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The ‘F’ Word: Investigating Men’s Perspectives on Feminism in Trinidad.

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Abstract

The purpose of this research is to both create a space for men to express their views on feminism as well as to have those aid in the shaping of a broader understanding of men’s relationship to feminist practice. These views are informed by specific trends of thought, which are herein discussed in relation to pre-existing literature in the discourse. They subsequently fall under: Feminism in Trinidad, the feminist voice and the ambiguity surrounding the movement. This paper, and its subsequent conclusions, is largely informed by the genuine opinions of a sample of men. Upon analyzing these, findings show, that third wave feminism and its implications, have contributed to an ambiguity surrounding the framework of said movement. Thus making the discourse seem off limits or even impenetrable for some men.

Keywords: Men, Feminism, third wave, trends, relationship, implications, ambiguity.
Introduction.

The ongoing scholarly discourse on feminism has largely remained just that, scholarly discourse, to a wide section of Trinidadian society. There is a gap between academic research on the subject and daily lived gender practices and perceptions. (See Fig. 1) I believe this gap is what has not only confused the notion of the feminist agenda but also excluded many men from the conversation on feminism. So that, “the question of Caribbean men’s relationship to Caribbean feminist practice still remains” (Kamugisha). The voice of the man, is often cloaked in suppositions and assumptions about the male psyche and theoretical implications of undeniable patriarchal inclinations. Many times, the defendant, is set to trial without even a plea, much less an unbiased judge in the matter. Is this modus operandi the reason so many men flee at even the whisper of the F- Word and find the feminist agenda so abstruse? This study argues that some men in Trinidad experience an ambiguity in their perception of Feminism, making it a taboo or off- limits movement for them.

The story of Caribbean feminism has been written and rewritten by women who have in their own right, pressed limits to establish many opportunities. They've brought to light and aroused action on many issues, that this generation of women are just simply born and have come to accept as a given. Interestingly enough, the stories on feminism have changed. Where do men now fit into the narrative? Is his place only found in the great antagonist of the ages? Or does he write his own story, unique in its oratory?

There exists a possibility that by understanding or hearing this male story, the discourse can be broadened, expanded and even amended. The study of what men think about feminism has not been one, particularly highlighted or popularized in both local and regional discourse. In instances where, the ideas of men regarding feminism have been brought up, the analysis predominately lends itself to traditional biases. These often take the form of intrinsic error on the part of the man, because he chooses not to conform (Crowe, 49). Scarcely in the discourse, do researchers attempt to understand, what the movement may be doing on their part to divert men’s and largely society’s view of the movement. This paper aims to meet that deficit in hopes of creating a more comprehensive picture of feminism as it relates to this specific context.

The study was conducted in 2017 during the pre-Carnival period and is delimited through convenient sampling to participants from the University of the West Indies, Open Campus. It is intended to identify particular trends of thought surrounding feminism from men and seek to form connections to already existing scholarship or shed light on the lack there of and the consequences of a perceived gap in theory and practice. Chapter one gives the methodology and conceptual framework, chapter two questions the presence of feminism in Trinidad, chapter three explores the feminist voice and chapter four examines ambiguity.

The academic conversation on feminism, in Trinidad is unique in that it takes into account factors that are shaped by this specific cultural environment. What makes this study relevant, is simply the notion that in broadening the limits of the story, we may broaden, the understanding of it and consequently Caribbean Society. In addition, the research has also yielded inspiration for a series of drawings which will accompany each chapter.
Chapter 1: Methodology and Conceptual Framework.

Why men, why women?

The interest in studying what men’s views on feminism were, was primarily wrought from a desire to start a conversation, where I saw none before, neither in literature nor day-to-day life beyond comic or sarcastic remarks (See Fig. 2). The perceived absence of the local male voice in the discourse was obvious, but what was even more apparent was the overarching stereotypical view of their opinions. The broad, “men hate feminists” cliche, reiterated and reinforced by innumerable, even reputable channels in society.

A Brief Guide to Kevin Baldeosingh’s Feminism.

One such channel is that of the local newspaper, a dominant fixture for information, an outlet for freedom of speech, biased and unbiased as that speech may be. Nonetheless, a proven
institute, from which many take their behavioural cues as it pertains to how they engage with a topic. An article that reinforced the stereotype was one, in the wake of International Women’s Day, in one of the country’s most prominent papers, the Trinidad Express. Kevin Baldeosingh, a notable local columnist, author and self declared humanist, in his piece, “A brief guide to feminism”, presented the country with the framework in which to understand and subsequently engage with feminism. In his piece, he highlights specific issues, to which he perceives as double standards within feminist thinking, all the while presenting them as absolutes. One such instance was his reference to what feminists believe a real man is. He outlines a real man according to their psychology, “as more of a woman than a feminist”. Under the section titled, ”Introduction to Patriarchy”, he states that, “all the problems in the world are caused by patriarchy, which is a system that lets men with beer bellies think they're sexy but tells women with hairy armpits that they are not”.

Silence: a native tongue?

It would be unwise to think of this piece, whether it was meant to be satirical or not, to be the views of all men. There are in fact males voice in the discourse such as that of Amilcar Sanatan, whose blog has arguably become an accessible means of reading about gender. However, this writing, what it stands as, has become synonymous with the male voice. Why? Men have become in the last century and in the local context, particularly silent, as if apprehensive to interact with the idea of feminism itself. The silence, has actually facilitated and perpetuated the stereotypical views of them on the part of feminism. So then I wonder where is the voice of men, is the discourse reserved only for women? Has feminism that proclaims all inclusivity, in the cusp of its agenda, excluded men in the conversation? What is obvious is that there exists innumerable amounts of literature, condemning men for a slew of reasons why they not only hinder the cause, but are naturally inclined to oppose their beliefs. For the most part, the literature does not appear to factor in the desire for an all inclusive discourse, but consider men as outsiders of the movement, because they belong to the patriarchy (Mohammed, 18). Has the way men are talked about forced them into silence, or hushed their voices into whispers? Has feminism painted a permanent perception of men?
Now, in the midst of these perceived absolutes, where is the actual voice of men. The voice, before it is calculated and treated through odd newspaper articles, and women who are for all purposes and intents, not men. What are men actually saying about feminism? The pre-existing scholarship has failed to acknowledge this voice as a valid participant in the conversation in its fullness and its entirety. Within the academic writing exists this gap. In asking men what they actually thought, the gap in the existing discussion would be filled in a way that would not only make a comprehensive study of feminism but help to understand the context to which the movement must navigate.

_A space, safe._

Engaging in the research, would create a space, where men could somehow enter into the discourse, even at its periphery. A means to provoke conversation wherein many thought a lack of desire to comment existed. In a sense, lift the veil of preconceptions, placed upon men by the voices that have taken it upon themselves to speak for them. It is easy to think that men do not or have ceased to form opinions of their own, this is what the study would hope to engage with. What has excluded them and why?

By allowing men to enter into the debate about feminism and articulate their unique engagement with it, the pre-existing scholarship and academic writing could evolve to facilitate a broader view of the movement. It is possible, that in the analysis of these views, feminism in the local context, may understand its shortcomings, victories and even failures.

_“Nobody going and tell you nothing”_  

Upon approaching the research, one concern in particular, was the hypothesis that men would feel more comfortable engaging with a man than a woman. Nevertheless, in designing the methodology for this research, it was found that the gender of the researcher would not affect how open the respondent would be, what would, was the appearance of any affiliation or biases about feminism. Having already formed my own views on feminism, what would be paramount to the success and validity of the research was my abandonment of those. In engaging with respondents, they should feel safe to engage in conversation and healthy discussion but also that
their responses not be met with any form of judgement. This led to the decision to use face-to-face interviews with 12 - 15 men, chosen at random, using a series of open-ended questions (Appendix). The questions were specifically designed to be broad as to facilitate any person of any intellectual level, to enter into the discourse at any point they chose. So that, someone that had little to say, would not feel prodded or required to say or know more. The questions were structured in a way where, any person could reference any experience or case to base their opinions on. Taking into consideration, the aim as starting and continuing discussion, what was also important to the study was creating a physical space where respondents felt comfortable to engage and remove the sterility from the research itself. Respondents should feel as though, the researcher, myself, was genuinely interested in their point of view. Thus introducing, another factor, which is the hypothesis that men do not feel as though their opinions were valued.

These interviews, though tethered by a small series of questions, would solely be driven by the respondents train of answers and thought, as to establish a comprehensive view. The format of the study and the analysis associated with it, would therefore, be solely based on these views. The subsequent writing would be led by those and then be analyzed according to their relation to pre-existing literature by authors who have written heavily on feminist practice both locally and internationally, such as Patricia Mohammed and Judith Soares. The framework for this study is then largely informed by the responses of participants. In this way, the views of the respondents, would not be trivialized or lessened but be acknowledged for their worth and contribution to the discourse. This being on of the main purposes for this study, giving men an opportunity to speak and actually hearing them. From this we can understand the apparent silence and the reason for it.
Chapter 2: Feminism in Trinidad.

Feminism in Trinidad: Who knew?

Much has been written about feminist moments, therefore it is beyond the scope of this research to delve into a comprehensive look at those details. However to establish the specific context of feminism, in which this study exists in, understanding the particular facets of second wave and third wave feminism in Trinidad is essential.

One author in particular who paints a vivid picture of this is Patricia Mohammed. In her article, "Stories on Caribbean Feminism: Reflections on the Twentieth Century", she establishes Feminism as a “part of a tradition of western intellectual thought and activism which long predates the twentieth century” (119), however “the issues of class, race or gender equality, [are] larger than the individual man or woman and are owned by no one society” (119). Thus, feminism, has had the ability to exist and become assimilated into Caribbean society (See Figure 2). In Trinidad specifically, Mohammed accounts the many interventions the movement made,
like the formation of the CWP- Concerned Women for Progress and the Working Women, who started off as female arms to small political groups. She talks about aligning themselves with other like-minded movements to carry out their agenda. One significant undertaking of the Working Women, was their role in the publicity of the Sexual Offences Bill. The women, interested in how the bill would help society, held a public forum about it, educating the public about its existence and ramifications. Also, through the efforts and work of many women, Trinidad became the first country to acknowledge housework in the GDP of its country. (137). Mohammed also acknowledges the formation of many NGOs such as CAFRA - Caribbean Association for Feminist Research, and a slew of other women’s hotlines and centres. The University of the West Indies, Trinidad’s leading university, boasts a Centre for Gender and Development Studies, where students are exposed to feminism and women’s movements. With such a robust history, second wave feminism has cemented its place in Trinidadian society, and set the stage for the following third wave, which will be explained further on in the study.

**Trinidad: Climate for Feminism?**
Leading up to this research, in Trinidad, there was seemingly an upsurge in very gender specific crimes on women. One such being the murder of Shannon Banfield, a 21 year old girl. The crimes set into action a slew of marches, protests and public interventions. The year before this, a Japanese national was murdered during the Carnival festivities. In lieu of comments made by then Mayor Tim Kee, which were seen as victim blaming in nature, one of Trinidad’s feminist groups, Womantra called for his resignation, and held a march in protest. Trinidad has been no stranger to violence against women, boasting high levels of gender specific violence every year. However when men were subsequently asked about feminism, their answers seem quite removed from this history and reality.

**The F- Word: First Impressions.**
When men were asked what they first thought when they heard the word feminism, many of them were caught off guard, though they had already been informed about the purpose of the study. Many of the respondents had never been asked and had subsequently never had to explain
it. For the sake of confidentiality, I have chosen to give each respondent an alternative name. John, when asked what he thought, answered; “screaming”, and then he laughed. Another participant, Greg, responses with:

To tell you the honest truth, a group of women for whatever reason or experience, dislike men for certain things. Men fuel this by being assholes. I also think of crazy women like my mother.

Another, “women in charge, women in control”. Regardless of the words men used to articulate their response, they all acknowledged a gynocentric movement that was geared towards equality for women. The responses varied, from levels on knowledge about what that supposed equality entailed and what the repercussions of that were.

While their individual definitions of feminism remain important in their own right, the first thing that immediately stood out from their responses was the lack of connection to any sort of local application. This led to my asking, more specifically, what they thought about feminism in Trinidad and whether they saw a space for it here. Firstly, most of the men did not know of any feminist groups in Trinidad, but maintained that they saw a place for it. Henry, commenting on Feminism’s place said there has to be one because of “shifting attitudes towards women”. On the other side of the spectrum Greg, a particularly straight talking student said of feminism, “It even have that in Trinidad?”. Peter, one of the less talkative respondents had this to say about its place:

I think overall talking about feminism right now […] The faster we could not think about women as having to fight for something is the faster we could get over feminism. People look at feminism like its something they have to fight for the rest of their life and it would never end. I don’t see women in Trinidad really having to at this point in time, I cant talk about the past, having anything to fight for.

So then arises two questions: why aren’t men aware of any feminist discourse in Trinidad and are they aware of the specific gender issues, if any, surrounding them? An answer lies in how men engage with feminism and what they think about feminism has a lot to do with the way in which they are informed. When men were asked of their first impressions of the movement, many made reference to specific points of engagement. When asked about Trinidad and feminism, John referenced a “life in leggings campaign [he had seen] on social
media”. Peter’s definition was informed by what he had seen in movies and television and Warren’s, by an interaction with someone who was a feminist. It is interesting to think about how men’s views are informed about feminism. Why is it, Baldeosingh’s thoughts over Amilcar Sanatan's?

INFORM-ation, social media made.

There has been a phenomenon, which has not been widely spoken about in feminist scholarship, which is the way social media informs the views of men. Each respondent, referenced some interaction with feminism on social media. Simon, a student, said of the movement:

I think it is hard to find any feminists who are unbiased. There’s a lot of rhetoric built into feminism. They make it so that if you oppose their views, you're automatically labelled as sexist. Like on social media, if you say anything they bash you.

Warren in discussion had mentioned the context in which he saw feminism, locally and internationally. When asked what this context was, his response was that,

… you have to talk about their social media. The most I come into contact with feminism is on a social media platform, right, and maybe an offhand conversation. Yes they have Womantra and all that stuff. I decided to stay clear of that. I would say that they use social media as the context for standing up.

On the matter of information, he also comments on his age group, young twenties as having a unique interaction with the discourse. “I think people my age don't take it very seriously, because of the way they interact with it on social media”. He goes on to say,

On social media, they have their own rhetoric and personality types and cliches. They have a network, a kind of social media brigade. In that brigade, you don't know who is a feminist or who’s just using it as a soap box.

John, a lecturer, describes his view of radical feminism as dominant because, “… they're the loudest and most popular on social media, which allows them to be heard and become the face of the movement”. From these responses, it is evident that twenty-first century men are exposed to feminism in ways that were not applicable during the second wave movement. Patricia
Mohammed in the writing, “The Future of Feminism in the Caribbean”, she comments on the, “methods of activism [ranging] from intimate consciousness raising women’s groups to society challenging of policy makers” (119). When one reads the writings of Mohammed, about protests in parliaments, and street protests, one wonders if these demonstrations with the onset of social media, have moved, to a new domain; one where the possibilities and the implications of expressions are limitless.

Chris Leong, in his piece, “Why don't some men don't like feminists”, references the impact social media has on the male opinion:

Many people may have formed their opinions from online conversations. I've found that people are always much more reasonable when you talk to them in real life, than when you talk to them anonymously over the internet. People actually think about consequences before insulting someone.

Interestingly a quarter of respondents mentioned having negative interactions with feminism on social media. Leong, also raises another element to the theory of information. Men’s views on feminism are similarly informed by face to face interaction with feminists. One respondent, Warren mentions having his view on the movement actually changed when he encountered a feminist friend. He recalls, “I talked to [a friend] and she fight me down and say it’s about equality, it’s about equality and I just took her word for it”. Apart from this, only one other respondent actually reported coming face to face with feminism. Others had never even met one, and reported their opinions largely formed by observation. Sherwin as he laughed about how crazy he thought the movement was, commented, “I guess its about how feminists market themselves, more than anything else thats what gives people mixed opinions on them, so its really down to the person”.

If the way men are informed truly has an impact on how their views are shaped, then the lack of engagement and the negative view on feminism comes as no surprise. If social media, as evidenced by the interview responses, is referenced as the main channel through which men learn and inform themselves, then whatever is there, whether accurate or not, is what constitutes their views. Whether misleading or not, this is the framework for many of men’s views on the movement. What is then compounding this issue, is then the lack of real time interaction with
any member. There seems to be a disconnect for men, between what dominantly informs their views and what they actually perceive to be the reality. Perhaps this is one of the reasons why men can attest to seeing no place for the movement in their local spaces.

**Trin-feminist?**

The concept of feminism, as it is informed by social media remains a sort of alien and strange concept in the minds of men. The disconnect, perpetuates the idea of the feminist voice not be a Trinidadian one, but that of a foreigner. Mohammed writes, “for many ‘feminism’ represents an imported set of ideas about women’s rights and struggle, the latter which is deemed unnecessary in … societies where the colonized black woman is deemed [already] independent” (116). So one can argue that social media and the way men are informed continue to perpetuate this idea. But who takes responsibility for this information? Whose responsibility is it to address the gap, where men do not see feminism as Trinidadian? With all the history and scholarship, why is there still a gap?
Chapter 3: The Feminist Voice.

In order to understand the gap, the whole picture must be painted. One of the key elements in the discourse on feminism is, the feminist voice. When men were asked to describe their views on this voice, they articulated their responses from the point of how they saw the movement responding to issues. When asked of the feminist voice, a myriad of responses came in. Men saw feminism and its voice in society in multiple ways (See Fig. 4). One of the responses that summarized these was that of John, who throughout the interview seemed particularly entertained. “I think its a big contradiction. I don’t see any clear lobby. Like I question where the law comes in, regulations, taxes, anything? Who is really lobbying for equal rights?” Another, Simon, had this to say, “our Trinidadian culture is ‘bhanwagonist’, feminism is just another

trend”. Warren on the issue of the feminist voice, “every girl now is a feminist, so they kinda
take up plenty different causes, so it is all broad and vague in my opinion”.
One could go on to transcribe every response, but what was absolutely clear is that men are
unsure about who is behind the voice, and the implications of that voice in Trinidadian culture.
Why does the voice of feminism remain distorted in the minds of so many men? This perception
of the voice does not clarify the gap, but widens it; the disconnect.

The respondents also reference another facet to which they corresponded the feminist voice,
what they literally saw, the action led by the voice. Addressing protests, in light of recent gender
specific crimes, Warren had this to say:

I think protests are a quick fix. It’s reactionary and I think that it’s conveniently [so].
There are a lot of things that they could protest about, that they don’t… so it brings about
the question of why they aren't doing it. Why do they forget about certain races, classes
of people? If it is about equality, why don't you’ll talk about men. You have to stand by
your word. To me, I’m not asking Womantra to be the heroes of the nation … but I don’t
think they have any kind of permanent vision of what they want. Even if they have
solutions, their public face is sill an angry protest. Protests aren't the only way to do
something.

Interestingly enough this sentiment, this lack of clarity concerning the impetus or conventions
regarding feminist action, was echoed in Robert’s response about the “many instances where
women are abused and nothing happened”, “… sometimes its on the news and a fuss is made and
then it just dies down after that”.

So, the “public face of feminism”, the manifestation of its literal voice is seen for many men
as protests, marches and seemingly sporadic intervention. The very nature of these acts in the
eyes of men, then raise another pertinent question, addressed in the following section.

The voice: Reactive vs. Proactive?

It came as no surprise after, having discussed men’s issue with the voice that ideas of activity
surfaced. The majority of respondents reflected on the reactionary element of the voice. Most,
saw this as only cropping up in loud strains when something happened in the society. This
according to John “runs the risk of bhanwagonists”. This meaning, those who only catch onto a trend when it’s made popular. Interestingly enough more than two men used the term to describe the feminist voice in society. Most men claim they only hear anything about women rights when, something happens. Greg summarizes his experience with a reactive voice like this:

> It’s like good and bad policing. I live in D’Abadie and there have been murders and reports all the time. Recently, you would have heard in the media that there was a string of murders. All of a sudden, the police are here patrolling all the time. So then they wait till something happens. What sense that making? Where are they all the time, all of a sudden Trinidad have feminists?

Greg somehow accurately summarizes the sentiment quite well. In his response, there exists key factors that help to understand why men view the voice this way. The media for one, as shown by the previous discourse made on information. Media’s role in the perpetuation of reactionary moves on the part of feminism, is one that cannot be denied. It aids in the sensationalization of an issue and its seemingly sudden disinterest, whether this is the reality or not. Paul says of this phenomena, “it seems as though, the way they move is that it takes an incident, there is a big uproar and a couple weeks later it dies down… I don’t think it should be reactionary”. So again in addressing the gap between men and feminism, one must take into consideration the mode of information, the voice and its actions. Men are unsure of the voice and thus what they are really being told what to stand for, in a reactionary tone. In navigating a sphere where, reactionary measures are associated with shock and fear, what happens when as Henry puts it, “we live in a society where things aren't shocking anymore”. How then can anyone, particularly men, hold fast to what is perceived as a sporadic movement. Because of this many men’s exposure to feminism is essentially limited to glimpses. A quarter of the men, claimed the murder of the Japanese national in 2016, and Womantra calling for the then Mayor Tim Kee’s resignation, as their first significant encounter with a specific voice. This, in a country whose records of gender specific violence remains startlingly high, becomes a concept to which many men find hard to accept. What cause is worthy and why? Henry, on discussing recent crimes, mentions the fact that the public was struck by the attention one violent act received as opposed to another. He had this to say:
… we should be outraged about everybody. So when particular groups sort of make noise about a highly publicized issue, it seems as though its about their popularity more than about the message. We tend to be reactionary, but the only way to push any agenda of equality and safety, we can’t just be reactive when something happens, it needs to be a kind of consistent message and a consistent program of education because reactions tend to be aggressive and people don’t respond well to aggression.

What Henry has so eloquently lent to this study, has risen as one of the sure issues perpetuating the gap. Echoed in every single respondent’s voice, was that of… consistency.

*Consistency, consistently. Please.*

The response of every man, placed much value on the idea that the voice of feminism is inconsistent. Discussions before this articulated revelation seemed preamble, for this, the discovery of a problem straining the walls of the gap. Henry, particularly, had a lot to say on this:

I think consistency is everything. If you're trying to change people’s perceptions … persistent, consistent pounding of a message whether people want to accept it or not is going to kind of affect who they become.

In a world where men are bombarded with information and are forming and reforming contextual framework so rapidly, consistency is absolutely necessary. It is interesting to think that men, who have been ushered into a set view, are those who are honestly calling for clarity. Inconsistency in belief, agenda and action, are by way of this study’s responses, undermining the support of not only men but the wider society.

*The plot thickens, but it smells the same: Carnival.*

As ideas of consistency surface, Carnival falls naturally into the discussion of every single candidate. One could propose that the time period, in which these interviews were taken, pre-festival, contributed to the overwhelming reference. However, this event, earmarked as one of the most key markers of our culture, was the basis of much debate. It was surprising and refreshing to see men so vehemently question something so deeply engrained in their culture, each approaching it in a different scope. To enter into discourse about Carnival and feminism,
could prove endless in limit and highly argumentative. What did stand out was one, prevailing trend of thought; that carnival had a large part to play in our particular cultural conversation.

In a recent article, “In Trinidad and Tobago’s Carnival Goes Feminist (Bikinis and Feathers included)”, Gabrielle Hosein, discusses how carnival and its ideologies of freedom and empowerment for women has now come to the forefront. She postulates that Carnival helps to “cultivate contemporary women’s opposition to rape culture” as the likes of the highly popularized slut walks of America. Interestingly enough, Hosein also counter argues that this, ‘bikini mas’ is not without its contradictions”. Between broad ideas of classism and financial restraints, lies what men see as the greatest inconsistency of the festival. Men see carnival in relation to feminism as hypocrisy. Now, the use of such a strong word in the discourse may seem harsh and all too broad, however each respondent to some extent, called to light the contrast and inconsistency of ideologies, within and without the Carnival season. The majority of men, reported feeling like what is not okay in regular life, suddenly becomes so during the event.

The crux of the matter, I propose lies in the fact that the beliefs that have shaped their ideas of feminism, regardless of their local application are completely separated from the reality at Carnival time. In essence there is a perceived double standard. John on the matter references the ‘Life in Leggings’ campaign, but goes on to say,

During Carnival, the same slurs are chanted in songs. Why isn’t that then disrespectful? Where is the outcry for these things? I think it’s hypocrisy. It’s all fun, but your body is still on view, by all these men you don’t want doing that all year long.

The issue of body politics, in light of Carnival hosts its own slew of inconsistencies in ideologies by both men and women. The lack of concretization of beliefs and agenda again rear its head in the gap between feminism and men. Paul argues that it is all about convenience and the idea that Carnival provides a convenient scope for women to go against what they have “preached all year long”.

**Rhythm or rhyme?**

Music as we can see rose to the forefront of this particular discussion. Greg, a music student himself, had this to say of this key component; “It’s hypocrisy, I used to work, like actually lay
down soca songs in the studio and all of the songs were against anything looking or sounding like feminism. The total opposite but that’s what women like”. Henry had an interesting outlook on it saying that, “music is powerful … but I know women who call themselves feminists and are into that kind of music. Your culture is hard to overcome because it’s so engrained in who you are”. He then goes on to say,

The truth is the music isn't really … lyrical and complex. So the lyrics aren’t really important, it’s kind of just about the hook and the beat. I remember the song ‘Kick in she backdoor’. People just looked over what were just really terrible lyrics. The first few seconds of the song was actually a woman screaming. JW and Blaze actually said they wouldn't play it anymore. It’s a very complex thing that people are navigating.

Carnival music as it pertains to soca and one can even link calypso, has long set the tone for society and the festival. Patricia Mohammed lends her commentary in her article, “Reflections on the women’s movement in Trinidad: calypsos, changes and sexual violence”. On women and calypso, she writes, “the oral song tradition of Trinidad, the calypso has incredible versatility as a social instrument” (33). People are not particularly interested in the lyrical value anymore, but what is still a valid postulation is that we as a society still take cues from the music we listen to. It shapes, unconsciously most times, what we deem to be acceptable or commonplace in society. So that when men are asked to engage with feminism in terms of carnival, there arises ideas of what is appropriate. If a song or particular theme in writing is accepted and popularized, by the women who they deem supposed against those same said ideologies, it appears as an oil and water situation; a great double standard. This, is what the majority of respondent saw Carnivals place in the discourse. Only one, having discussed body politics as that of the woman alone, placed any emphasis on the act of ‘mas’, as activism. In light of Hosein’s article, I wonder how many men find her thoughts consistent with their own views. John asks of the movement, “are women’s responses even based of of learned theories”.

It is not in mine or anyone's right to validate or accept any particular view on this. What is to be truly understood is the underlying thread, that weaves itself throughout any topic in the discourse on feminism for men; what feminism is and its framework is still highly ambiguous for most men.
To add to the stew: a few issues to taste.

It has become understood that the male interaction with feminism is riddled with inconsistencies and unresolved modes of information and responses. However in addressing these and to set a sort of retrospective framework, the article by Crowe, “Men and Feminism: Some Challenges and a Partial Response”, should be addressed, rather the key challenges. The first challenge so well articulated by Henry, a lecturer, was this,

There is this kind of aggression towards feminism, because men think its about women having power over men… or even if they think it’s about equality men will start to talk about their own struggles because it’s difficult for people to recognize their own privileges.

Now this, being a fairly consistent view shared by the respondents is one that Crowe, in this article, investigates. I believe that his arguments may help to better understand this view. He proposes,

Men are aware that feminism is not about them. This is difficult for many men to grasp simply because they are not used to it… because mainstream discourses are designed to accommodate and value male points of view. A discourse such as feminism, that is not interested in in their problems therefore at first appeared as hostile and alien”. (49)

Henry was the only respondent, who ventured to postulate as to why men were hostile on this level. Crowe also in this particular writing, insists that it is the sole responsibility of men to stand for or against a movement that, as he had just pointed out is not about them, but this too poses its own set of challenges. How does a man approach such a discourse or cause. Assimilate to some point, its agenda to the extent whereby he can hold one firm standpoint, especially since this study has shown that men aren't particularly aware of the issues facing women. Crowe proposes a reason for the lack of awareness:

… women do not always talk to men about things that are important to them. They are often more comfortable talking to women, which is entirely understandable… On the other hand, this phenomenon also means that some men go through their whole lives without being placed in a position where they really have to try to grasp a distinctively
female perspective. It is no wonder some men have difficulty comprehending the feminist agenda. (52)

If men are not exposed to the issues in a way where they can as Crowe suggests, “learn to be for others” (50), how then can we expect them to attach themselves to sporadic causes and manifestations of an elusive agenda. Robert in reasoning as to why men don’t want to talk about the F-Word said this, “most men that I know, don't have the confidence to ask or share their opinions honestly, They prefer to go lime in the rum shop and talk about it there”. Now, this is not to dismiss the reality that men can and are making an effort to understand and support the feminist cause, however there still exists the wider majority who are disillusioned by it all. This brings to the forefront the second challenge.

Crowe suggests that the reason men have such a problem grasping the, “feminist project, is the ambiguous position it affords them” (49). Again men are unsure, where and when they can enter the discourse and often think they're opinions to be of no value. Most men, pinpointed moments, where they felt that they had tried and was simply turned away. Both Warren and Paul described feeling, “attacked”. Simon, had this to say, “I’m not really educated on anything, but I get attacked, like help me to understand”. Crowe also highlights this, a shortcoming of the movement,

Whether men’s views are heard and considered within feminism depends on whether women think they are worth hearing. And, quite often feminists are not terribly interested in what men are saying; they would rather hear from women … (49)

So then how could a man, find his place in the discourse, when they are of the idea that they will get shot down or women are genuinely uninterested in what they can add. Maybe, it is not a man’s place to contribute to a cause so gynocentric in nature, however the movement must engage in a society, where unsurprisingly men exist. This sort of ideologies also fuel the “that’s not by business” cliche. John mentioned feeling as though, “women have their thing, leave them. I don't have to do anything”. Is this stance then perpetuated by this thinking. How can a man enter into any discourse, if it is made impenetrable.

Crowe in addressing the aforementioned challenges also suggest that men in their experience with feminism, must address their limits of knowledge and experience. If this limit exists, what is
then being done to broaden them and clarify the ambiguity? This helps to hone in on one the mightiest contingent of the gap. The issue, I propose is what is keeping the men out of the discourse and perpetuating the silence of men.
Chapter 4: Ambiguity and the Gap.

Ambiguity: to catch a hummingbird.

Thus far, we have heard men’s views and thoughts on the wider discourse on feminism and come to in some way understand or postulate as to why they feel this way. What underlies the gap, that has continually been mentioned, is the ambiguity of the movement and its agenda (See Fig. 5). Every challenge that men in their responses have articulated, can be linked not only to this elusiveness but also their lack of knowledge.

Firstly it is obvious that men are plucking out and addressing whatever issue they associate with feminism in a vacuum of sort, rather than a multi faceted agenda. For example, John engages with the idea of equality in wages, whereas Henry enters the discourse from the angle of gender and the LGBTQ debate. As Henry himself says, “people define feminism as a number of things”. Simon mirrors that sentiment in his estimation that “most men don’t even know what it is”. Sherwin says of this issue, “The definition of what is a feminist is so vague”. So then we ask
ourselves, what is causing this”. Has the second wave of feminism set a precedent for this, or is it a new wind, a new wave.

Second and Third wave feminism: all the same?

Firstly, in delving into the matter of the vagueness or ambiguity, it is of paramount importance that we understand to which context of feminism we now navigate. To formally contrast every detail of these waves would require a study of its own, however therein lie some crucial elements for discussion. These are eloquently summed in an article which appeared in the Washington Post recently, catchily entitled, “Betty Friedman to Beyoncé: Today’s Generation Embraces Feminism on its own terms”. The article brings forth some major aspects of second wave feminism which according to Martha Rampton and reiterated by Patricia Mohammed, was characterized by a radical voice on sexuality, reproductive and equal rights. It, according the Martha Rampton, in her article “Four Waves of Feminism”, it “was increasingly theoretical, based on a fusion of neo-Marxism and psycho-analytical theory, and began to associate the subjugation of women with broader critiques of patriarchy, capitalism, normative heterosexuality, and the woman's role as wife and mother”. The movement was associated with very specific homogenous statements of their agenda. The dissolution with many supposed impositions of femininity such as makeup, high heels and bras were frowned upon. What this movement stood for and what it did not was made increasingly clear through marches and protests and intense engagement with set ideas and goals. In taking a closer look at this feminism of the 60’s and 70’s and the contemporary wave to which we navigate, what is clear is that feminism has changed. Is feminism as political charged by civil rights movements and neo-Marxist theory? The contrast between the waves are strikingly addressed in the Washington Post’s article. The authors pose the argument that,

Far from the largely monolithic feminism that came of age amid the upheaval of the 1960s and ’70s, it is splintered and amorphous. It fits varied interests and groups under one massive umbrella. Where women of the Second Wave found their entrée into feminism in a rousing speech, a book, a march, a copy of Ms. Magazine or a women’s group, now young women are frequently introduced to it through a Beyoncé video, a
season of HBO’s “Girls” or a website such as Jezebel — all of them occupying wildly different plots on the vast, untamed feminist landscape. (Sheinin, Dave et al)

So then feminism has become less homogenous and a more ambiguous ‘splintered” space. Less political. more cultural. Anyone can take any part of it. Many second wave feminists must deal with the contradictions to which this wave presents. This new wave, virtually leaderless and faceless, poses a whole new challenge to not only men but society. It is elusive.

**Gender = feminism?**

Another argument about third wave feminism and the way it interacts with Caribbean society, in particular is addressed in the writing of Judith Soares in her piece, “*Addressing the Tensions: Reflections on Feminism in the Caribbean*”. One of her main arguments as to why in her opinion, the movement remains stagnant and quite ambiguous to many, is the shift from a feminist discourse to a mainly gendered one. She claims that the “dominance of gender over feminism has proven to be problematic since it has allowed for a loss of debate within … and about feminism … [which] suggest, at one level, that women’s or feminist issues have been resolved and there is no further need for struggle” (190). One can ask of this, has feminism become too abstract, and all encompassing? Has centralizing this specific area and leaving a slew of other untethered and ambiguous, led to the same said gap. This is seemingly where the research points. It is possible that men, who are disinterested or maybe even searching, when they approach the discourse, may find the reality of it to be much more diluted than they had supposed. In her article, “*Like Sugar in Coffee: Third Wave Feminism and the Caribbean*”, Patricia Mohammed has this to say, “as a result of second wave efforts [and what that has afforded], feminism is no longer a concentrated set of ideas, shared by specific groups and individuals who advocated for women, but a consciousness …”(5).

**Rebranding?**

With all the ambiguity and controversial information surrounding feminism, one can ask if the connotations of the word have aided in the dejection of many to claim the title of a feminist. Henry, opened this scope in thinking which is mirrored in the comic but relevant piece, “Why
men have a problem with the word Feminism”, by Martin Daubney. He poses the idea that, “the word now symbolizes a megalith of negativity” and in light of this study’s findings; ambiguity surrounding, “all that is about how men and women interact”. He supposes that the word in itself hinders the movement and thus needs a rebranding of sort, where it adapts to feedback and new information, or resist and see many more turn away from its agenda. It is the hope of this study that the movement wherever and whomever it exists in, will understand this turning point and take decisive action. One of those in particular being the decision to educate people, especially in Trinidad.

Tell me who it is, what it is.

Interestingly enough, men as evidenced in this study are still making attempts especially in light of our Trinidadian context to reach across the gap, however it is what they find there remains puzzling. Men throughout discussions, expressed views like how one, Warren, felt that the discourse was particularly “uneducated”. Paul’s sentiment was this, “Do not belittle me because I don't know something, educate me”. Studies have shown that people who do not feel educated on a certain subject are more likely to resist it. This is evident. So then who’s responsibility is it to educate persons on feminist discourse or even as Mohammed coins it, feminist consciousness, and how can they do it. Henry again raises an interesting point about consistent imagery. If persons over time are exposed consistently to certain ideas, their mindset will gradually change. Education in whatever form it takes, can and will change the discourse on feminism, regardless of its abstract shape.
The vast majority of feminist writings are from females. This is exactly how it should be for understanding the female perspective of life, but one cannot understand gender issues without understanding the male perspective too. Just as most feminists would argue that mainstream society's views are distorted by reading predominately male authors, the some distortion will inevitably occur when a gender studies student reads predominately female authors. Feminism can still focus on females - it's just that feminists should not act as though they understand male issues without having read the male voices. (Leong)

The quote by Chris Leong again summarizes why this study and its applications are so important. The male view on feminism has revealed itself to be tremendously porous and layered in thought and questions of the supposition and isms they already engage with. What has been
uncloaked, is that the male voice is not silent nor combative as it is sensationalized to be. It is, rather disillusioned by the ambiguity of a movement that seems to be less inclusive and considerably more elusive (See Fig. 6). Third wave feminism has had a dominant part to play in this. It’s framework having become considerably less structured and reactive. Perhaps men and society as a whole are still catching up to it. However as for now, what must be given attention is the idea that in not addressing the male voice and the education of it, the movement can and will only perpetuate the gap that exists between feminist discourse and men. The channels through which men’s views are informed also need to be understood for their strengths and weaknesses. Women who claim feminism must become willing to open the discussion and understand, particularly in Trinidad, that though the male voice has been articulated in one way, by understanding the reality of it and the new challenges which third wave feminism present, the gap can be mended.
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Appendix

List of Open-ended questions to be administered during interviews.

1. What comes to mind when you hear the word “Feminism”?
2. What do you think about Trinidad in relation to feminism?
3. How do you think the average male responds to the F word?
4. Do you think there is a space for feminism in Trinidad?
5. Have you heard of any feminist groups in Trinidad?
6. In light of recent events and the rise of a “feminist stance” concerning those issues, what do you think of the responses?
7. What is the face of feminism that social media presents?
8. So do you think that if there was education in terms of feminism, you think that would help the discourse?