

Attributes of Women Feminists as Perceived by Management Students: An Investigation Using Lens Model

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Abstract

The empirical investigation attempts to identify significant dimensions of women’s feminism as perceived by management students. The study used an innovative technique of lens model to fulfil this objective. The critical dimensions of feminism were carefully chosen based on the review of literature. The dimensions included visionary, idealistic, public figure, influential, activist, dauntless and assertive. With the help of lens model design, male and female management students were presented with 35 pictorial profiles depicting different magnitude of these dimensions. For each profile, they were asked to indicate feminism magnitude on a 20-point judgment scale. The correlation coefficients were computed between magnitudes of a dimension and perceived feminism for each participant across 35 profiles. Critical examination of idiographic data showed a number of interesting features. The attribute of activist emerged as a significant dimension for both males and females. Males viewed visionary and assertive as significant dimensions whereas females regarded influential as a significant dimension of feminism. The findings were explained and implications were outlined.

Keywords: *Feminism, Lens model, Activist, Social judgment*

Introduction

Feminism refers to an intense awareness of identity as a woman and interest in feminine problems. The subjugation of women is a central fact of history and it is one of the main causes of all psychological and sociological imbalance in the community. Recent form of feminism that came to existence after 1960s has become an evolving socio-political movement (Eagly & Riger, 2014).

The feminist thought and feminist movement in the west have some influence on the women’s movement in the developing country like India. Yet, feminism as it exists today in India has gone beyond its western counterparts. In the Indian context, feminists have their own self-perception. However, from the viewpoint of scientific inquiry, it is appropriate to delineate the perceptions of other segments of the society with respect to a woman feminist. Since the identification of perception of all segments of the society is beyond the scope of a single empirical study, the perception of management students has been focused. In addition, an innovative method of lens model has been adopted to generate data for drawing conclusions.

The Technique of Lens Model

The empirical work relating to feminism has generated useful insights in the context of the attributes of feminists. From the standpoint, it is appropriate to make use of a robust scientific design to further investigate and enrich our understanding of the perceived

attributes of feminists. The works of Brunswik, the noted cross-cultural researcher, offers a unique body of knowledge in the context of sound methodology.

Brunswik's Representative Design

In the context of methodological problem in behavioural science, some of the effective techniques in research have remained underutilized. Brunswik's lens model represents such a scientific attempt. Although Brunswik explicated the model with a view to enhancing the scientific status of the field of cross-cultural research and increasing the predictability of human behaviour; this technique has all along been largely confined to academic discussion. Egon Brunswik's (1952) research belongs to the functionalist school concerned with the organism's adaptations to its environment. He postulated that the relationship between the organism and its environment rather than the nature of the organism itself should be the object of behavioural research.

His methodology opts for representative rather than systematic design of experiments and the idiographic statistical approach. He uses the idiographic statistical approach to indicate that each person's behaviour should meet a statistical test of regularity or dependability before the behavioural data can be defined as a function of situational variables. This idiographic approach is directly tied to representative design of experiments, when there are sufficient numbers of trials or situations to use significance tests. Brunswik's insistence on the study of individuals in sufficiently representative contexts provide the groundwork for development of specific theories of behaviour and appropriate tests of their validity, unlike traditional nomothetic approaches which was ensuring that the field would not become a cumulative science.

The lens model was initially developed by Egon Brunswik (1952, 1956) and later refined by Hammond (1966). Its unique contribution to behavioural science lies in suggesting a direction for appropriate focus of research and providing an experimental paradigm for such research. Though initially conceived as an approach to studying perception, the lens model has come to be recognized as a complete model of human behaviour. Its refinements and bulk of its applications have been realized within Hammond's social judgment theory. Before initiating the discussion, a word about social judgment theory is in order.

Social Judgment Theory

Many important decisions require information about past events, present events, expected future events or events that for reason other than time are not directly accessible to the decision maker. Decisions of this kind cannot be based on certain knowledge. They need to be based on inferences or judgments. Instances of these kinds of decision problems include weather forecasts, predictions in the changes of economic cycle and several cases of medical diagnosis. A common feature of these judgmental tasks which confronts the meteorologist, the economist and the physician is the information (cues) on which the judgments are based are not univocal indicators of the distant future. That means the judgments or the inferences are based on uncertain information. By combining information from various cues, it may be possible to make reasonable accurate inferences even though each cue in itself is only a poor predictor of the distant event.

According to Brunswik (1952), probabilistic functionalism, the capacity to utilize cues this way, is a fundamental aspect of the ability to adapt to an uncertain environment. This ability is brought about by repeated experiences with the functional relationship between the cues and the distal variables in the environment.

Judgments made by people are at the heart of the problem of discrimination in a society. To the extent that technologies exist for understanding human judgment, these technologies ought to be used to determine where judgment-related discrimination exists and help redress resulting injustices.

To the extent that unaided human judgment has played a central role in the development of the larger problem of discrimination, it may well be that aided human judgment can pay an equally central role in the resolution of that problem (Brehmer, 1979).

The Social Judgment Theory paradigm provides a conceptual framework directed primarily at making descriptions of overall relation between task variables, cognitive variables and social judgments.

For this reason, the paradigm rests on three fundamental variables: (1) the subject and the task must be always studied together, (2) task variables and cognitive variables should be described by parallel concepts and (3) the descriptions should contain functional relations rather than causal relations.

The paradigm thus provides data about empirical relations between the social judgments of people and the task variables and cognitive variables that determine what these judgments will be.

Keneth R. Hammond (1966) suggests that most human learning, particularly with regard to social adaptation, takes place in probabilistic circumstances. Individuals must learn to function and to adapt in situations in which the information available is not a completely reliable indication of social reality. It thus becomes imperative that the individual gets to identify the most useful sources of information and learn how to combine them in order to maximize his adaptation to the social environment. For example, wholly reliable rules or procedures are not available to determine who will be an effective leader, to whom to employ, and whom to trust etc. Moreover, since multitude of potential cues exists which might be useful in making a decision, the individual needs to carefully screen them, identify the most useful cues and in all likelihood come to use several of them in combination for making the most effective judgments.

Lens Model and its Application

The question of why lens model is the best can only be understood by referring to Figure 1. Y_e represent an unknown event which the judge would like to predict. All the judge has available to him are the cues, designated X_1, X_2, X_3, \dots in order to predict this event. For example, the unknown event (Y_e) might be future weather condition. The forecaster does not know exactly what the weather will be, but he makes a judgment based on certain cues like wind speed, temperature, barometric pressure etc. The right side of the lens model Y_s , represents the forecaster’s judgment about the weather. The wide arc connecting Y_s and Y_e , labelled r_a , indicates his or her success of achievement as a forecaster over a series of judgments that is the correlation between his or her judgments that is the correlation between his or her judgments and the actual weather conditions which occur (Beal, Gillis, & Stewart, 1978).

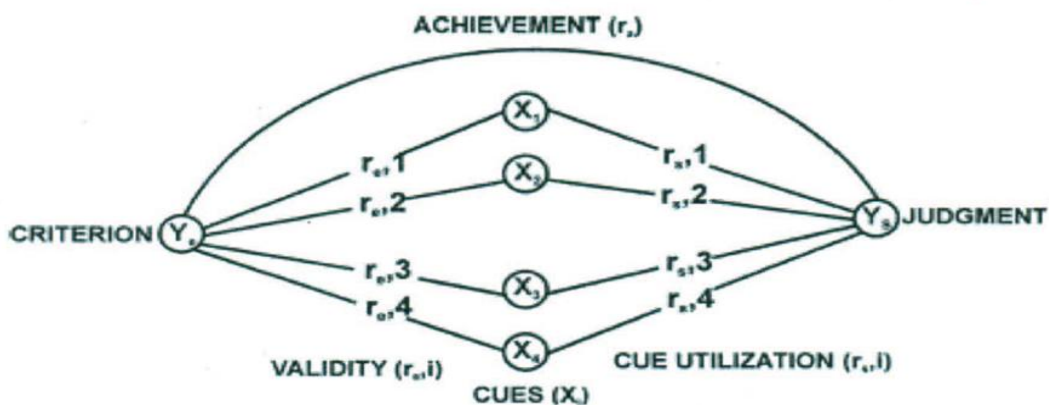


Figure1 : Lens Model

The lens model may be viewed as a representation of any situation in which individuals are making judgments about a criterion. They have several sources of information available, none of which predicts the criterion perfectly, although some sources of information may be more useful than others in predicting the event. The task of the individual is to identify the most useful sources of information and learn to employ them skilfully in making accurate judgments.

This method requires subjects to make inferences regarding the values of a criterion variable based on cues having uncertain relationships with the criterion. The degree of a subject's success of achievement can be effectively measured by correlating his responses with the actual values of the criterion.

Brunswik represented this in terms of a convex lens describing the relationship between human judgment, environmental cues and the object to be judged.

Variations of the model have also been applied to the study of situation where only one system, the cognitive system of the individual, is available for study. The model has also been adapted to the study of situations where three or more systems are interacting. The lens model has been stressed in the context of research methodology (Sahoo & Pattnaik, 2001) and management issues such as leadership (Sahoo & Mohanty, 2010).

It is thus essential to realize that Brunswik's lens model is a complete model of behaviour, whereas the lens model that has been used by social judgment theorists is a restricted version that applies to the judgment process. The model allows the investigator to confront individuals with tasks, which are formally representative of those they typically encounter. The capacity to adequately represent these conditions renders the model available with regard to considerable number of problems of interest to psychology.

An Overview of Literature on Feminism

The history of feminist politics and theory is often talked of as consisting of three "waves". First wave feminism is generally associated with the women's suffrage movements of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. First-wave feminism was characterized by a focus on officially mandated inequalities between men and women, such as the legal barring of women from voting, property rights, and employment and equal rights in marriage.

Second-wave feminism is associated with the women's liberation movements of the 1960s and 1970s. Second-wave feminists began concentrating on less "official" barriers to gender equality, addressing issues like sexuality, reproductive rights, women's roles in the home, and patriarchal culture. Finally, third-wave feminism is generally associated with feminist politics and movements that began in the 1980s and continue on to today. Third-wave feminists have critiqued universal notions of womanhood. Ultimately, feminism is broadly concerned with improving the conditions of women in society. Some commentators believe that the women's movement of the twentieth century were so successful to combating gender inequality that we have now entered a "post-feminist" era. While it is undeniable that feminist movement have made tremendous gains for women over the last 100 years, social scientific evidence demonstrates that there are still large inequalities between men and women when it comes areas like income and wealth, political power and opportunities, legal rights, sexual assault, rape, domestic violence, and overall status (Beauvoir, 1949; Deshpande, 2009).

The way a feminist has been depicted in the literature posits the activist elements. For example, Virginia Woolf in her book '*A room of one's own*', has depicted that women were not recognized as individuals or autonomous being. The loss of the freedom of the female mind is also reflected in other novels. Women are seen to be concerned with activism as a tool of social change. Women writers believe that art is a major weapon for social change.

Others have used synonymous expressions such as ‘public figure’, ‘dauntless’, ‘influential’ and ‘assertive’ in the context of advocating for women’s emancipation and empowerment.

Several models of feminism such as liberal feminism, socialist Marxist feminism, radical feminism, psychoanalytic feminism, cultural feminism, and radical feminism have implicated extreme views as well as liberal views. Feminists have also been depicted as visionary and idealist. There is no all-encompassing single feminist idea. Women writers in India such as Arundhati Roy, Mahasweta Devi and Shobha De also echo similar concerns through their novels. Thus, it may be difficult to portray the attributes of a feminist in view of changing temporal and cultural matrix. Yet, a cluster of attributes such as visionary, idealistic, public figure, influential, activist, dauntless and assertive is generated based on the review of the pertinent literature.

Rationale and Objective

As indicated in the foregoing section, the review of literature pertaining to feminism reveals a cluster of attributes of a woman feminist. These include the attributes of being visionary, idealistic, public figure, influential, activist, dauntless and assertive. In addition, a brainstorming session (conducted by the third author) with the management students suggested similar descriptors of women feminists.

Furthermore there is no study till date that empirically derives the perceived attributes of feminists. In order to fill this research gap, the present investigation is directed at the following specific objectives:

1. To identify perceived attributes of feminists
2. To examine the role of gender in such perception

Study

In view of the foregoing rationale, two major objectives have been delineated. First, it is planned that lens model be applied to generate dimensions that are perceived significant by the participants. The actual implementation of the model can be undertaken in various forms such as the presentation of profiles and presentation of verbal statements regarding the feminists. However, the profiles offer the vividness of visual perceptions. Accordingly, several profiles are prepared and each profile depicts varying degrees of several dimensions. It may also be added that the presentation of profiles is undertaken in a quick succession. The participant does not have the scope of reflecting much on each of the dimensions. Consequently the individual judgment is spontaneous and natural.

It may also be added that this process of judgment is helpful in ensuring that the individual is not aware of his/her actual basis of judgment. This is an important point. Several studies in the past have indicated that individuals adopt one criterion for their judgment, but report a different criterion as the basis of judgment. For example, students report that they judge teachers based on their scholarship. Actually, they judge teachers based on the interest a teacher takes in student’s affairs. Thus, lens model is considered helpful in tapping the real basis of judgment, but not the consciously reported basis of judgment.

The second objective of this study is to identify the relevant parameters as perceived by participants. It is not possible to sample and include all the parameters that may be related to attributes of feminism. However, a manageable number of dimensions have been identified based on the review of current literature. These include being visionary, idealistic, public figure, influential, activist, dauntless and assertive.

While these parameters have been conceptualized in the light of pertinent literature, a fundamental concern of the study is to identify those parameters that have perceived significant. That has prompted the use of lens model in the context of a judgmental process.

Method of Study

The study involves a two-group design where young adults (males and females) are expected to express their subjective judgment about feminism. The subjective judgment involves the presentation of pictorial profiles where all the seven dimensions are depicted in the form of bars. The dimensions include visionary, idealistic, public figure, influential, activist, dauntless and assertive. The magnitude of dimension is depicted by the height of the bar. There are 35 profiles. Magnitude of each dimension is varied across the 35 profiles. The presentation of a profile is followed by an outcome judgment where the participant estimates the intensity of feminism on a 20-point scale. It is important to indicate that the strength of association between a dimension and perceived feminism can be computed in the form of product moment correlations across trials.

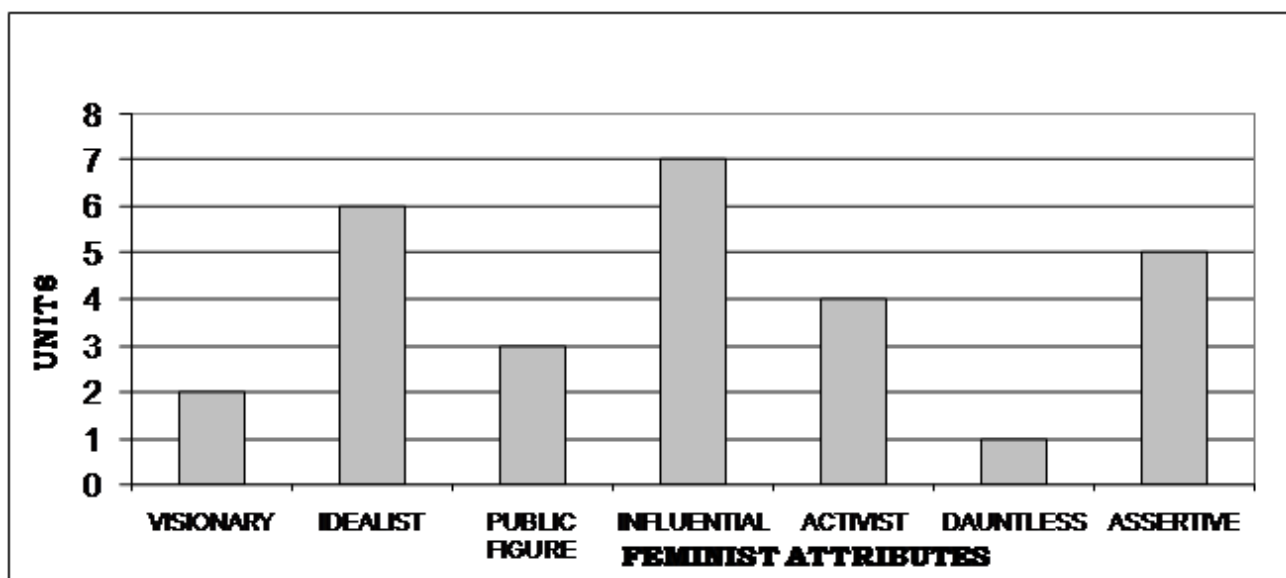
Participants

There were 77 college students randomly sampled from a well-recognized management institute of Eastern India. There were 28 males and 49 females in the study. Their age ranged from 20 to 25 years (Mean=22.3, SD=2.1). All participants belonged to a single programme of this organization

Task

The task was based on Brunswik’s lens model. The task consisted of 35 profiles. The dimensions of feminist attributes were selected based on the review of relevant literature. In each profile, the dimensions were presented in the form of bar diagrams, where each bar represented a specific dimension. The height of the bar is indicative of the strength of the dimension. In each profile, the heights of the bar diagrams corresponded to varied magnitudes of feminism dimensions. Each dimension (e.g., visionary, idealistic, etc) varied from one to seven units across profiles. While preparing the profiles, care was taken to vary the magnitude of each dimension from profile to profile. This ensured inclusion of dimensions of differing magnitudes across the profiles.

Figure: 2 Feminist Profile



Each dimension in a profile was suitably labelled for the clarity and convenience of the participants. In each profile, the seven dimensions of feminist attributes (visionary, idealistic, public figure, influential, activist, dauntless and assertive) were included. The dimension of visionary denotes the ability to see the shape of things in future. Idealistic refers to a person who has strong principles.

Public figure denotes socially well-known person. Influential is one who has means to wield power. Activist is one who works to achieve a social change. Dauntless means fearless. Assertive is one who is able to make a statement with a conviction.

Procedure

The participants were chosen from a reputed management institute. They were contacted in their respective classroom. Rapport was established and a brief instruction about the task administration was given. Each participant was given two practice trials. Each participant was handed over a response sheet containing the following instructions:

“You are presented with a number of profiles. Each profile depicts the attributes of a woman feminist. The magnitude of each characteristic is represented by the height of the bar. Please imagine that you are in a situation where you are perceiving these characteristics in different magnitude. The characteristics include visionary, idealistic, public figure, influential, activist, dauntless, assertive. Please reflect on the situation and decide the extent of feminism in that woman. You are required to specify your assessment on a 20- point scale, where ‘1’ denotes the least feminism and ‘20’ the maximum feminism. Examine each situation as depicted by a profile and go on rating all the 35 profiles. You may indicate your rating for each profile on the response sheet provided.”

The response sheet further contains a brief definition of each of the seven dimensions as mentioned earlier. Care was taken to provide only an operational definition of each attribute without explicating conceptual explanation. The participants present were told that the feminism profiles would be flashed on the screen/wall in succession. Each one was advised to focus on each profile one after the other and indicate his/her response by encircling a number from 1 to 20. They were asked to note that ‘1’ indicated least feminist and ‘20’ indicated the most feminist.

Intermediate numbers from 2 to 19 accordingly represented increasing quantum of magnitude of feminism. It was also stressed that no profile should go unevaluated.

After ensuring that the participant was comfortably seated and he/she was provided with response sheet and writing material, the PPT containing 35 pictorial leadership profiles was run through a LCD projector. The time gap between two slides was kept to the comfortable minimum to ensure spontaneity and naturalness in the cue-processing phase before arriving at the outcome judgment. The response sheet was collected after extending thanks to the participant for his/her cooperation and involvement in the entire process.

Results

As indicated earlier, the application of the lens model generates idiographic data. In the present investigation, each participant has been asked to indicate his /her judgment with respect to do linkage between a cue and feminist’s attributes. Table 1 presents mean relationships in terms of correlations between dimensions and judgments. It is shown that males view feminist as visionary, $r(33) = .33, p < .05$ (see Table 1). However, this criterion does not emerge as a significant dimension for females, $r(33) = -.03, n.s.$ Both males and females do not view feminists to be idealistic, though there is a trend on the part of females to regard idealistic as a significant dimension ($p < .10$).

Table-1: Mean Dimension –Feminism Associations

Criteria	Males (n=30)	Females (n=51)
Visionary	.33*	*.03
Idealistic	.05	.29
Public figure	.3	.14
Influential	.12	.42*
Activist	.34*	.51**
Dauntless	.012	.18
Assertive	.44**	.24

*p< .05

**p< .01

Similarly, the attribute ‘public figure’ does not emerge as a significant dimension, though there is trend on the part of males to view public figure as a significant dimension ($p < .10$).

The result further indicates that females consider ‘influential’ as a significant criterion of feminism, $r(33) = .42$, $p < .05$. It does not emerge as a significant dimension for males. It is important to note that both males and females view ‘activist’ as a significant dimension of feminism, $r(33) = .34$, $p < .01$ and $r(33) = .51$, $p < .01$. The attribute ‘dauntless’ does not emerge as a significant dimension. Finally males regard ‘assertive’ as a significant dimension, $r(33) = .44$, $p < .05$, while it remains non-significant for females.

In sum, both males and females regard ‘activist’ as a significant dimension of feminism. In addition, males view ‘visionary’ and ‘assertive’ as significant dimensions, while they tend to consider ‘public figure’ as a significant dimension. In contrast, females views ‘influential’ as a significant dimension, while they tend to consider idealistic as a significant dimension.

The analysis of group comparison further indicates the role of gender in perception. Males and females differ significantly with respect to their perception of ‘visionary’ as a characteristic of feminism, $t(79) = 3.4$, $p < .001$. As shown by Table 2, males attach greater importance to the attribute of visionary compared with females ($M = .33$ and $.03$, respectively).

Table-2 Group Comparisons on Dimension Feminism Associations

Dimension	Groups	Mean Associations	SD	t-values
Visionary	Males (n=30)	.33	.11	3.40***
	Females (n=51)	.03	.02	
Idealistic	Males(n=30)	.05	.02	3.98***
	Females(n=51)	.29	.14	
Public Figure	Males(n=30)	.30	.17	0.90
	Females(n=51)	.14	.11	
Influential	Males(n=30)	.12	.08	3.27**
	Females(n=51)	.42	.21	
Activist	Males(n=30)	.34	.13	0.80
	Females(n=51)	.51	.18	
Dauntless	Males(n=30)	.12	.04	1.02
	Females(n=51)	.18	.06	
Assertive	Males(n=30)	.44	.11	2.17*
	Females(n=51)	.24	.10	

*p <.05

** p <.01

*** p <.001

In contrast, females attach greater importance to the attribute ‘idealistic’ (M=.29 and .05, respectively). With respect, the attribute of ‘public figure’ males and females do not differ. Females attach greater importance to the attributes of ‘influential’ compared with males (M= .42 and .12, respectively). Since both males and females view the attribute ‘activist’ as significant, there is no gender difference with respect to the magnitude of linkage.

Similarly both males and females consider ‘dauntless’ as non-significant hence no greater difference. However, there is gender difference with respect to the perception of ‘assertive’ t (79)=2.17, p< .05, males attach greater significance to ‘assertive’ as a feminist attribute compared with females (M= .44 and .24, respectively).

In sum, the group differences is revealed with respect to visionary, idealistic, influential and assertive dimensions compared with females. Males value visionary and assertive while females emphasize idealistic and influential as attributes of feminist. It is important to recognize that both males and females regard activist as a significant criterion of a feminist.

Discussion and Conclusion

The application of lens model in generating significant dimensions of feminism as perceived by management students provides a number of interesting findings. First, both males and females perceive ‘activist’ to be a distinguishing feature of feminism. It may be indicated that the women liberation movement in the 70’s and 80’s greatly advocated a number of radical changes, both social and cultural, as a part of their revolution. Although the forms of such advocacy have charged, feminist movement continues to voice for a number of progressive social actions.

The perception of management students (both males and females) stresses the attributes of activist. This is very much in the expected direction.

Males views feminists as visionary and assertive. It is plausible that males, because of outward orientation, emphasize leadership qualities and they regard these two leadership traits as significant attributes of feminists. Females, on the contrary, emphasize the attribute 'influential'. It appears that too much restriction in the past moves them to go beyond certain unnecessary controls and they optimistically hope for a changed scenario. Perhaps they motivate themselves to project the attribute of influential to groups of feminists. Females also indicate a trend in viewing idealistic as an important attribute, though it does not reach the value of statistical significance. It can be conjectured that the stereotypic tendency of females to move towards communion and affective side of our existence brings this finding. In the similar scenario, males' tendency (trend) to consider 'public figure' as a significant attribute can be judged.

Implications

The study has implications both in terms of its theoretical and applied significance. Theoretically, it clarifies the empirical network (nomological network) of feminism. It may be indicated that people often are not aware of the basis of their judgment. The lens model is a unique way of generating dimensions of actual decision-making.

In the domain of applications, the findings can be utilized to educate males and females in the context of feminism. However, the present study has focussed only on the gender difference among management students. In future, a greater sampling frame can be adopted. Additional contexts and inclusion of other groups would bring out a wealthful of scientific information regarding significant dimensions of feminism.

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