barriers to students' selection of a degree that might be considered interesting but impractical.

Why are majors so important? The number of majors in a degree program not only reflects the success of that program and students' recognition of its significance but helps to provide further resources. Universities like ASU invest considerable money and effort in recruitment and retention practices. Major numbers are used heavily by colleges

and universities to assess resources for funding as well as faculty and staff lines. Without majors, programs struggle to survive, especially non-traditional majors such as WST. Programs want majors for various reasons, but most importantly they want to train students to continue to conduct the important work of the field.

Students clearly do not view the WST degree as applied, despite the large number of students we serve in our classes. Preliminary research suggested they found the material interesting and relevant but did not understand the wide array of pragmatic applications the degree had to offer. Unfortunately, if students are under the impression that low paying or no jobs are available, they will never see the WST major as a viable option. If students continue to see the "F" word as a bad word, they would never understand the importance of the feminist movements and their contributions to society. Dislodging these myths about feminism so often perpetuated by society and helping students understand the practical value of the WST degree can influence students' perceptions about the degree and help to attract new majors to the field.

Research Questions

In this study I answer the following research questions:

RQ 1) Among students taking a course in women's studies, how and to what extent does participation in a module on job applicability influence a student's perceptions of the potential career applicability of the women's studies degree?

RQ 2) Among students taking a course in women's studies, how and to what extent does participation in the module regarding feminism impact a student's perceptions of the value of the women's studies degree?

RQ 3) How does one's social location interact with the findings of RQ's 1 & 2?

CHAPTER 2

THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVE AND RESEARCH GUIDING THE PROJECT

In this chapter I use two theoretical frameworks, intersectionality and availability bias, to help explain the disparities between degrees and how students ascribe meaning to them and highlight the relevant literature in regards to the major selection process. Next, I discuss the influential work in the field of Women's Studies addressing both the strengths and challenges of the field. Lastly, I discuss the limitations of the current literature and how my research is unique as well as previous cycles that have informed the design of my intervention.

Theoretical Perspectives

Intersectionality

Intersectionality examines the relationship of identity and oppression. Hill (2013) discusses how gender, race, class, age, ethnicity and sexuality interact on multiple levels simultaneously and argues that these identity categories are not monolithic, but rather they intersect and interlock. Intersectionality is the idea that there is no singular experience of one identity, that one category does not act independently of others and cannot be examined singularly. Crenshaw (1989) coined the term when discussing black feminism, arguing being black and being a woman cannot be understood independently of each other but rather in relation to each other.

According to Dill (2009), intersectionality is a critical tool to examine disparities of gender, race, and class. In terms of my study, intersectionality was a way of taking into

account some of the factors that could impact a major choice. Viewing through an intersectional lens allows us to see that different identities at different times may be powerful or powerless. While currently there are no studies that use an intersectional framework to examine majors (or lack thereof) in the field of Women's Studies, intersectionality can certainly help to explain why some students with certain background characteristics take a risk in having a degree people may view as impractical and may help to identify the factors that create these differences.

Mullen (2014) argues that educational majors play an important role in the construction of identity and career preparation, that one is not more important than the other. Mullen based this assertion on analysis of data from an in-depth interview study conducted to examine gender and social differences in the selection of choice of majors in liberal arts degree programs. Her purpose was to challenge the literature that suggests students choose majors based solely on job applicability. This study sought to discern why students choosing liberal arts majors still have such a great gender divide even though less likely to choose their degree based on careers. Mullen (2014) also explored the relationship to institutional contexts, arguing these institutions must create the frameworks for how students approach majors. Communicating the aims of higher education and how those majors fit within the institution can also help promote decision-making or create opportunities for gendered processes to occur.

This study also further examined another social category, class, and looked at the socio-economic differences and its impact on major selection. Mullen (2014) found that these students involved in the study, mainly of high socioeconomic status, chose liberal arts majors for reasons other than future employment (or salary) concerns. Their cultural

capital, which I will further discuss below, came in the form of being viewed as cultural and worldly due to the fact that many of the students who attended this private college came from privileged backgrounds, more than half came from the top 15% of the income scale. There was a little diversity reported; about 21% were first-generation students and this same population of students was also the most racially and ethnically diverse. However, even though the study showed that students did not choose a major based on careers, more male students felt compelled to be the supporter of their families and hoped that their major may still later in life lead to a lucrative career they loved. Mullen (2014) also found that this smaller proportion of males from lower socio-economic backgrounds seemed to show even more concern for selecting a major in line with career opportunities. From this research, first generation students and particularly male students, as opposed to students from privileged backgrounds, may be pressured to choose a practical degree perceived to provide a higher income. This may be the only opportunity for upward social mobility. An intersectional framework can further explain these risks.

Availability Bias

Availability heuristics may also help to explain the disparities between degrees and how students ascribe meaning to them. Availability bias is the idea that examples that come easily to mind often influence people's perceptions or how they make selections. Tversky and Kahneman (1973) argue that these mental shortcuts are often relied upon when evaluating something or making a decision. This further complicates more distant concepts because people often solely rely on what they have seen or heard to form judgments.

This behavior can influence major selection in many ways. For example, this will be evidenced if a student who is not familiar with a WST degree refers to the common stereotypes that so often surround the field. Common stereotypes include WST not seen as practical degree or the belief that classes are led by angry feminists who male bash. Marchbank and Letherby (2006) found these negative stereotypes of WST to be alive and well and expressed mostly by students who had no prior experience in the field. This research suggests that availability bias may also play a significant role in how students perceive the practicality of a WST degree. If a student can not readily come up with an example of a job one can secure with a WST degree, this availability bias translates to lasting judgment of the degree being impractical or of little worth. This reliance on an immediate example proves problematic for an untraditional field so often misunderstood and disproportionately represented.

Related Research: The Field of Women's Studies

Across the nation, interdisciplinary programs such as Women's Studies and Ethnic Studies have faced challenges in attracting majors to their respective fields (Olzak & Kangas, 2008). Moreover, there is a paucity of data available that helps us to understand the factors that influence student decision-making with respect to the declaration of a major. Existing research suggests a variety of factors, ranging from parental influence to gender, class, and race as discussed by Cole and Omari (2003) and Malgwi and Burnaby (2005). For example, both Oschensfeld (2014) and Morgan (2008) show in their research that women often picked fields that pay less and are more associated with female

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(gendered) work such as education. While job applicability, according to the relevant literature, seems to be one of the highest indicators in major selection, these other socially constructed categories also play a role in this decision- making process.

Student perceptions about particular career paths and job characteristics also play a role. Beggs, Bantham, and Taylor (2008) identify several factors that influence student decision-making. They found that students chose a major based on perceived job characteristics associated with that field, and those perceptions were often completely inaccurate. Robst (2006) also examined the match between employment and field of study. Similar to Beggs et al., this study suggested that students' perceptions of what they would later obtain from their degrees were often inaccurate. This research suggests that we need to know more about where students draw their information about potential majors and career paths, including prior to their entry into college, and what initial ideas about these majors and their perceived return they may bring with them to college and to the major-selection process.

Although many scholars have discussed misperceptions associated with the field of WST, or claimed that students and their families typically do not understand the practical value of a WST degree (Marchbank and Letherby 2006), there are no rigorous, published studies that explore the factors I have identified as they relate to the declaration of a WST major. Berger and Radeloff (2011), whose book provides guidance for students already pursuing a major in Women's Studies, address the misconceptions of the field and how to make the most of their career, but this research is unlikely to reach students who have not otherwise considered a career in this field.

Berger and Radeloff (2011) provide guidance for students pursuing a major in Women's Studies that is often misunderstood by the public. Their book provides an overview of the field, and it counsels students that they should expect to embark on their journey of learning not just through coursework but also by "doing." They discuss the importance of internships, service learning opportunities, and study abroad. They address the many misconceptions of the field and provide data on the various employment paths majors often pursue upon graduation. This is a valuable and practical book for students who want to know how to make the most of their career, but it is unlikely to reach students who are not actively considering a career in this field.

There are two other influential works in the field of women and gender studies in terms of course management and development. Kennedy and Beins (2005) and Wiegman (2002) independently discuss the current state of the field, and they speculate as to what it might become within the context of a society often labeled as *post-feminist*, or the perception that women have already achieved their goals and feminism may no longer be as relevant. This would undoubtedly have an impact on students claiming a major, for if students think feminism is no longer necessary, they would not see the need to obtain a degree in this area.

Kennedy and Beins (2005) show that although they are relatively new, WST programs are thriving in that the number of scholars in field has grown significantly. They examine such questions as what the focus of these programs are, their various commitments to interdisciplinarity, the momentum and popularity of these programs, and the tensions that exist within programs that specifically seek to examine the politics of

intersectionality. They also discuss the issue of social change and how the methodologies followed in the field can be harnessed to create a more just and equitable society.

Weigman (2002) examines the institutional structures that both support and challenge women's studies programs within universities and colleges, providing an analysis of where women's studies as a field emerged, as well as where and how it is likely to continue to transform. From curriculum and feminist pedagogy, to how it is situated within the university, Weigman addresses the concerns as a field as well as how to build on these successes. The collection serves as a reflection, focusing both on the classroom as well as the experiences of faculty within these programs.

And lastly, as discussed earlier, Marchbank and Letherby (2006) explore the opinions, attitudes, and experiences of both women's studies and non-women's studies students regarding the field. This article addresses some of most common stereotypes, often relayed by outsiders, experienced by faculty and students alike. Looking at consistently reported statements from students regarding stereotypes such as women's studies classes are easy or insignificant, these authors examined the attitudes and experiences of three groups of students: WST majors, students who have taken WST classes, and students with no experience in WST at all. Unfortunately, they found the negative stereotypes to be alive and well, expressed by students who had no prior experience in the field and usually male. As found by these authors, the critique of women's studies is often different from the critique of other fields. This differential treatment reinforces the idea that preconceived notions about WST continue to deter students from the field and allow the degree to be seen as something of little practical or social value.

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My research is unique in that it explored why those who take courses in WST and find interest in the content are so reluctant to declare women's studies as their major field of study. The purpose of my study was to develop and test innovations that might redefine these misconceptions and address the barriers to students' selection of a degree that might be considered interesting but impractical.

Previous Action Research on this Problem of Practice

In previous work it was my hope was to come to a better understanding of the factors that influence students' likelihood to major in WST. This research was done in order to inform the design of an innovation intended to increase students' likelihood to major. During this time I explored the following questions:

- How and to what extent does late exposure to WST classes affect the likelihood to major?

- How and to what extent do perceptions about the career applicability of WST influence the decision to major?

- How and to what extent does the structure of ASU in terms of advising and course requirements restrict the choice to major?

- How and to what extent do social attitudes regarding gender and feminism influence the decision to major in WST?

I disseminated surveys in the spring and fall semesters of 2016. In the spring semester 78 students responded, and in fall 81. The survey contained 31 questions that were both open- and close-ended. Semi-structured interviews were also conducted in the fall

semester, with interviews of 4 first-year students. The questions focused largely on major selection and knowledge and ideas about the field of women's studies.

Common themes arose from the data. It was clear from the surveys and the interviews that students perceived a strong connection between the choice of major and career preparation. It was also evident that the field of WST is something that students connected to very few or limited career paths, if they thought they knew anything about related careers. Finally, it was apparent that the "F" word still has a negative connotation and is not an identity that students readily claim.

For example, from analyzing the data as to why students choose their majors I found 3 common reasons: 1) job/career preparation, 2) interest in area, and 3) preparation for graduate/medical/law school. The most popular reasons for selecting a major revolved around job opportunities, advancement within their current jobs, and career preparation. In terms of what is most important about their future careers, many students focused on money, stating priorities such as "financial stability," "high salaries" and "financial freedom."

In terms of WST and its applicability during the first iteration of my survey (n=78) (and seen in again in the next cycle), when asked what students know about the major, more than 70% of respondents reported that they knew nothing at all or very little. Responses on open-ended prompts included statements such as the following: "not much, don't think there's any job available," or "I know that many people do not choose this major and that it is often criticized." Only 15% of the students acknowledged some of the contributions of the degree such as the examination of women in history, reproductive health, or general efforts to address inequalities.

As I mentioned in Chapter 1, when asked about feminism in the survey (n=78), 45% either did not consider themselves a feminist or remained in a neutral state.

Most striking from the interviews was the similarity of student responses, corroborating the survey data. All interviewees viewed their degree as a route to "a job." All viewed the WST degree as practical but were uncertain about career options or salaries. One respondent was unaware of what someone with a WST degree would do and said that even though the classes were enjoyable, a major "would never be a reality."

These previous cycles of research support some of the preliminary speculations I had about why students are reluctant to major. They addressed my research questions in terms of perceived practicality of the degree, social attitudes about feminism, and the impact of these perceptions and attitudes as it relates to student selection of major. And finally, this data reinforced the importance of my intervention in two key areas: job applicability and feminism.

Summary of Theoretical Perspectives and Research Guiding the Project

In this chapter I discussed the theoretical frameworks I use to help explain the disparities between degrees and how students ascribe meaning to them and highlighted the relevant literature in regards to major selection. I also examined the influential work in the field of WST and the limitations of the current literature. Finally, I demonstrated how previous cycles helped inform the design of my innovation with the focus of two areas: feminism and job applicability. Chapter 3 will address the method I used in implementing and evaluating a simple innovation to address those focal concerns.

CHAPTER 3

METHOD

In this chapter I discuss the setting, participants, and role of the researcher as well as the instruments and the data collection that I used. The preliminary data helped to explain why students might be reluctant to declare a major in the field of WST and helped to inform the design of this innovation in two key areas intended to increase this likelihood, job applicability and feminism. Using a convergent mixed methods approach, I collected qualitative and quantitative data allowing me to combine the strengths of both. This data and analysis answered the following questions:

RQ 1) Among students taking a course in women's studies, how and to what extent does participation in a module on job applicability influence a student's perceptions of the potential career applicability of the women's studies degree?

RQ 2) Among students taking a course in women's studies, how and to what extent does participation in the module regarding feminism impact a student's perceptions of the value of the women's studies degree?

RQ 3) How does one's social location interact with the findings of RQ's 1 & 2?

Setting

The Women and Gender Studies program at Arizona State University was the setting of this action research study. Situated within a large, Research One university, last year alone our program taught over 6,000 students. One of the largest and most vibrant WST programs in the nation, we offer a wide variety of courses that remain extremely

popular with most of them filling to capacity. We find students often take multiple classes in the field simply out of interest in the curricular content.

At ASU, however, the number of undergraduate students majoring in WST has declined over the past decade while the number of students taking classes in the field has grown significantly. WST courses attract an impressive audience but the number of majors is not commensurate with this growth. Currently, the major enrolls 84 students.

As a lecturer and previous advisor, and due to the large enrollment in my own classes where I teach approximately 2,000 students each year, I conducted this study to determine whether students, who are so reluctant to claim a major in the field, have a change in perception of the degree after completing one of the two treatment modules. During Spring of 2018, when this study took place, I recruited participants from the following classes: 1) WST 100: Women, Gender and Society; 2) WST 371: Sex & the City; and 3) WST 374: Desperate Housewives.

WST 100 is our large gateway course. These course serves as the introduction to our field, a course where students fulfill general studies and get a sense of the curriculum we offer. These courses are large, capped anywhere from 150-400, and usually fill to capacity. Popular each semester, this is where students get a taste of feminism and what our unique program has to offer. This WST 100 hybrid course, with a total enrollment of 150, was one class from which students were recruited to participate in the innovation. WST 371 and WST 374 are two large online courses that critically examine representations of women in popular culture. WST 374 was offered in A session and had 173 students enrolled and WST 371 B session which had a total enrollment of 383.

Students from these 2 large online classes were also recruited to participate in the innovation.

Participants

The participants for my research were undergraduate students who were enrolled in my WST classes at ASU. These students came from three classes offerings in the spring of 2018 which had a total combined enrollment of 706. Of the 706 students, 175 students completed the pretest and 66% of these students completed the entire sequence of a pre-module survey, one of three randomly-selected modules, and a post-module survey. These students came from a variety of majors and backgrounds and were recruited from various modalities (in person, hybrid and online), though only the students in one class (WST 100) were offered an extra-credit incentive for either participating in the study or an alternative extra-credit opportunity. They varied in terms of their academic year in college ranging from freshman year to senior (or even beyond). Students completed both pretest and post surveys and 40 participated in the feminism module, 36 in the jobs module and 39 in the control group. A smaller sample of students, 6 students total, 3 from each treatment module, participated in semi-structured interviews.

Table 1 below provides further information about the number of students who participated in each module and interview.

Table 1.

Number of Participants in each module

Module	Survey	Interviews
Module 1: Feminism	40	3
Module 2: Control	39	
Module 3: Job Applicability	36	3
TOTAL	**115**	

Similarly, Table 2 below provides information about the students who participated in the innovation but also includes their demographic information first by module and then by combined totals**.**

Table 2.

Demographic variables for participants

Demographic Variable	Control Condition	Jobs Module	Feminist Module	All Participants
% Students of Color	53	44	46	51
% Male	30	25	38	32
% First Generation	30	6	26	28
N	40	36	39	115

Role of the Researcher

I was aware of my role as an insider within the Women and Gender Studies program and as the students' instructor within these WST classes from which I recruited and also conducted interviews and surveys. I taught these sections, whether hybrid, in person or online, developed the curriculum, and graded the work. Due to the large size of most of these classes, however, I often do not know why they choose to take our courses

or how many WST courses they may have taken total. I often do not know their majors or year in college.

I was also an interviewer/observer in terms of the semi-structured interviews I conducted. Here my intent was to gather more information about what factors have thus far influenced their decisions with respect to a major and their perceptions about feminism and job applicability and if they have changed after participating in these online modules.

As an action researcher, I collected and analyzed all data as I have from previous cycles. For the interviews, I collected, transcribed, and analyzed all the qualitative data looking for major themes. I performed member-checking to ensure trustworthiness. I also analyzed all open-ended questions from the surveys as well as a small extra credit assignment offered to students who participated in one of the modules for WST 100 and looked for major themes. I designed the content for both modules pre-innovation stage and collected and analyzed all pretest and posttest data as well.

Innovation

To increase majors in the field of Women and Gender Studies, to address the many misperceptions of feminism, and to help students understand the practicality of the degree, I created two 10- minute video modules, one on feminism and a second on job applicability; I used a 10-minute video on cinema as the third module for the control group. This control-group video is related to some course content in the classes but does not touch on either feminism or careers.

For this innovation, after the invitation to participate and an electronic consent process, students were directed to an initial survey via Qualtrics. Once this pretest was complete, Qualtrics randomly and evenly placed them in one of the three modules. Once in their respective modules students then watched a 10- minute video and were directed back to the posttest survey. Of the participating students who completed the entire process, 40 viewed the control-group video, 36 were exposed to the job applicability module, and 40 completed the feminism video.

Both of the modules on feminism and job applicability helped to address my research questions in terms of practicality of the degree, social attitudes about feminism, and the impact of each concept on major selection. By participating in the module on feminism I hoped to debunk the stigma attached to it. The intent of this module was that students would no longer see feminism as a dirty word and be able to critically analyze the representations they see. I expected that exposure to this module would influence student perceptions about the importance of incorporating or even accepting feminist principles into their lives and to further increase the understanding of why students major in WST. This module helped to address RQ 2.

The divergent career paths followed by our graduates demonstrate the applicability of the degree to a wide range of professional and advanced degree placements and the intent of the module on job applicability is to allow the students to see some practicality of the degree and be able to envision these competitive placements in a variety of settings. I expected that exposure to this module would influence student perceptions about the potential career applicability of a WST major, aligning with RQ 1.

I believed video technology could most accurately provide the context needed to critically evaluate these representations and in turn impact students' perceptions because students spend so much time consuming media. Media is a commonly-used tool and because of the demographics of the population used for this study, I believed video to be the most effective means to disseminate this information to potentially have an impact.

Module 1- Feminism

The first online module focused on feminism and the preconceived notions students often have. People often view feminists as man-hating, anti-family, unfeminine women. This module focused on dislodging myths about feminism so often perpetuated by society and the media. In this 10-minute video students were exposed to a variety of images. Using a historical context, starting with first-wave and ending with third-wave feminism, I framed the importance of the feminist movements and their contributions to society by showing a timeline of images and gains made including, for example, the right to vote. Further, looking at popular culture representations I deconstructed stereotypes and discussed their impact. Using memes, videos, and other resources I challenged traditional gender roles and addressed social justice issues while using an intersectional lens. For example, one section of the video provides statistics on the wage gap, another section shows a clip of a popular female musician discussing the impact of claiming a feminist identity, and finally another shows young girls in the toy store playing with items and participating in activities some would consider outside gender norms. For this module, 40 students completed both the pretest and posttest, and of these students 3 participated in semi-structured interviews.

Module 2- Job Applicability

The second module focused on job applicability. As explained earlier, Women and Gender Studies (WST) has a wide array of pragmatic applications; however, students are typically reluctant to declare a major in the field due to many misperceptions, including its applicability to career development. This online module taught students about the practicality of the degree. It addressed questions such as the following: what is in demand for corporate America and what do I need to do to obtain these jobs? This module focused on transferrable skills. It exposed students to what they need to do and why the degree is relevant. For example, it included video of 6 alumni and how their degrees helped them develop the skills they required to obtain these various jobs and how they marketed themselves. These alumni showcased their various placements from settings such as corporate America, non-profits, teaching at an all-boys private high school to a makeup artist working with celebrities in the Los Angeles area. It helped students further understand the connection between the degree and how it is applied to the real world with meaning- whether monetary or in the type of job they desire.

This 10-minute video largely relied on alumni and their experience in the workforce. I identified six alumni and asked each of them to create a short clip, one to five minutes unedited, on their experience in the job market and the types of jobs they have secured upon graduation. Some guiding questions I had them consider were the following: How did the WST degree help you? How has it changed the way you approach situations? How has it changed your attitude or behavior in professional settings? What skills did you learn that helped prepare you for what you are doing (whether professionally or in academia)? Was there a particular moment within your time

in WST that you can trace to the position you have now? Taking pieces from each video, students were presented with an array of job possibilities and graduate opportunities in connection to the skills learned from the WST degree. For this module 36 students completed both the pretest and posttest and 3 from this population also participated in semi-structured interviews.

Control

The final module was the control group. This group watched a 10-minute Youtube video, *Popular Culture: What is Cinema For*. This clip focused on cinematic representations. It analyzed questions such as the following: What do films do for us? How do they impact us? Do they make us more moral? More respectful to things we hold dear? The premise of this video is that cinema can help us appreciate what we have and that we should see film as more than just entertainment but rather guides to life. This video was selected because the courses I regularly teach and those from which the students will be recruited are largely focused on popular culture. This video is related to course content without exposing them to any of the topics covered in the other two modules. Forty students participated in this module, completing both pretest and posttest.

<div align="center">Instruments</div>

Surveys

The survey designed to measure student perceptions about Women's Studies and feminism contains 38 questions that use a 5-point Likert scale. At the end of the pretest students were asked to provide demographic and major information. The survey was

delivered via Qualtrics. I invited students via email through their course shells to participate online. I used identical surveys for both pretest and posttest, with the exception of the demographic and major questions removed in the post-survey. Students also created a unique ID they used in the pretest and posttest survey. I hand-matched 5 surveys with minor differences in the pretest and posttest IDs.

The survey had 8 constructs aligning with two major themes: Job Applicability and Feminism. The constructs for job applicability included the following: A) Jobs/ Generic; B) Jobs/ Personal Goals; C) Jobs/ Material Goals and D) Jobs/ Career Goals. The generic jobs construct included questions such as, is the WST degree practical or relevant? The personal goals construct explored student perceptions about issues such as whether the WST degree would satisfy a student's interest, personal goals or even further educational opportunities. The material goals construct addressed salary, material items (home, cars, etc.) and even material success. And finally, the career goals module was used to gauge perceptions about the WST degree being able to provide such benefits as a prestigious title or even job security.

Similarly, the constructs for Feminism included the following: E) Feminism/ Generic; F) Feminist Identity; G) Feminist Knowledge and H) Feminism/Media Representation. Feminist Identity asks questions such as if students identify as a feminist, if they would claim feminism in front of a friend or family member, or if they only feel comfortable identifying around other feminists. Feminist Knowledge probes about their knowledge of the field of women students and intersectionality. And finally, the media representation construct measures what they think about the images they see in the media (and social media) in regards to feminism.

There were various questions within these constructs that were tested during the pilot phase, with some removed to improve reliability. There is only one question for Feminism/Generic, and thus reliability was not measured. Appendix A contains the full list of survey questions, and Table 2 displays estimates of Cronbach's alpha from a sample of 115 students enrolled in WST courses.

Table 3

Perception of Feminism and Job Applicability in WST Estimates of Reliability (N=115)

Factor	Revised Survey Within Factor Items	Cronbach's Alpha Estimate of Reliability
Jobs / Generic	Items A1-2	.695
Jobs / Personal Goals	Items B1-5	.865
Jobs / Material Goals	Items C1-5	.877
Jobs / Career Goals	Items D1-8	.891
Feminist / Identity	Items F1, 2, 4, 5, 6, 8, 9	.701
Feminist / Knowledge	Items G1, 3, 4, 6	.644
Feminist / Media Representation	Items H1, 2, 5, 6, 7, 9	.531

The table above shows the analysis of reliability per construct and overall. Removal of several questions on a pilot version of the survey yielded higher Cronbach's alpha scores. The constructs as finally constituted are displayed in the chart above, and the full list of survey questions appears in Appendix A.

Open-ended Survey Questions

Open-ended questions from the surveys were also used for qualitative analysis. These included answers from the 36 participants in the jobs module and 40 students who participated in the feminism module. Pretest questions included questions about the number of courses students have taken and even questions about political activism and

current events such as #MeToo movement. Questions on the posttest included items such as what students remembered most about their module or what they thought was most vivid.

Semi-structured Interviews

For the qualitative analysis of my innovation I also conducted interviews from a smaller population of students who completed one of the treatment groups. I used a semi-structured approach and inquired about students' perspectives of the WST degree, the limitations or advantages, if they would declare a major, and how they think outsiders perceive the degree. Students were also asked about feminism, what they think it is, if they consider themselves a feminist and how they think others, such as the media, portray feminism. And finally, students were asked about the treatment group in which they participated.

I interviewed 6 participants, 3 from each treatment group. The students who participated in the interviews that completed the jobs module came from various majors and backgrounds. John was a junior and an Accounting major; Anne was also an upper-classmen and a Musical Performance major; and Emi a sophomore majoring in Film & Media studies. From the feminism module, my 3 interviewees included Susan a Liberal Studies major and a freshman; Marie who a freshman and an Anthropology major; and finally KK who, like Susan, was also majoring in Liberal Studies.

The interviews lasted approximately 20 minutes. I used audio recordings to record the interviews and aid in the transcription process. I recorded, transcribed, and coded the interviews. Member checking was used to ensure reliability. Please see Appendix B for the full questionnaire.

Extra Credit Assignment

An extra credit assignment was offered to students in WST 100 who had participated in the modules. This assignment was anonymous. I posed a variety of questions in regards to the module they had participated in. Students responded to various prompts such as what surprised you most about your module? What if anything did you learn in this module? Did it change your perspective pre to post survey? And finally, do you think the WST degree is useful? This data was also used for qualitative analysis.

Data Analysis

I used a convergent mixed methods approach. The data analysis techniques below further explain how they aligned with my research questions, measuring both change as well as relationships.

Quantitative Analysis

RQ1 is answered partly by estimating a regression for each Jobs construct with the individual posttest construct score as the dependent variable and the treatment (jobs condition) as the independent variable and the pretest score as a covariate. This will help to address the "to what extent" part of RQ1.

RQ 2 is answered in part by estimating a regression for each Feminism construct with the individual posttest construct score as the dependent variable and the treatment (feminist condition) as the independent variable and the pretest score as a covariate. This helped to address the "to what extent" part of RQ2.

By adding in the demographic variables (first generation, gender, race, etc.) to the equations used for both RQ's 1 and 2, RQ 3 is answered in part by this and also by seeing how the coefficient for the treatment and the total R^2 change in a regression. I answer RQ 3 with an expanded regression including the demographic variables (first generation, gender, race) and an interaction term (being in the module plus this social identifier). This helped to answer the "to what extent" part of this research question.

Qualitative Analysis

A thematic analysis of these transcripts helped to identify meaningful patterns within the data. Because the major topics of the interview included the decisions that lead to student's selection of major, knowledge of the major in the field of women's studies and ideas about feminism in general, this allowed me to further explore RQ 3 and how possible prior exposure to stereotypes and one's own lived experience may have informed their major decision in more complex ways. These interviews helped further aide in answering RQ 3 as they helped to explain the meanings and perceived disparities between degrees and majors in various fields, employing intersectionality to help inform my method.

Open-ended questions from the surveys were also analyzed from both treatment groups. These included answers from the 36 participants in the jobs module and 40 in the feminism module. Further data was also collected and analyzed from an extra credit assignment offered to students enrolled in my WST 100 class who had participated in the feminism module (31) and the jobs module (20).

Credibility

Reliability of the survey instrument is discussed above. For qualitative analysis, member checking was used to improve, and add credence to the accuracy and validity of my data. I met with students immediately following the interviews with preliminary results and shared my verbal findings to ensure accuracy. Students responded positively and all responded these findings captured their views accurately.

I recruited ASU undergraduate students enrolled in three of my Women and Gender Studies classes, one introductory hybrid survey and two upper division online elective courses. Student took an initial pretest survey. Once the survey was completed students were automatically placed in one of the three modules. On completion of their 10- minute video they were routed back to the posttest survey. The posttest contained a question asking them if they were interested in participating in an interview from which I selected and contacted students. I also collected extra credit responses in the WST 100 class in mid-April. For this study, innovation data was collected from March through April of 2018. Once the interviews and surveys were completed I analyzed all data. Please see table 4 below for a timeline.

Table 4.

Procedure Timeline

March 2018 (Session A)	• Sent out email via blackboard inviting students to participate in online survey and began data collection of surveys. Survey disseminated to WST 374
March 2018 (Session B & C)	• Send out email via blackboard inviting students to participate. Survey disseminated to WST 371(start of spring B) and WST 100 (session C)
April 2018	• Offered extra credit assignment in WST 100 • Selected a smaller portion of students to interview and conduct interviews
May 2018	• Member Checking

CHAPTER FOUR

RESULTS

In this chapter, the results and analysis of both quantitative and qualitative data collected in this convergent mixed methods research project will be discussed according to the research questions. The three research questions are as follows:

RQ 1) Among students taking a course in women's studies, how and to what extent does participation in a module on job applicability influence a student's perceptions of the potential career applicability of the women's studies degree?

RQ 2) Among students taking a course in women's studies, how and to what extent does participation in the module regarding feminism impact a student's perceptions of the value of the women's studies degree?

RQ 3) How does one's social location interact with the findings of RQ's 1 & 2?

In chapter 4, I use quantitative data in conjunction with qualitative data. Following Creswell's (2015) research methods, I first discuss quantitative data to develop an understanding of these research questions, then qualitative data to inform those results.

The quantitative results and analysis include survey data (pretests and posttests) that were administered via an online survey system (Qualtrics) and analyzed using regression. The qualitative research instruments include semi-structured interviews of students from the treatment groups, as well as open-ended questions from the pretests and posttests, and finally an extra credit (EC) assignment offered in the WST 100 class.

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Below, before discussing final results, I will provide some brief context to this data collection process.

As explained in Chapter 3, the quantitative data included collection of both a pretest and posttest survey. This survey was administered to students who were enrolled in my WST classes in the spring of 2018 and was given in March. Assignment was random and evenly divided. The pretest was taken immediately before students were placed in the innovation (a video specific to each treatment group) and then lastly, completion of a posttest. Of the three video modules to which students were directed, the two treatment groups included modules on feminism and job applicability and the third was a control group. The purpose was to test these innovations that might redefine these conceptions about the major and to address the barriers to students' selection of a WST degree. The pretest and posttest survey contained 8 constructs aligning with two major themes: 1) perceptions of job applicability and 2) perceptions of feminism.

The constructs for job applicability included the following: 1) Generic; 2) Personal Goals; 3) Material Goals and 4) Career Goals. The generic jobs construct included questions like is the WST degree practical or relevant? The personal goals construct explores students' attitudes about topics such as whether the WST degree would satisfy a student's interest, personal goals or further educational opportunities. The material goals construct addresses issues such as salary, material items (home, cars, etc.) as well as fulfilling material success. Finally, the career goals module is used to further gauge student perceptions about the WST degree being able to provide such desired items as a prestigious title or even job security.

The constructs for Feminism include the following: 1) Generic; 2) Feminist Identity; 3) Feminist Knowledge and 4) Feminist Media Representation. Feminist Identity asks students questions such as if they identify as a feminist, if they would claim feminism in front of a friend or family member or if they only feel comfortable identifying around other feminists. Feminist Knowledge probes about their knowledge of the field of women students and intersectionality. And finally, the media representation construct attempts to measure what they think about the images they see in the media (film, TV, etc.) and even social media in regards to feminism.

The pretest and posttest survey contained 38 questions each of which use a 5-point Likert scale with 5 as "strongly disagree" and 1 "strongly agree." Students who report a 1 are more likely agree with the WST content presented and 5 means they did not. One hundred and seventy-five students completed the pretest compared to 115 (66%) who completed both the pretest and posttest. Because the final counts for each condition are similar, we can infer that attrition is not discernibly different across the conditions.

The qualitative data collection included the following: 1) a 25-minute semi-structured interview with transcripts that were coded thematically for analysis; 2) open-ended questions collected via the surveys; and 3) a small hand-written extra credit assignment offered in WST 100 that was part of a participant incentive structure, but whose responses can further gauge students' engagement with a module. The data was coded using themes, and for the interviews member checking was done to further ensure reliability. For member checking, immediately following the interviews, students were provided with responses to their questions to check for accuracy.

Descriptive statistics from the pretest to posttest survey in each of the constructs are displayed in Table 5 below. These results show that, for the jobs module overall, a discernable difference in each of the four constructs which have lower mean scores in the posttest. These measures show that students' perception that a WST degree is useful in terms of job applicability increased after seeing the video. For these scales, 5 means 'strongly disagree' and 1 'strongly agree,' and lower scores translate into an increased perception that the women's studies degree is useful. While all four constructs in the jobs module show a considerable change, the generic job construct had the smallest change. The constructs related to feminism, however, do not show clear differences pretest to posttest.

Table 5.

Pre and Posttest results by Construct

Construct	Pretest		Posttest	
	M	**SD**	**M**	**SD**
Generic	1.92	0.67	1.72	0.65
Personal Goals	2.52	0.84	2.18	0.92
Material Goals	2.93	0.91	2.13	0.95
Career Goals	2.68	0.79	2.18	0.82
Identity Feminist	2.30	0.66	2.23	0.11
Knowledge Feminist	1.96	0.53	1.97	0.61
Media Feminist	1.98	0.52	1.97	0.62

As discussed above, Table 5 above shows the changes in survey scores by mean and standard deviation before and after participation in the innovation. Next, I will present further analysis for these modules according to each research question.

Research Questions

Research Question 1

Research question one asks the following question: Among students taking a course in women's studies, how and to what extent does participation in a module on job applicability influence a student's perceptions of the potential career applicability of the women's studies degree? Quantitative and qualitative data were used to answer this research question. This includes, for the quantitative analysis, survey responses for those students who participated in the job applicability module (36) and in the control group (39). For the qualitative analysis, this includes interviews (3), open-ended questions from the survey respondents in the job applicability module (36) and extra credit responses (20) from students who participated in this same module.

Quantitative Analysis. I answered RQ1 in part by estimating a regression for each jobs construct with the individual posttest mean score in the construct as the dependent variable and the pretest score and the condition (a dummy variable indicating exposure to the jobs module) as the independent variable. This will address the "to what extent" of RQ1.

Table 6 below provides the coefficients and standard error for each of the jobs constructs for the pretest and by condition.

Table 6.

Coefficients and standard error per construct within the jobs module

Construct	COEFFICIENTS (Standard Error in parentheses)	
	Pre-survey	Condition
		in jobs module
Generic	0.71	-0.42
	(0.10)	(0.13)
Material Goals	0.81	-0.67
	(0.08)	(0.12)
Personal Goals	0.79	-0.41
	(0.07)	(0.13)
Career Goals	0.71	-0.51
	(0.08)	(0.12)

The table above reflects, in terms of RQ #1, that there is indeed a meaningful difference in these scores for students who participated in the jobs module. The students in this treatment group (exposed to the job module) experienced a discernable change, a comparative decrease in the mean construct which represents an increase in their perception that the WST degree is applicable to careers across all four constructs.

This table summarizes results of a multiple regression analysis for each jobs construct. Analysis was run on all four jobs constructs: 1) generic; 2) material goals; 3) personal goals, and 4) career goals.

The -0.42 coefficient for exposure to the jobs module dummy variable means that being exposed to the jobs module led to a decrease in the post-module score of -0.42 for the generic jobs construct in comparison to those who watched a video unrelated to this content. What this indicates is that those who were exposed to the jobs module and observed the variety of jobs WST alumni had secured had a more positive attitude

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towards the general applicability and practicality of the degree posttest. Results from the multiple regression analysis for the generic jobs construct indicate the predictors in the model explain 47% variance in the posttest ($R^2 = .47$, F (2, 72) = 31.3, $p < .001$) when the independent variables included the pre-module survey and exposure to the jobs module, which means students who were exposed to the jobs module.

The -0.67 coefficient for material goals construct can be interpreted to mean that those who were exposed to the jobs module had a decrease in the post-module score by -0.67 compared to those who were in the control group. Similarly, what this indicates is also a more positive change in perception in regards to general job applicability towards material goals. After exposure to the jobs video module, students more readily agreed that a competitive salary or material success are obtainable with a WST degree. Results from the multiple regression analysis for this construct indicate the same predictors in the model explained 67% of the variance in post material goals ($R^2 = .67$, F (2, 72) = 71.4, $p < .001$).

The personal goals construct shows a -0.41 change in score compared to those who participated in the control group. What this indicates is that students displayed a more positive view of the general job applicability of the degree and its connection to personal goals and careers after participating in the innovation. Results from the multiple regression analysis for this construct indicate the predictors in the model explained 64% increase in variance ($R^2 = .64$, F (2,72) = 63.5, $p < .001$).

Finally, for the career goals construct the -0.51 coefficient means that being exposed to the jobs video module led to a decrease in the post-module score on the career goals construct compared to those who were not. This again implies that these students

now have a more useful view about the general career applicability of the degree and more readily think that a prestigious title or job security, for example, are more plausible. The multiple regression analysis for career goals indicated these same predictors, explaining 58% of the variance in the posttest (R^2= .58, F (2, 72) = 49.6, *p* = .002).

The pre-score coefficients above show that exposure to the jobs module is not just the result of preexisting differences for students among the different conditions. In fact, these coefficients show the impact and isolate the effect of the jobs module. For example, looking at career goals construct you see that for every 1 change in the pretest you have a 0.71 change in the posttest. There is a similar magnitude for the other 3 constructs as well.

What these multiple regression results show is that those who were exposed to this innovation (the jobs condition) experienced an increased belief that the WST degree is indeed applicable to careers. As mentioned above, a decrease in each construct score represents an increase in that perception due to the design of the Likert scale. In summary, this data indicate that the job-related video module was effective in influencing students' perception of the career applicability of the WST degree in all 4 constructs.

Qualitative Analysis. The qualitative data used to answer this research includes interviews (3), open-ended questions on surveys (36) and extra credit responses (20). The interview and survey questions are listed in the appendix. For the extra credit assignment offered to students in WST 100, I posed a variety of questions in regards to the module they had participated in. Students responded to various prompts such as what surprised you most about your module? What if anything did you learn in this module? Did it

change your perspective pre to post survey? And finally, do you think the WST degree is useful?

This qualitative data and analysis below addresses the "how" of RQ1. When considering how this module impacted students' perceptions of job applicability and the WST degree common themes emerged from this data. These themes included 1) perceived limitations in terms of career applicability; 2) empowerment/ social change as a result of the degree.

Perceived limitations in career applicability of a WST major. The first common theme that students revealed across all forms of this qualitative data collection indicated a positive change in perceived limitations in terms of jobs offered to graduates of WST. For instance, in the extra credit assignment the data derived (which allows students to use their own words to describe their experience), shows student who responded to this module experienced a shift in perspective that was further supported by the quantitative results discussed above. Many students admitted they did not understand the wide array of pragmatic applications the degree has to offer prior to this innovation. For example, one student responded after participation in the innovation, "I am surprised at all of the opportunities there are with having a degree in Women's Studies." The word "surprised" was used commonly in discussion to reaction to this module. Multiple students wrote they were surprised the degree provided so many opportunities such as one who stated: "All the students featured had very diverse career paths, it really surprised me" another who referred to it as "wide variety of career paths" and finally one who wrote: "I didn't realize there was such a wide variety of uses." Many, after watching the video of alumni, stated that they were shocked by all you could do with the degree and one even wrote she

now thought that "A women's studies degree can distinguish your resume from others" or another who said "I no longer view WST as just a course but now as something helpful to people's lives and development of a career."

The survey revealed this same discussion of theme. When asked on the posttest what students thought of the module many reported they enjoyed the video and were pleasantly surprised at what they had learned. One student wrote: "I'm taken back by the range of jobs that are offered to people with WST majors." Another responded "It opened up a new world" and continued to later state "I wasn't expecting the video to be like this." Others wrote they now see the degree as something that can "get them far in life," "can make you more distinguished in the workforce" and many stated they were now "more interested" in the major.

Again, on the posttest, when asked to write in what students thought the most important ideas found in the module overwhelmingly and again, perhaps not surprisingly, students discussed that they had no idea that WST could allow them to obtain so many different career goals. They claimed to be "open-minded" or as one said "I will do more research before assuming something based on a title."

Of the students who participated in the interviews they all also responded that this module did have an impact on their perception of the degree and they too did not realize all the potential career paths, that this too was surprising to them. Anne responded she didn't major in WST but now wanted to minor. She responded, "The stories of the alumni were extremely memorable" and that she now sees the degree as a "route to multiple things, to many diverse careers." Emi responded similarly after watching the video on job applicability and said she too wanted to minor. She found the video "very helpful" and

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said she "enjoyed the divergent careers paths." John said he would not want to major in WST, for his major was something he has always wanted to pursue, but that he now saw that the WST degree "affords multiple career paths beyond what was social work or teaching."

It was evident that prior to participation in this module the field of WST was something that students perceived very few or limited career paths (not high paying) for or they know nothing about it at all.

Empowerment and Social Change. The second common theme that arose from this data analysis included students' discussion of power and social change in terms of the value of the degree. Students, on the extra credit assignment, wrote "the value of getting a WST degree is that you can have power to make change" or "the degree gives you the ability to make something happen." One student echoed this by writing: "The degree is valuable especially for those who want to further equality." The answers like this were countless.

In fact, on the posttest for this module, students were asked if they considered a women's studies degree to be a symbol of power. Over 75%, (27 of the 36 students) responded they either highly agreed or agreed with this statement. When asked what they remembered most about this module one student in the posttest wrote "That one can achieve career goals as well as bring about change in society."

Similarly, in the interviews Anne stated the degree to some "could be seen as a risk but that it allows for empowerment and change and divergent career paths." Emi responded that "WST is very powerful and is very practical" giving examples of work in advocacy and sexual assault.

While it is clear that what emerged from this data collection is that students, as mentioned in this previous section, not only didn't realize the career paths were so diverse, with one commenting you could get a job in anything "from corporate America to a makeup artist" but they also connected the degree with social activism even within these larger corporate entities. Women's Studies arose from a social movement and at the heart of the program is activism so it is not surprising that students would connect these two no matter the profession.

In conclusion, and as discussed above, many common themes arose from this data including perceiving the degree in a more applied way, recognizing the divergent career paths that are available for graduates as well as the association with empowerment and the ability to create change. In summary, we see the influence this module had on student's perception of potential career applicability as similarly shown in the quantitative section. We find the quantitative and qualitative results for RQ 1 are consistent and mutually supportive of one another.

Research Question Two

Research questions two asks, among students taking a course in women's studies, how and to what extent does participation in the module regarding feminism impact a student's perceptions of the value of the women's studies degree? RQ 2 will be answered using quantitative data from the surveys (40 feminism, 39 for control) and qualitative data from open ended questions (40) on the surveys, interviews (3) and extra credit responses (29).

Quantitative Analysis. As I did with RQ 1, I answered RQ 2 in part by estimating a regression for each Feminism construct mean score with the individual

posttest mean score in the construct as the dependent variable and the pretest and

condition (the dummy variable indicating exposure to the feminist module) as the

independent variable. This will help to address the "to what extent" part of RQ2.

Table 7 below provides the coefficients and the standard error for the two

independent variables in predicting the posttest. Further discussion of these results is

provided below.

Table 7.

Coefficients and Standard Error per constructs within feminist module

Construct	COEFFICIENTS (Standard Error in parentheses)	
	Pre-survey	Condition
		In feminist module
Feminist Identity	0.90	-0.07
	(0.06)	(0.08)
Feminist Knowledge	0.76	-0.05
	(0.07)	(0.09)
Feminist Media	0.68	-0.02
	(0.10)	(0.10)

Because of the very low difference in the mean construct scores between students

who were exposed to the feminist module and those who were not, Table 7 demonstrates

that there was not a discernable difference in the posttest construct scores for those

students that participated in the feminist module. Therefore, unlike with the jobs module,

students who participated in this treatment group did not show a meaningful difference in

survey scores in comparison with the control group and did not provide evidence that a better understanding of feminism was provided.

This table summarizes the results of the multiple regression analysis for the feminist constructs. Analysis was on three constructs: 1) identity; 2) knowledge; and 3) media.

The models had reasonable success in explaining the variation on the post-module scores in the feminism-related constructs, but that was driven mostly by the pre-module score, not whether a student was exposed to the feminism video module. The multiple regression for the identity feminist construct accounted for 75% of the variance in the posttest ($R^2 = .75$, F (2, 76) = 112.4, $p = .4$). The multiple regression for the feminist knowledge construct indicated the predictors in the model of pre knowledge feminist explained 62% of the variance in the posttest ($R^2 = .62$, F (2, 76) = 60.9, $p = .9$). Similarly, the multiple regression analysis for the pre media feminist construct explained 40% of the variance in post media feminist ($R^2 = .40$, F (2,76) = 24.9, $p = .9$).

Taken together this data does not show that being exposed to the feminist module led to a better understanding of feminism. Perhaps, not surprisingly, because students were already enrolled in a WST course and there may be a selection bias, we would expect a significantly higher understanding of feminist principles for students enrolling in our course and therefore the potential impact of a feminist module would be mitigated by their prior experience and understanding of those values. As discussed above, there appeared to be no meaningful changes pretest to posttest in general for these modules as displayed in both Table 5 and the regression analysis as we account for the condition. In

summary, this indicates that the feminist condition was not successful in predicting or explaining variance in any of the post feminist constructs.

Qualitative Analysis. The qualitative data showed similar findings to the surveys. Overwhelmingly the students who participated in this study whether via interviews, surveys or the extra credit assignment stated that the video did not really change their perception or their answers pre to posttest. However, it was clear that students related to the feminist principles presented in the module and from this data two common themes emerged in terms of claiming feminism: 1) importance and 2) stigma.

Claiming feminism/ Importance. A number of words and phrases were commonly used throughout the surveys, extra credit assignment and interviews. While students overwhelmingly reported that this module did not change their perception, many common themes still arose. Words like relevant, significant and important really stood out in the coding. Students stated that the discussion of feminism presented in the module was an important one, a great reminder of the movements and their accomplishments, and of course still relevant today. It was evident that this video clearly meant something, a source of empowerment, reinforcing principals that already held true. One student on the extra credit assignment wrote: "I was surprised by the feeling of empowerment I had watching the video." Another wrote: "WST and this video represent empowerment"

Similarly, as the quantitative data above also showed, students did not seem, according to what they were reporting, to have a meaningful change in perception though their connection to feminism is clear. For example, on the extra credit assignment one stated: "I really liked the discussion of feminism but it was not new content and I really didn't learn anything new." She continued to write "this is an important topic, but not a

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new one." Many others expressed similar statements such as "I already consider myself a feminist" or "a lot of this content I already learned in my WST classes." More wrote: "It didn't change my answers but it was an important reminder" or "the perceptions I held on the questions stayed the same before and after the video, my answers on feminism were positive and remained positive after the video."

Similarly, on the posttest for the feminist module when students were asked about the video and the representations of feminism and its impact one responded "My opinions about feminism and this class have not changed." Another said, "Amazing! I agreed 100% with all of the comments of what a feminist is." And finally, "It made me really happy that there are so many out there like me who think the same things I do about women's rights" that student later goes on to scribe "but it did not change my answers."

The 3 students who were interviewed after participating in the module on feminism also reinforced many of these same ideals. Marie when asked about whether or not the module changed her perception pretest to posttest she responded: "Not really, it was the same message about feminism that I already knew, I gave the same answers pre and posttest." KK had a similar response stating: "It didn't change my attitude, the video backed up what I already thought." Susan stated in terms of a change in attitude after the innovation: "No, I don't think so. I found it encouraging, but yeah, pretty much what I think and my philosophies."

In summary, these students overwhelmingly consider themselves feminist (about 90% of the respondents claimed this), they recognize its importance, but it did not change their perception. As mentioned earlier this is not surprising given these students were

already enrolled in a WST course and already likely have a higher understanding of feminist principles.

Claiming Feminism/ Stigma. One student summed it up nicely on the extra credit assignment when she wrote: "I see many women who think feminism is a bad word. Not just young girls but grown women" she continues on to say "it is such a stigmatized word." While overwhelmingly students who participated in this module all seemed to either readily claim feminism or said they agreed with its principles they also recognized the stigma attached to it and the backlash that may come with claiming it. On the extra credit assignment one student wrote: "This video reinforced that feminism does not constitute negative connotations." One stated: "I now feel more strongly about loving myself as a feminist and labeling myself this way in front of my peers without concern of backlash." This concern was echoed by another who wrote: "this video really had me thinking about how feminism may affect my future and even my job." Even on the posttest students claimed: "People have a misunderstanding of what feminism is. Feminists are not man-hating angry women, they just want equality for all' or "there should be no stigma or shame for calling yourself one."

When further probed about the materials presented in this treatment group one common word used repeatedly was "respect." Students stated they were surprised and excited to see celebrities in the video claiming feminism even though there is a stigma attached to it that could impact their career. In fact, on the survey when asked if they agreed with the statement that female celebrities often do not claim they are feminist because of the stigma attached only 13 of the 41 students found this to be false. Similarly, 85% of these students reported seeing negative views about feminism on social media.

Students who were interviewed reported similar stories. Marie said what really stuck out was the celebrities that spoke on behalf of it. She said, when speaking of Emma Watson, "Often celebrities don't speak on the position of feminism" and continued in the interview to later say she had "respect for these celebrities." Similarly, on the extra credit assignment and again from a student on the survey, both wrote they were surprised to see Cardi B discussing feminism. Finally, one student wrote what she found most valuable in the video was the small snip of malala yousafzai and "how you shouldn't be afraid to call yourself a feminist."

Again, students resonated with these very high profile, public figures readily claiming the word. One student on the survey wrote: "more and more celebrities are painting feminism to be a good thing instead of people giving it a negative connotation."

One student stated on the extra credit assignment, "The video only reinforced ideas and perceptions I already had" another said "but I liked seeing Emma Watson discuss this" or "I liked seeing men and women, black or white, gay or straight claiming feminism." Students admired that these celebrities did not fear the backlash.

In conclusion, while the module may not have changed their perception, their support did indicate their sense of connection and the importance of claiming feminism no matter what their standing in the world. Similarly, as we saw with RQ 1, here we also see the quantitative and qualitative findings for RQ 2 are consistent and mutually supportive of one another.

Research Question Three

Research question 3 asks, how does one's social location interact with the findings of RQ's 1 & 2? RQ 3 will focus solely on the jobs constructs. By adding in the

demographic variables to the equations used for both RQ's 1 and 2 (with dummy variables for first generation, gender, and race), I answer RQ 3 in part with an expanded regression, by seeing how the coefficient for the treatment and the total R^2 change in a regression.

      Quantitative Analysis. Because there were no clear meaningful changes in the constructs on feminist identity as a result of exposure to the feminism modules, here I focus solely on the constructs tied to job applicability. Across all job modules as the quantitative data above suggests, differences between post-module surveys among students exposed to the jobs module and students in the unrelated module proved discernable. Multiple regression analysis was used to test if social location helped predict participants' perceptions of the value of a WST degree. Social identifiers for gender, first generation, and race categories were added for each construct regression using dummy variables: a 1=male variable, a 1=first-generation college student variable, and a 1=student of color variable. With each demographic variable, I also constructed an interaction term, where 1 represents *both* being in the jobs module and *also* being male, a first-generation college student, or a student of color (for different regressions). I then compared the simpler regression with just the pre-module survey and exposure to the jobs module with an expanded regression that included one demographic dummy variable and its associated interaction term. The result was nine comparisons, three each (for gender, first-generation status, and race) per jobs applicability construct. After running the multiple regression analysis across all jobs constructs and each social identifier, two interesting results are notable, the interaction with gender around the material goals construct and the interaction with race around the personal goals construct.

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Table 8 below displays the material goals construct with the social identifier of gender. Within Table 8, Model 1 displays the multiple regression analysis of the pre material goals module and condition variables predicting the post material goals module score. Model 2 displays the multiple regression test of the pre material goals module and condition plus the social identifiers (gender) and the interaction effect of the pre jobs module and the social identifier on the post jobs module score. As mentioned above, pre material goals score was meaningful as a predictor and continued to remain meaningful in the post material goals score when adjusting for gender (male).

Model 1 shows the basic regression with the dummy variable for the student's being male but without interaction terms. Here the construct for material goals was meaningful, and we see a -0.65 change for those exposed to the jobs video module compared to those who were not exposed to the jobs module. Results from the multiple regression analysis indicate the predictors in Model 1 explained 67% of the variance in the post material goals ($R^2 = .67$, $F(2, 72) = 71.4$, $p < .001$), when the independent variables includes the pre material goals score, gender, and which module the student was exposed to. This, similar to the results we see in RQ #1, still indicating a more positive attitude for those exposed to the jobs module in regards to applicability of the degree in terms of securing a career and obtaining material goals. Model 1 shows a positive predictive relationship between being male and the post-module material goals score, or a *worse* perception of the ability of WST majors to provide a career that meets participants' material goals. However, the large standard error of the coefficient for gender means that apparent positive relationship could well be an artifact of sampling, or is not statistically significant in a generalizable sense.

Model 2 shows the expanded regression with the dummy variable for the student's being male and also the interaction term (being male and in the jobs module). In this model, the pre material goals measure continued to have a discernible influence on the post material goals score when also adjusting for gender (male). For men, the effect of being in the jobs module is represented by the -0.23 coefficient, the sum of the interaction coefficient and the jobs module coefficient. This indicates the increasing magnitude for Model 2 is an effect specific to the women from this sample. Therefore, the women who participated had a greater impact and more readily endorsed the materials within the module, shown with the -0.81 difference, which is a lower (but greater-magnitude) effect than for men. The multiple regression analysis for the material goals construct and male indicated the predictors in this model explained 69% of the variance in the posttest (R^2 = .69, $F(4, 70) = 39.2$, $p < .05$). Overall, while both women and men, after participation in the jobs module, now see that material success is more plausible with a WST degree, the jobs module shifted the perceptions of women more forcefully than for men.

Table 8.

Coefficients and standard error within the material goals construct factoring gender.

Variable	Coefficients (Standard Error in parentheses)	
	Model 1	**Model 2**
Pre-survey material goals	**0.82**	**0.83**
	(0.08)	(0.08)
Male	0.19	-0.06
	(0.14)	(0.19)
In jobs module (condition)	**-0.65**	**-0.81**
	(0.13)	(0.15)
In jobs module AND male		**0.58**
		(0.28)
R^2	.67	.69
Adjusted R^2	.66	.67
Note: bold-faced coefficients have $p < .05$		

The next finding to report when looking for an interaction between social identifiers and the jobs module was seen in the personal goals construct when examining race. Table 9 below displays regressions for the personal goals construct with the social identifier of race in a manner like Table 8. Model 1 displays the multiple regression with the pre-module personal goals score, student-of-color dummy variable, and exposure to the job video module predicting the post-module personal goals score. Model 2 is the multiple regression with the pre-module personal goals score, student-of-color, and exposure to the job module plus the interaction of the race and exposure-to-jobs-module variable.

Model 1 shows the basic regression with the dummy variable for the students of color but without interaction terms. Here the coefficient tied to exposure to jobs module was discernibly different from zero, and we see a -0.40 change for those exposed to the

jobs video module compared to those who were not exposed to the jobs module. This means that the benefits for perceptions of the WST degree for personal goals in a career held true after entering race as a factor. The multiple regression analysis for the personal goals construct controlling for the condition in Model 1 indicate the predictors in this model account for 64% of the variance ($R^2 = .64$, F (3, 71) = 42.2, $p < .002$). Here the results indicate the jobs module is relevant in predicting the post-module score on the personal goals construct.

That changes with an interaction term. Model 2 shows the expanded regression with the dummy variable for race with the interaction terms. In this model the coefficient for being in the jobs module is -0.24 for white students and -0.54 for students of color (adding up the jobs-module and the interaction coefficient). That appears a meaningful change in the personal goals construct for both groups of students. However, the standard error for both coefficients is too large. What this indicates is that for students of color, in terms of intellectual curiosity, personal goals and preparing for future educational opportunities in relation to the WST degree, that for this group of students adding the information about race does not add to what we know about the effect of exposure to the jobs video module. The multiple regression analysis for the personal goals construct and race indicated the predictors in this model explained 65% of the variance ($R^2 = .65$, F (4, 70) = 32.1, $p = .3$).

Table 9.

Coefficients and standard error within the personal goals construct factoring race.

Variable	Coefficients (Standard Error in parentheses)	
	Model 1	Model 2
Pre-survey personal goals	**0.78**	**0.79**
	(0.08)	(0.08)
Students of color	-0.09	0.06
	(0.13)	(0.18)
In jobs module (condition)	**-0.40**	-0.24
	(0.13)	(0.19)
In jobs module AND students of color		-0.30
		(0.26)
R^2	.64	.65
Adjusted R^2	.63	.63
Note: bold-faced coefficients have $p < .05$		

Qualitative Analysis/Gender. It is not surprising that we see women more strongly endorsing the materials presented in the material goals section and its relationship to gender. Financial security, material success, competitive salary were all hot topics in this section. As I mentioned in chapter 1 in preliminary research, in terms of what is most important about students' future careers many students in prior cycles of research emphasized their focus on money, stating priorities such as "financial stability," "high salaries" and "financial freedom." Men, however, often see this as of higher importance than women as discussed in the literature in Chapter 2. Interestingly, on the posttest for the job applicability module, 26 of the 36 students said they either agreed or strongly agreed that the WST degree would provide financial security. However, of the 36 who participated in this module, 27 identified themselves as women and 9 as men. And while the majority of my interviewees post innovation were also female, it was

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interesting that my one male interviewee (John) did mention the two jobs he associated with WST were social work and teaching, both of which are not seen as high paying careers.

Qualitative Analysis/Race. My students of color, via interviews, did not indicate that any particular construct in the job module was limiting to them. Three of my interviewees identified as students of color, however only 1 participated in the job module. During the discussions of the major these students did not mention limitations in terms of personal fulfillment. There could many reasons this particular construct on personal goals was not impactful, which will be further discussed in Chapter 5.

Summary

The results and analysis of both quantitative and qualitative data collected were discussed according to each research question. For RQ 1 many common themes arose from the data including perceiving the degree in a more applied way and recognizing the divergent career paths that are available for graduates. The module on job applicability overall had an impact on students' perception of potential career applicability and showed discernable change for those who participated in this condition. The quantitative and qualitative results for this question were consistent and mutually supportive of one another. Similarly, for RQ 2 the quantitative and qualitative data also revealed similar findings and were mutually consistent with each other. While being exposed to the feminist module did not provide evidence that a better understanding of feminism was

provided, it was clear that students already related to the feminist principles presented in the module.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION

This study sought to develop and test innovations that might address and redefine the misconceptions students have in regards to the selection of a Women and Gender Studies (WST) degree. My project's goals were to identify factors and barriers which discourage students from selecting a major in our program and develop and test innovations that have the potential to ameliorate these factors. As discussed earlier, my experience initially suggested that four factors potentially accounted for the discrepancy between our high enrollment numbers and low major numbers. These included the following: 1) late exposure to the field; 2) a perceived lack of applicability to one's career; 3) limited flexibility in shifting one's program of study; and 4) social attitudes towards feminism as a political movement. However, further cycles of research found two of these areas most salient: perceptions of feminism and job applicability.

I expected that exposure to these modules would change students' perceptions about the applicability of the WST degree and provide an overall better understanding of the degree. The quantitative and qualitative data and analysis in Chapter 4 reveal that, while students who participated in the jobs module may have an overall better understanding of the WST degree in relation to career applicability, the students who participated in the feminism module, even though reminded of feminist values, did not demonstrate changed perceptions of the degree.

The Feminist Module

First, the feminist module did not prove effective in changing students' perceptions or provide evidence of a better understanding of feminism. As stated previously, because students already were enrolled in a WST course we might expect a significantly higher understanding of feminist principles. Students enrolling in our courses largely already identify themselves as feminists or are at the very least are open to its principles. This prior experience and understanding of those values might mitigate their response.

Secondly, the innovation for this class was run mid-semester when students already have been exposed to many of these ideas and concepts. Even if students did not identify as feminists, they did not find this content new or surprising. The courses from which the participant pools were recruited, all discuss the importance of feminism and the contributions of the respective movements. As students overwhelmingly mentioned in all forms of my data collection, the content in this feminist module was not new but rather reinforced curriculum and ideas they already were previously exposed to.

Finally, the cultural climate, and more specifically, social attitudes towards feminism as a political movement have shifted during my research. As I mentioned in Chapter 1, with respect to the politicized nature of feminism, its reputation, and whether or not the backlash against feminism discouraged students from selecting a major in WST, when asked about feminism in a prior cycle of research (2016) the survey (n=78) indicated that 45% either did not consider themselves a feminist or remained in a neutral state. However, during the innovation, over two years later, of the 41 students who

participated 35 either strongly agreed or agreed they consider themselves feminist, this is over 85%.

Why did this shift happen? A number of factors have shifted. One is the political climate and the election of a president who has been seen as a threat to women's rights and openly accused of sexual misconduct. In fact, students mentioned this change in climate on the surveys with one stating: "With the current presidency and all of the talk about women, people are starting to pay more attention to women within society." Also, movements such as #MeToo and others have gained momentum and popularity. One student on the pretest survey wrote of the movement: "Feminist movements, such as the #METOOMOVEMENT, have brought the whole world together for a common cause, that is equality in the society. The #MeToo movement is great, and it makes me happy that this hashtag is so famous and powerful." Another wrote, "Feminism has come to the world stage. There is no going back. The marches are motivating and it is inspiring to see women; young and old, march in solidarity. In fact, students during the innovation reported seeing more people claiming feminism in the media and 73% of these students claimed the media shows feminism in a positive light. For example, one student wrote on the pretest "I feel like it has been good because more and more celebrities are painting feminism to be a good thing instead of people giving it a negative connotation."

The national discourse around feminism has changed. We have a record number of women running for office and discussion about sexual harassment and feminism is more prominent than ever in the headlines. For example, *CNN* (Enda, 2017) had a headline that reads, "Donald Trump is the best--and worst—thing that's happened to modern American Feminism," and that he is "bad for women…but great for the women's

movement." They argue he has "galvanized women like no other president." *Fashion Magazine* (Reynolds, 2017) asks, "Is feminism more relevant today following Trumps election?" In fact, when subscribers of this magazine were asked in a poll if feminism is more relevant today following Trump's election, 71% of respondents stated yes. Clearly the f word has been on the minds of many.

Students are also heavily exposed to and participate in social media. While social media is more tailored and students belong often to groups in which they subscribe (which is commonly people of similar interests/values), over 80% claimed on the post-test that new media is a tool of empowerment. This new media is powerful in that people can express their own personal views and beliefs and disseminate them to large audiences. This also allows for large numbers of people to be exposed to ideas of feminism and issues important to the movement. These numbers show that feminism may no longer carry as much stigma now that it receives more air time.

The Jobs Module

The jobs module, on the other hand, did prove effective in changing students' perceptions about WST and the career applicability of the degree. All forms of data collection demonstrated that students knew little about the divergent career paths available to WST graduates. In previous cycles of research, even majors in the program could provide very few examples of the types of jobs they might secure with the degree. This shows that participation and exposure to content on student success stories and career paths may positively influence students' perception of the degree and could lead to an increase in majors. In a large setting such as ASU, where our program is serving so

many students in the classroom, our major's numbers should be much more robust. The divergent career paths followed by our graduates demonstrate the applicability of the degree to a wide range of professional and advanced degree placements, and this module proved effective in communicating this to students.

Intersectionality

Intersectionality may help explain why some students with certain background characteristics take a risk in having a degree that many people may view as impractical, and may help to identify the factors that create these differences. An intersectional framework suggests that first generation students and particularly male students, as opposed to students from privileged backgrounds, may be pressured to choose a practical degree perceived to provide a higher income. As mentioned, the college degree may be perceived to be the only opportunity for upward social mobility. Mullen (2014) in her research clearly found this to be a factor. Although the quantitative data did not reveal any major findings for first-generation students, gender was a factor for the material goals construct. This was seen in both the interviews as well as the surveys. Again, this finding is not surprising. This data suggests that while both men and women changed perceptions after participating in the jobs module for the material goals construct, women demonstrated a greater change. This result could be for a variety reasons. Oschensfeld (2014) and Morgan (2008) show in their research that women often pick fields that pay less and are more associated with work gendered feminine, such as education. Women (white but often not women of color) are socialized to take different types of jobs, where men often feel pressured to hold jobs with high-paying salaries. These gender stereotypes

are further perpetuated and reinforced and became a major factor when students are considering majors. Without further investigating race or class and considering how these social factors and structures intersect, it is difficult to speculate why this could have occurred.

In terms of race and the personal goals construct not being meaningful, this finding was not anticipated, and there was no qualitative data to further analyze or discuss it. However, personal fulfillment in terms of careers for students of color looks different, as it has historically, based on a number of factors. Weiler (1997) discusses how the complex realities of women's career choices are not taken into account in terms of career development and that economic survival is the main motivation for getting a job, particularly for women of color. This would lead them to view a degree such as WST not personally fulfilling and possibly in turn not economically meaningful. These women are also taught to not put themselves first, but rather their community and family. These cultural values are passed down through generations where women are taught to not think in individual terms. Decisions women make about their careers paths are shaped by society and their community and the pressures that lie within.

In retrospect, using intersectionality and relying more heavily on the quantitative data may not have been the most useful tool. As Metso and Le Feuvre (2006) argue, "This type of data produces explanations of social structures that take into account neither the consciousness of the subjects studied nor the meanings of their experiences for these subjects" (p. 35). Again, this array remains significant and needs more research, particularly further qualitative research.

Availability Bias

An availability heuristic was one of the theoretical perspectives framing the research, to help further explain the disparities between degrees and how students may ascribe meaning to them. This behavior can influence major selection in many ways. Marchbank and Letherby (2006) found negative stereotypes of WST to be alive and well and expressed mostly by students who had no prior experience in the field. This suggests that availability bias may also play a significant role in how students perceive the practicality of a WST degree, both in terms of its relationship to feminism as well as its career applicability. While the support of the students in the feminist module indicated their sense of connection and importance in claiming feminism it appears as if they still did not perceive the degree in a more applied or practical way. They discussed the degree as having the ability to create change or a source of empowerment but may not see it as a viable route towards career development.

As discussed in Chapter 2, if a student cannot readily think of an example of a job one can secure with a WST degree, this gap might well translate to perceptions of the degree being impractical or of little worth. This reliance on an immediate example coming to mind proves problematic for an untraditional field so often misunderstood as WST is. This was true for the job applicability model and showed why this innovation was successful. These students initially either had no idea or relied on stereotypes when asked about the types of jobs one might secure with a WST degree. This was clearly present in the pretests and evident throughout the interviews in all the cycles of research. Time and again they mentioned few careers. Once students were exposed to the

accomplishments and divergent career paths of graduates their perceptions quickly changed. For example, one student confessed in the posttest "I will do more research before assuming something based on a title".

Limitations

As with any research project, there are always limitations. The limitations of this study include the following: 1) sparse literature related to the field; 2) study attrition rates; 3) limited number of students to conduct a thorough intersectional analysis; 4) the need for more qualitative data to address unexpected results; and 5) short term measure limitations.

As shown by Olzak and Kangas (2008), interdisciplinary programs such as Women's Studies, Ethnic Studies, and others, have faced challenges in attracting majors to their respective fields. One limitation, in terms of my initial research, was solely relying on literature surrounding majors outside of the field because so little exists in WST.

Study attrition and sample size was a second limitation. Many students who participated in the pretest did not participate in the posttest. Due to this, the final number of students who participated in the entire innovation the analysis resulted in a smaller sample size than anticipated. This limited both my quantitative and qualitative results, for a smaller pool of students who participated in surveys equated to a smaller population of students willing to interview and more limited opportunities to identify intersectional phenomena in quantitative results.

Another limitation pertained to my interviews, both in the number I was able to conduct as well as the questions asked. Uncertain of the quantitative results since a convergent mixed methods approach was used, some of my results were not addressed in the interviews and lack the expressive data required for analysis. For example, questions for results that could not be anticipated, such as particular job constructs' not proving impactful for students of color and what could account for this difference needs to be further researched. A true intersectional analysis would require more thorough demographic analysis and qualitative data.

And finally, the short-term measure of the survey and erosion effect comprise important limitations. The time constraints of this study and the fact that students completed this innovation in one setting are limiting. The survey provided a reasonable measure and the ability to show immediate change in perception; however, the inability to continue to measure how this may later influence students' major decisions is an important consideration. We may see an erosion of the observed effects, due to the fact that if students were given this survey again at a later date, we may not see the same change in perception. In fact, we expect it to be smaller. Also, the ability to follow students over their academic career and to see if major selection changes occur could be extremely useful but would require a much larger time commitment.

Future Cycles of Research and Transferability

In future cycles of research, it may be beneficial to narrow the scope. First, only the jobs module would be implemented to a much larger population of students. Secondly, this innovation would be run the first week of classes before students are

exposed to any content in class in regards to WST. Next, a larger sample size would equate to a much larger group of students recruited for interviews questions that can better address an intersectional approach with richer qualitative data. And finally, I would follow students over their academic careers to see major selections and/or changes to major.

In terms of following students over their academic careers it may also be beneficial to recruit participants solely from the WST 100 classes which attracts a larger population of freshman in comparison to the other upper division courses from which I recruit. Freshman may be more likely to change their majors as they are just beginning their academic careers and forming perceptions about applicability of majors. Freshman students also are unlikely to have had exposure to WST content, unlike upper-division students who have already fulfilled prerequisites.

Other WST programs could easily replicate this process. Women's Studies programs nationwide face similar problems in terms of recruiting new majors in the same way traditional programs do. I also believe, as the literature and this innovation suggest, that perceived job placement is a mental roadblock for students choosing the major. In terms of transferability, I would recommend two choices: 1) the use of just the jobs module and 2) recreate this jobs module with video and testimony of their own alumni.

Conclusion

Students' perception of the link between job applicability and major selection proves to be strong in all cycles of my research. I used two theoretical frameworks, intersectionality and availability bias, to help explain the disparities between degrees and

how students ascribe meaning to them. The pedagogical commitments of our program may explain why students are so drawn to our classes to begin with, however it was unclear, before I began this project, why they chose not to major. This research is significant because it identified just that. For those who work in the field of WST it is clear the many practical ways a degree in the field enhances career development. My research shows that students exposed to this innovation, specifically the jobs module, experienced an increased belief that the WST degree is indeed applicable to career development and that students initially relied on little to no knowledge. This is significant in a sociological sense because this lack of career knowledge about alumni has been an obstacle for our program, and intervening in student perceptions may allow for the increase of majors.

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APPENDIX A

SURVEY

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this survey. We are interested in learning more about your knowledge, attitudes, and beliefs regarding the Women and Gender Studies major as well as your ideas about feminism. We anticipate the survey will take about 20 minutes.

Please create a unique ID (you will use this same ID in the follow up survey). Please enter the first three letters of your mother's maiden name followed by the last four digits of your phone number (no spaces):_____

Section A

A1) A women's studies degree is a practical degree.
Strongly Agree   Agree   Undecided Disagree   Strongly Disagree

A2) A women's studies degree is relevant today.
Strongly Agree   Agree   Undecided Disagree   Strongly Disagree

Section B

B1) A women's studies degree is something I have interest majoring in.
Strongly Agree   Agree   Undecided Disagree   Strongly Disagree

B2) A women's studies degree would satisfy my intellectual curiosity.
Strongly Agree   Agree   Undecided Disagree   Strongly Disagree

B3) A women's studies degree would allow me to create change in society.
Strongly Agree   Agree   Undecided Disagree   Strongly Disagree

B4) A women's studies degree would allow me to satisfy my own personal goals.
Strongly Agree   Agree   Undecided Disagree   Strongly Disagree

B5) A women's studies degree would help prepare myself for future educational opportunities.
Strongly Agree   Agree   Undecided Disagree   Strongly Disagree

Section C
C1) A women's studies degree would give me financial security.
Strongly Agree   Agree   Undecided Disagree   Strongly Disagree

C2) A women's studies degree would allow me to obtain material goals (new home, car, etc.)
Strongly Agree   Agree   Undecided Disagree   Strongly Disagree

C3) A women's studies degree would lead me to a job with a competitive salary.
Strongly Agree   Agree   Undecided Disagree   Strongly Disagree

C4) A women's studies degree would help to provide me with a network to achieve material success.
Strongly Agree   Agree   Undecided Disagree   Strongly Disagree

C5) A women's studies degree is a symbol of power.
Strongly Agree   Agree   Undecided Disagree   Strongly Disagree

Section D

D1) A women's studies degree allows for a broad range of job possibilities.
Strongly Agree   Agree   Undecided Disagree   Strongly Disagree

D2) A women's studies degree has relevance to my career goals.
Strongly Agree   Agree   Undecided Disagree   Strongly Disagree

D3) A women's studies degree would allow me to combine my passions with my career trajectory.
Strongly Agree   Agree   Undecided Disagree   Strongly Disagree

D4) A women's studies degree would help to provide job security.
Strongly Agree   Agree   Undecided Disagree   Strongly Disagree

D5) A women's studies degree would help to lead me to a job with a prestigious title.
Strongly Agree   Agree   Undecided Disagree   Strongly Disagree

D6) A women's studies degree would allow work life family balance.
Strongly Agree   Agree   Undecided Disagree   Strongly Disagree

D7) A women's studies degree would lead me to a job that would be engaging.
Strongly Agree   Agree   Undecided Disagree   Strongly Disagree

D8) A women's studies degree would lead me to a job that would be rewarding.
Strongly Agree   Agree   Undecided Disagree   Strongly Disagree

Section E

E1) I am interested in Women's Studies.
Strongly Agree   Agree   Undecided Disagree   Strongly Disagree

Section F

F1) I consider myself a feminist.
Strongly Agree   Agree   Undecided Disagree   Strongly Disagree

F2) I incorporate feminist principles into my life.
Strongly Agree   Agree   Undecided Disagree   Strongly Disagree

F4) I identify as a feminist, but not publicly.
Strongly Agree   Agree   Undecided Disagree   Strongly Disagree

F5) I feel comfortable identifying as a feminist only amongst family and friends.
Strongly Agree   Agree   Undecided Disagree   Strongly Disagree

F6) I feel comfortable identifying a feminist only around others who I know are feminist.
Strongly Agree   Agree   Undecided Disagree   Strongly Disagree

F8) I am sometimes reluctant to identify myself as a feminist because I fear it might limit my career opportunities.
Strongly Agree   Agree   Undecided Disagree   Strongly Disagree

F9)I am sometimes reluctant to identify myself as feminist because I fear it might limit my social network..
Strongly Agree   Agree   Undecided Disagree   Strongly Disagree

Section G

G1) Feminism focuses too much on anger.
Strongly Agree   Agree   Undecided Disagree   Strongly Disagree

G3) There are important connections between feminism and multiple identities (such as race, sexuality, ethnicity).
Strongly Agree   Agree   Undecided Disagree   Strongly Disagree

G4) Feminism is still relevant today.
Strongly Agree   Agree   Undecided Disagree   Strongly Disagree

G6) Feminism undermines relationships between men and women.
Strongly Agree   Agree   Undecided Disagree   Strongly Disagree

Section H

H1) Feminism has impacted the portrayal of women in the media.
Strongly Agree   Agree   Undecided Disagree   Strongly Disagree

H2) I have seen feminists often portrayed in the media.
Strongly Agree   Agree   Undecided Disagree   Strongly Disagree

H5) I have seen negative views about feminism expressed on social media (facebook, twitter, etc.)
Strongly Agree   Agree   Undecided Disagree   Strongly Disagree

H6) The new media is a tool for women's empowerment.
Strongly Agree   Agree   Undecided Disagree   Strongly Disagree

H7) The media has influenced my perception of feminism as a positive thing.
Strongly Agree   Agree   Undecided Disagree   Strongly Disagree

H9) Female celebrities often do not state claim that they are feminists because of the negative stereotypes associated with it.
Strongly Agree   Agree   Undecided Disagree   Strongly Disagree

Section I [Only for the pre-survey]

What is your gender?
        Man
        Woman
        Transgender
        Genderqueer/ non-conforming
        Other (if you wish please specify)

What is your race?
        American Indian or Alaskan Native
        Asian Pacific Islander
        Black or African American
        White / Caucasian
        Other:

What is your age?

Are you from Arizona?
        YES
        NO

Are you the first generation in your family to go to college?
>
> YES
>
> NO

This question is about the household you gre up in: What is the HIGHEST level of education of your parent(s)/guardian(s) or caretaker(s)?
>
> Grades 1-12
>
> High school or equivalent
>
> Some college or other postsecondary education, including training programs for adults
>
> Bachelor's degree
>
> Master's degree
>
> Doctoral or professional degree (MD, JD, etc.)

What year are you in college?
>
> Freshman
>
> Sophomore
>
> Junior
>
> Senior
>
> Graduate
>
> Other

What is your current major?

When did you choose your current major**?**
>
> Prior to Entering College
>
> Freshman year in college
>
> Sophomore year in college
>
> Junior year in college
>
> Senior year in college

Why did you choose that major?

Are you a double major?
>
> YES
>
> NO

What are you double majoring in?

Have you ever changed your major?
>
> YES
>
> NO

Are you an ASUOnline major?

     YES

     NO

Have you ever considered majoring in WST?

     YES

     NO

Why or why not? Please explain:

Are you a WST minor?

     YES

     NO

Is the WST course you are currently enrolled in online, in person or hybrid?

How many women's studies courses have you taken to date, including this semester?

How have current events (such as the January 2017 and January 2018 women's marches or the #METOOMOVEMENT) influenced your perception of feminism?

Has women's involvement in political activism in the past year overall been good or bad for women and more importantly, why?

APPENDIX B

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

CORE QUESTIONS

Is this your first WST course?

Have you ever considered majoring in women's studies? Why? Why not?

To what extent is women's studies a practical degree?

To what extent is it NOT a practical degree?

Are you a feminist?

Why did you say that?

Is that what your friends and family would say?

Do you remember the video you watched between the two surveys you took?

What do you remember about it?

What was good about it?

What was bad about it?

What did it make you think about?

POTENTIAL FOLLOW-UP QUESTIONS:

What is your current major?

Tell me how you came to choose that major?

Tell me what you see your degree as a route to?

How do you define feminism?

Tell me one word you feel describes feminism today?

Where did you learn about feminism?

To what extent do you consider yourself a feminist?

Do you think feminism is a dirty word? Are there stereotypes that persist?

Do you think others (your family, friends, peers, etc.) view feminism as a negative or

positive thing? For example, would you tell your employer you are a feminist?

Tell me why you are interested in women and gender studies?

What types of opportunities upon graduation are available with the WST degree?

Do you think other degrees would provide a better opportunity for you in terms of what you would like to do upon graduation?

To what extent is a WST degree still relevant today?