

Struggles of a Feminist Organization in Porto Alegre

Opportunities and limitations of liberal strategies

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Abstract

This study maps out and explores different feminisms and their strategies. It is based on a case study of the liberal feminist organization *Empoderamento da Mulher* apparent in Porto Alegre, Brazil. Interviews were conducted with women active within the organization and within feminism in general, as well as some people who do not consider themselves feminists. The study also builds on previous research on feminist theories and women's movements, and provides an analysis of the opportunities and limitations of the organizations' strategies that they use as a white, middle-class feminist organization navigating in the feminist field. Using the theoretical concept of *empowerment* together with feminist theory, the potential of such an organization is critically investigated, in a context of disagreeing feminist groups and in a country where the importance of feminism is growing. Finally it is argued that the different feminist approaches should recognize their limitations and seek to work more together, in order to achieve a tangible change in society.

Keywords

Feminism, feminist strategies, liberal feminism, radical feminism, empowerment, equality, inclusiveness, movements, Brazil

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1. Introduction

Different feminist theories provide different strategies to reach equality and liberation of women. These feminist traditions will be presented and discussed in the paper. The research problem can be described as; *Strategies of feminist organizations* and these strategies will be investigated in the context of the liberal feminist organization *Empoderamento de Mulher* in Porto Alegre, Brazil. The organization aims to empower women by knowledge, information and increased self-esteem through fortnightly meetings where locals participate to discuss and debate relevant feminist issues. Men participate in these meetings as support and in order to learn more about feminism and how to empower women around them. According to the organization men's inclusion and individually oriented strategies for women's empowerment are what liberates and empowers them. This opens up for fundamental questions regarding the extent to which these strategies contribute to create change and empower women. Feminist studies deal with how to propagate change and different feminist traditions advocate different strategies to achieve equality. The paper aims to, through this case study of *Empoderamento da Mulher*, shed light on these questions through an analysis of the liberal feminist traditions apparent in Porto Alegre and their strategies. This will ultimately reveal the opportunities and limitations of the mostly liberal strategies of the organization. The empirical material derives from a three month field study conducted in Porto Alegre, Brazil, where primarily *Empoderamento da Mulher* and their strategies were observed.

The different feminist approaches and strategies brought up in the paper are; liberal, radical and to some extent Marxist feminism, as well as the concept of empowerment. Liberal feminism presents several strategies as solutions to the problems, for instance to create a labor market and a political sphere where women have the same rights as men. The approach focuses on women as individuals where the inclusion of men is central. According to Radical feminism the problem delves deeper and the solution is not solely for women. They argue that our culture separates the public sphere of politics, labor-market, laws and power from the private sphere including care, close relations, sexuality and reproduction. According to radical feminists "the personal is political" and they want to remove the separation between public and private and create a whole new view of society. The Marxist feminist solution is to reshape the economic system and the organizing of the wage labor based on the interests of

the working class. They argue that through doing this, and removing the class differences, women's liberation comes as part of the bargain. (Gemzöe 2014: 11-12)

The paper adheres to the following structure: firstly the aim and research question are presented in the second chapter, following that the third chapter explores the theoretical concepts and frameworks for the different kinds of feminism (liberal, radical and Marxist). Subsequently the methodological approach and a background of the organization as well as the feminist movement in Brazil are discussed in chapter four and five. The empirical analysis is then provided in chapter six divided into three sections; the perceptions of the problems for women in Porto Alegre, the strategies of the organization to tackle these problems and finally a discussion regarding the feminist strategies. The paper is concluded in chapter seven with some final arguments.

2. Aim and research question

The aim of this paper is to; through a case study of *Empoderamento da Mulher*, create an understanding around feminist thoughts and strategies by bringing up and analyzing liberal feminist strategies as well as strategies of other feminist groups in a context of a growing feminist movement. Through doing this the strategies of *Empoderamento da Mulher* with their opportunities and limitations will be revealed.

Using this study the potential for change stemming from civil society organizations can be highlighted when it comes to strengthening a marginalized group and its influence on the individuals involved. A thorough review of the literature has been conducted during the writing of this paper to show that it is linked to contemporary research, and discourse, on feminist women's movements which are then linked to the empirical data collected.

The research questions are as follows; *which strategies does the feminist organization Empoderamento da Mulher employ? And what opportunities and limitations come with these strategies?* This question is investigated in the context of a case study of the organization *Empoderamento da Mulher*, where the empirical data of how this specific organization works with liberal feminism, using individually oriented strategies for women's empowerment and the inclusion of men, is presented. The liberal strategies will be put into a context and theoretical framework of feminism to evaluate them together with other thoughts of feminism.

To answer the research question, it is first necessary to discuss the reason for the organization's creation. What appears to be the greatest problem in society linked to the prevailing view of women in Porto Alegre? Furthermore what these empowering strategies are and what impact they can have on the individuals involved as well as what effects they think that their work has on society as a whole will be investigated. This paper examines how the organization works with women's empowerment and how women perceive the organization's work and its impact on their lives. The effects will be dealt with in a more hypothetical manner, since they are difficult to investigate empirically. The study will also examine what the organization wants to accomplish and which strategies it has employed to tackle its problems. For Marxist and radical feminists' class differences and economic inequality are important for understanding the feminist question, and political strategies are important to propagate change. *Empoderamento da Mulher*, with a more liberal approach

does not focus on these inequalities. The implications of the organizations choice not to ally fully with working-class women will be investigated and whether it is possible to understand and change women's subordination without using political strategies.

The women's movement is important for social development in Brazil, and hopefully the study will ultimately contribute to an improved understanding of the women's movement in Brazil and of the strategies that these movements and organizations use, as well as it will contribute to the literature on feminist strategies in Latin America. Previous literature is more focused on working-class feminism and organizations while fewer studies can be found on middle-class organizations using liberal feminist strategies. This study will contribute to the knowledge about liberal feminist organizations and their strategies. This will be explained further in the previous research chapter.

3. Theoretical concepts and framework

Before turning to the empirical results the following chapter will summarize the analytical framework and the theoretical concepts used. To answer the research question about *what strategies the feminist organization Empoderamento da Mulher uses and what opportunities and limitations that come with these strategies*, it is essential to put the organization in a theoretical framework, to conduct a general discussion about empowerment, feminism and different feminist strategies in Brazil. In this paper the feminist approaches will be described as liberal feminism, radical feminism and Marxist feminism.

Feminism

When the English word “feminist” came into use in the late 1880s its meaning was defined as “support for women’s equal legal and political rights with men” (Bryson 2003: 1). Bryson (2003: 1) argues that a broad definition is important in order to include all theories of feminism since they all discuss the subordination and inequality between the sexes. Like liberalism and socialism, feminism is an ideology of equality (Gemzöe 2014: 9-10). Gemzöe (2014: 16) defines a feminist as a person who considers women subordinate to men and who deems it necessary to be changed. The definition takes away the attention from whether a girl is masculine, pretty or whether she is sexually available, and instead focuses the attention on how the society and the world looks, including a critical statement for change of the prevailing conditions to make people reflect (Gemzöe 2014: 16-17). Similarly Alvarez (1999: 182) states that feminist movement-oriented activities aim at “fostering women’s empowerment and transforming prevailing gender power arrangements”. *Empoderamento da Mulher* does not want to define feminism. They argue that there are many different understandings of the concept and that a pure, perfect feminism is non-existent.

A common argument to deny the powerlessness of women is by referring to *individual* women’s power. Feminism does not deny that women as individuals can have power in certain situations; feminism however, claims that women generally have less power than men. It is important to understand that the inequalities between men and women are neither the only nor the largest inequalities globally (Gemzöe 2014: 19-23). Gemzöe argues that a definition of inequalities only between the sexes can be seen as elitist and racist since it derives from a western, white, middle-class perspective with women privileged in every way

except when compared to white powerful men (Gemzöe 2014: 29-30). Bryson (2003) agrees, and states that the common criticism of liberal feminism is its' primary concern for middle-class needs (Bryson 2003: 53).

Different strategies to reach equality

According to Gemzöe (2014: 10) the dominating interpretation of feminism is that women are oppressed only because they are women. Feminism as a whole aims to erase this inequality.

Gemzöe (2014: 11, 15) continues to argue that feminism takes on several different forms and many theorists mean that talking about *one* form of feminism is impossible since the mechanisms of women's oppression do not have a uniform simple political solution. In this section several different *feminisms* will be described to define the organization *Empoderamento da Mulher* in a context of feminist political theory (Gemzöe 2014: 15). Gemzöe (2014 :33) states that opposing ideas often exist side by side, sometimes within the same thinker.

Liberal feminist strategies

Liberalism according to Bryson (2003: 158) is based on the pursuit of self-interest, assumptions of competition and the belief in the western democracies as fair. The ideology came with the principle of equal rights and value of all people, and during the seventeenth century feminists started to use liberal ideas to argue for women's right to education, employment and legal equality. Today these rights are a given in many countries, however, not yet in Brazil (Bryson 2003: 2-3), (Gemzöe 2014: 33-34). The core of liberal feminism is the idea of women as fully fledged citizens and individuals, that men and woman are equal and that the sexes are not different in terms of rationality or intelligence. They are fighting for equal political representation, equal access to important roles in professional and political life, equal rights on the labor market and equal salary (Gemzöe 2014: 40).

Leijonborg (2001) claims that liberal feminism wants to break the structural subordination of women using three strategies; female empowerment, to systematically break down the barriers that women face and to include men in the struggle. Furthermore Leijonborg (2001: 11-12) argues that the word feminism got a negative connotation because of socialist feminism, that the unwillingness to focus on the individual led to all men being seen as enemies of feminism.

The notion of women being intuitive, sensitive and focused on relationships with men being logical, independent and aggressive is completely disregarded within liberal feminism. The lower status of women is explained by the former exclusion of women from political and legal rights, as well as by the fact that women haven't had the chance to work on equal terms in the labor market and instead were relegated to the private sphere of the family. The liberal strategies according to Gemzöe (2014: 34) are among others education and to influence attitudes as a means of abolishing women's subordinate position and grant them access to the public, political sphere in the same extent as men. Mill extended the liberal principles to also include women, and regarded the subordination of women as a political problem, which made him an early male feminist. Mill and Wollstonecraft (cited in Gemzöe 2014: 35-37) claim that the reason why women might seem more sensitive and irrational is because of the way they were raised.

The liberal feminist ideal is viewed as an ideal for humankind which also frees men from gender roles, and Gemzöe (2014: 41-42) claims that the abolishment of gender roles would be liberation for all. Wollstonecraft, Stanton and Mill all refer to the liberal principle that women are independent and rational individuals and therefore entitled to equal political rights (Bryson 2003: 74). Wheeler and Thompson (cited in Bryson 2003: 25) argued that the biological differences can't ever be an argument against political rights. They also suggest that the liberal concepts are somewhat flexible, and not automatically incompatible with other feminist approaches (Bryson 2003: 27).

Radical feminist strategies

Radical feminist ideas and women's movements were introduced by the "Women's Liberation Movement (WLM) in the late 1960s" who argued that they hit the roots of the oppression of women with a theory by and for women. They further argued that women are oppressed just for being women and that this oppression is the most widespread and fundamental form of domination. The radical theory derives from women's personal needs and experiences of oppression and coined the quote: "the personal is political". They use strategies like "awareness rising"; where women in groups share their personal experiences of being a woman and of being oppressed and then together analyze them politically to think of strategies for change. This made many women realize they were not alone having these thoughts and experiences.

Some radical feminists argue that the problem is neither discrimination nor capitalism, but *male power*, and their common aim is to end the patriarchy which they argue benefit all men. Since their group interests oppose men's interests the women were united into a sisterhood that goes above the class or "race" division (Bryson 2003: 3, 163) (Gemzöe 2014: 48-49). Kate Millet (in Gemzöe 2014: 50) states that patriarchy is permeating all aspects of society in a way which makes it natural and invisible. Women are brought up into the structure of patriarchy as small girls, and during their upbringing the school, books, and religion teach them that women are subordinate to men and have an intrinsically lower value. As a result many women accept the idea of inferiority as natural. The patriarchy is driven by economical dependence, and radical feminists argue that the ultimate expression of the patriarchy is the sexual control exerted over women with the ultimate weapon being rape (Gemzöe 2014: 50). The radical feminists are pointing out the oppression of women in what the liberal feminists call the private sphere: the male control over women in the private life; sexual oppression, violence against women and misogyny. The view on women from a radical perspective is that women always get to be secretaries, house wives or sex objects, with the task to satisfy the needs of men (Gemzöe 2014: 48), (Bryson 2003: 163). Stanton (in Bryson 2003: 35-36) argues that all women are united by a fear of rape, and that "society, as organized today under the man power, is one grand rape of womanhood".

Gemzöe (2014: 56) claims that radical feminists are to thank for that rape, prostitution, sexual abuse and violence against women are no longer seen as "private matters" within a private, apolitical sphere, but something that the politics have to relate to. A huge change of attitude has taken place since the 1970s regarding oppression of women in the family and sexual repression.

Marxist/Socialist feminism

Within socialist and Marxist feminism the question of the relationship between the sexes and classes becomes important. Gemzöe does not refer to Marx as a feminist even though he formulated a theory focused on the human liberation from all forms of oppression; because she meant he was not interested in the exploitation of women. Despite this, feminists use Marx's theories for their purposes. The Marxist view on people has been used to understand the power relationship between the sexes. Marxist theory states that "the liberation of women will be reality after a socialist revolution" (Gemzöe 2014: 60-61). Bryson also disagrees with Marx being a feminist. Marxist feminists argue that; "the goal should not be equal rights

within an unequal society” and that for true equality for women a socialist society based on co-operation and collectivism is required, not individualism and competition (Bryson 2003: 3, 56-57, 67-68).

Engels (in Gemzöe 2014: 63) writes that the subordinate position of women is a result of the introduction of private property and the emergence of a class society. His idea about men needing to control women’s sexuality to secure heirs of the property is a seed to a theory that could analyze sexual relations. Marx and Engels claim that the oppression of women will end only when the class society and private property disappears, they do not have a specific feminist approach (Gemzöe 2014: 63).

A framework for empowerment

The conceptualization and measurement of women’s empowerment is important in order to understand the struggle of the organization and because the organization uses empowerment of individual participating women as a key strategy.

Empowerment terminology has arisen from theoretical debate and from the practical experiences of women working at a grassroots level (Rowlands 1997: 7). The concept is fairly new, and several perspectives are involved (Petesch, Smulovitz & Walton 2005: 61). Ashcroft (cited in Sleeter 1991: 3) defines empowerment as: “[...] belief in one’s ability/capability to act with effect”.

McLaren (in Sleeter 1991: 3) talks about empowerment in terms of education where “students” can broaden their understanding of themselves and the world. Monkman (1998) argues that the objective of education is individual change. Furthermore he describes the need for informal education of women and suggests programs for empowerment which include gender consciousness-raising practice aimed at both sexes. His view on empowerment is close to the one of the organization.

Kabeer (cited in Petesch, Smulovitz & Walton 2005: 41) defines empowerment as “the expansion in people’s ability to make strategic life choices in a context where this ability was previously denied to them”. Strategic life choices refers to the decisions that influences a person’s life, for instance decisions regarding marriage, employment and childbearing (Malhotra & Schuler 2005: 78). In Brazil women do not always have the ability to make strategic life choices, for instance abortion is still denied to them by law (The criminal law

enforcement). Kabeer (2008) states that the capacity of women to organize around their interests and needs will likely lead to an increase in public recognition of their basic rights.

Sardenberg distinguishes between two approaches to empowerment; “liberal empowerment” and “liberating empowerment”. She defines the concepts and clarifies how they relate to feminist theories. “Liberal empowerment” has a focus on individual growth and depoliticizes the empowerment process by focusing on an aspect which can be taught in classes as in the case of *Empoderamento da Mulher*. Contrary to this “liberating empowerment” is seen as an instrument to overthrow the patriarchy using collective action (Sardenberg 2010: 3-4). The focus of “liberal empowerment” is similar to the strategies of liberal feminism, while “liberating empowerment” can be resembled to Marxist or radical feminism

Empowerment has two psychological concepts; subjective well-being and self-efficacy (psychological empowerment). The quality of life in society and positive emotions derive from this, such as sociability, self-confidence, leadership and active engagement. Positive moods produce a state that appears to be similar to psychological empowerment (Diener & Biswas-Diener 2005: 125).

Empowerment can include financial, emotional or rhetorical aspects or aspects in terms of identity. Central to this study is what empowerment means to the members of *Empoderamento da Mulher* and what it means for them to be empowered. Therefore the study will primarily use the psychological and educational aspects of empowerment, since that is the way in which many liberal feminists see it, as something that increases the self esteem and self-efficacy. While the study will be focused on this perspective other definitions of empowerment will also be covered, where necessary, to fully understand other views on feminism such as radical or Marxist theory.

Previous research

Research previously done on similar subjects will be presented in this section as a foundation and outline for further discussion. For instance Gemzöe’s and Bryson’s ideas and discussion about the different feminisms and Leijonborg’s statements about liberal feminism have been brought up.

Antrobus (2004: 9) defines the global women’s movement by its diversity, its feminist perspectives and its methods of organizing. Further she claims that the feminist movement is formed out of local struggles brought together in a context of global challenges and

opportunities, and that the divisions created by class, age, sexual orientation, ethnicity and geographical location make the women's movement complex (Antrobus 2004: 1). She argues that even with a lack of unity, coordination and continuity the women's movement is enriched by diversity, passion and commitment to its causes, and by spontaneity of its strategizing (Antrobus 2004: 24). Antrobus (2004: 147-9) argues similarly with *Empoderamento da Mulher* that strategic alliances with men are essential in the feminist struggle.

A commonly used theoretical concept within *Empoderamento da Mulher* is *intersectionality*. A universal definition of women was abandoned when the second wave feminism collapsed in the 1970-80s (Zack 2005: 161). This resulted in the emergence of intersectionality (where each intersection speaks for itself), because the poor and black women realized feminism was focused mostly on white middle-class women's problems (Zack 2005: 161). The intersectionality led to the creation of several different feminisms divided into class, sexual preference and "race", Zack (2005) argues that these segregations are still ongoing which has led to that discrimination and exclusion still haven't ended among women, and this makes political unity impossible (Zack 2005). Critics argue that all intersections are not always relevant in the cultural and historical context. In a worst case scenario all power structures (LGBTQ, the class struggle, sexes) will be analyzed but then lead to a superficial understanding (Gemzöe 2014: 190). Zack (2005: 1) claims that "no one is quite sure what is going on in academic feminism these days". Feminists did not unite to rebuild the universal feminism after the second wave feminism collapsed, instead separate feminisms were created.

Coe (2010: 12) argues that her studies improved the empirical and theoretical understanding of feminist influence and advocacy in Latin America. Here another aspect will be analyzed by adding a local dimension of the impact on the individuals that are supposed to be empowered. Perhaps more difficult to measure than policy changes, but important still because it is these attitudes and views which influence a population and ultimately may contribute to cultural change. What motivates the members to continuously try to influence society? According to Coe, there is a balance: if they perceive that they have achieved all their objectives, they no longer have a reason to get involved in advocacy work, and if they feel that they do not meet any of their goals, they may become dissatisfied with the formation of opinion and choose another strategy or dissolve completely (Coe 2010: 42).

In the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency's (SIDA) report presenting an evaluation of KtK foundation (Kvinna till kvinna) one of the activities by the NGO was to

create spaces for women to meet. The meetings lifted the women's self-esteem and sent important signals to younger women, exactly as in the case of *Empoderamento da Mulher* (Lyth & Peck 2006: 21).

Bystydzienski (1999: 200-201) brings up an example of a feminist organization founded in Honduras, Latin America, where from the late 1980s, new, grassroots organizations emerged in the context of the popular struggle. This develops feminism aware of its roots in the popular movement (Bystydzienski 1999: 211).

The author's impression is that previous literature has focused, as in the previous example, more on the working class organizations: Alvarez (1999: 182) mentions that NGOs are not new when it comes to Latin American feminisms. Both informal feminist collectives and movements worked with popular education, political mobilization and "poor and working-class women's empowerment". In South America between 1920 and 1960 social movements revolved around orthodox Marxism. Economic processes were seen to be the only significant factors leading to rising labor movements, and the working class was considered the only relevant movement-actor (Coe 2010: 22). Fewer studies can be found about middle-class organizations using liberal feminist strategies. The fact that middle-class women organize is merely used as criticism towards liberal feminism (Gemzöe 2014: 29-30), (Bryson 2003: 53). This study will contribute to the knowledge about this type of organization.

To summarize this chapter has discussed three different branches of feminism with their pros and cons. While *Empoderamento da Mulher* elects not to define feminism, to avoid exclusion, a framework for the concept has been laid out. Furthermore different strategies have been presented concluding that *Empoderamento da Mulher* is a primarily liberal organization based on their strategies and view on empowerment. Other feminist thoughts have been discussed in order to provide a spectrum in which the organization can be discussed and analyzed as well as its weaknesses. Moreover the term empowerment has been defined for the purposes of this paper and a brief review of the previous research has been presented. An observation on the body of research is that little, so far, is done concerning liberal middle-class feminist movements such as this one, instead much of the focus is on working-class women's movements.

4. Methods and methodological approach

The methodological section of this paper primarily describes the process of data collection and discusses the connection between the theoretical concepts presented and the empirical data itself.

Feminism and empowerment have been studied through the primarily liberal strategies of *Empoderamento da Mulher*. Empirical data has been collected in Porto Alegre, Brazil between January and April 2015 by using qualitative methods such as interviews, group discussions, and participant observation as well as everyday reflections around spontaneous conversations concerning my subject, plus a continuous analysis of the online forum on Facebook. Participation in activities such as seminars and lectures helped to create a sense of how the organization operates in regards to its advocacy work and public appearance. Aspers (2011: 108-110) brings up the importance of participating in the same activities as the informants, to be able to ask how they perceive and interpret what they do and to be integrated in the field. Only then the researcher can get an understanding of the social life and what is going on in the field. A danger is to “go native”, and become too ingrained in the field of study. Reports, definitions from the organization and web-pages as well as previous texts on the subject were also used as material. These methods are considered relevant for the study since a mix of different methods and materials always yields a better result. However, qualitative methods for the collection and analysis of evidence are appropriate for this study since it is difficult to measure feelings and perceptions with quantitative methods. The main focus of the collected materials is not the organization itself, but the organization's strategies. The organization's main focus is the empowerment of individuals and not primarily to change policies, which is a typical liberal feminist feature. The material is representative for *this* organization in Porto Alegre, but might contribute to a deeper understanding of liberal feminist strategies.

To answer the research question it is necessary to first define the view of women in the region through interviews as well as previous research and statistics to get a well-substantiated explanation of patriarchal structures in Brazil. Doing this creates a balanced picture of the issues which can then be compared to the organization's visions and what results they have achieved.

Members and volunteers, the founder of the organization as well as people not from the organization have been interviewed. For the best results to be reached interviews should be mixed with conversations and dialogues. A dialogue does not try to find explanations but is looking to reach an understanding and the interviewer is always an actor and part of the process (Gustavsson 2004: 240-241, 250-251). Group interviews were held as this creates a discussion between people who in a social game develop their opinions and ideas, which is advantageous for the study (Gustavsson 2004: 248). Similarly to Coe (2010: 15), it was assumed that the participants and researcher worked together to create the empirical material. The data was therefore constructed through active participation rather than passive collection.

Unstructured interviews were conducted to reach subjective information through an explorative method. Semi-structured interviews built on a series of pre-defined open-ended questions which changed during the course of the interview and were used to capture personal reflections of the respondents. Structured interviews were used only on a few occasions since an inductive rather than deductive method was used. The research question was formulated after the fieldwork when an understanding of the context and women within it was reached.

The researcher's role is important especially keeping in mind the subjective perspective of being a young, Swedish feminist which was constantly kept in mind during the entire investigation process. This can be both positive and negative as a Western perspective comes into play. Aspers (2011: 66) mentions the importance of self-reflection. The researcher needs to reflect on their role and how that role affects the informants, the research and the researcher. The fact that most of the informants were white middle-class women of similar age might have had an impact on the material in a positive way since it enabled easier understanding and associations between informants and researcher. In contrast if the study was made on women of a lower socio-economical status the differences between informant and researcher would surely be greater.

News articles, websites and reports have been used as sources; it is important to reflect on whether these sources can have a tendency. Social media such as Facebook and blogs were also used as material since the organization uses social media for its advocacy work to a big extent. It is difficult to refer to Facebook since it is a space always changing, however, so is the organization. I used this material to understand their standpoint in different questions, and what information they chose to spread and discuss in the groups. This is a new type of

collective action interesting to analyze since it paves the way for a new type of activist work. It has to be mentioned that the organization might move on from the snapshot that I have provided and changes might have happened since I did the interviews. The interviews were anonymised both for ethical reasons and to improve the quality of the answers provided by the respondents.

Aspers (2011: 79) brings up the importance of mastering the language in the country of the fieldwork, I found it a big advantage to understand Portuguese during my fieldwork in Brazil. He also mentions that the countrymen often have a need and interest to compare and exchange experiences. The fact that the members of the organization were interested in the Scandinavian feminism and social conditions made our interactions easier and the material richer.

When reflecting on the impact of the organization other women and the patriarchal structures in the country have to be taken into account. It may be that the organization's middle-class feminist agenda has had difficulties to reach out and make an impact in the whole region. At the same time it means a big change for the women who participate in the organization. During the fieldwork I concentrated on the informant's perception of the importance of the organization and not necessarily the actual impact.

5. Background on the feminist movement in Latin America and the organization

The source of feminism's growth in Latin America can be found in the neoliberal adjustments and the sense that the state no longer "takes care" of its citizens. "Neoliberal social and economic adjustment policies, state downsizing, and changing international regimes" all contribute to the feminist struggle growing stronger (Alvarez 1999: 181). First-wave feminism refers to the period when women mobilized in favor of suffrage between 1850 and 1930. Second-wave feminism refers to the period of women's mobilization that began in the late 1960s (Coe 2010: 25). In the late 1960s Latin American scholars searched for new theoretical tools in response to the changing social and political environment. They directed their attention to these new movements, including the women's movements that challenged patriarchal, authoritarian rule. It was both as a resistance movement and as pop-culture, as the political struggle not only took place in relation to the state, but also in civil society. During the 1980s to the 1990s, most Latin American countries went through neo-liberal reforms under the pressure of globalization, which altered the relationship between state and civil society (Coe 2010:23).

In large parts of South America, the Catholic Church has a strong social influence on the population and the political elite. This creates a barrier to the impact of the organization since people publicly uphold teachings of the church, although in practice they often ignore these when it comes to sex before marriage, birth control, abortion or divorce (Coe 2010: 60). The equality agenda opposes the teachings of the Catholic Church, e.g. women's rights of using contraception, having abortions and getting a sexual education, as well as the empowerment of women (Coe 2010).

Momsen (2010: 1) argues that the gender discrimination becomes worse because of the peripheral position of poor countries of the South, the fact that their economies are in transition and the after-effects of colonialism. Safa (1990: 354) argues that a marked increase in the participation by women in social movements in Latin America has been witnessed. The organizations in which Latin American women are participating are led by and for women. Alvares (1999: 181) alleges that in "advocating feminism" Latin American organizations working with feminism have played a critical role by preceding a progressive policy agenda, at the same time as they have articulated important connections between the large women's

movement and civil society.

“The gauchos”

An important theme that emerged from the interviews was the culture of the Gauchos (Cultura Gaucha) and the male chauvinism that it perpetuates. Many feminist informants mentioned the traditional culture of the gauchos as a huge problem in the state. Gaucho, or Gaucha for girls is what people from the state Rio Grande do Sul are traditionally called, the Gaucho is traditionally very proud to be masculine. A radical feminist (interview 9) states that the culture of gauchos is chauvinistic and that according to it girls have to be delicate, groomed and looked after. The culture withholds the conceptions of femininity and masculinity and the gauchos are the ones reproducing it, not the women. In the countryside it is even worse; women have no sexual liberation, they accept abuse, and normalize violence. She explains that she moved from the countryside to Porto Alegre because of the liberty there (interview 9).

Commonly in the interviews with male informants not identifying with feminism was that they do not see the culture as a problem for equality, they mean that the girls want their men masculine and don't mind being objectified as feminine and delicate, this is rather something they strive to be.

Background on the violence in Brazil

Cerqueira and Santa Cruz Coelho (2014: 2) argue that gender violence is a direct reflection of the patriarchal ideology which reveals roles and power relations between men and women. The chauvinistic culture is a byproduct of the patriarchy, where women are objectified which leads to various types of violence, including rape, being fueled and legitimized. This takes place in two ways: by the accusing of the victim; and by the reproduction of the structure within the Criminal Justice System itself.

An estimated number of 527 000 people suffers from sexual violence in Brazil each year of which 10% are reported (Cerqueira & Santa Cruz Coelho 2014: 6). In 2011 88.5% of the victims were women and over 70% of rape victims were children or adolescents. The psychological consequences of such actions can be especially devastating at a young age making these findings even more alarming. Furthermore victims are often more likely to display issues with their self-esteem as well as adapting functionally into society (Cerqueira & Santa Cruz Coelho 2014: 7, 26).

According to Cerqueira and Santa Cruz Coelho (2014: 26) the ideology of patriarchy and its chauvinistic expression, the media and the Criminal Justice System strengthens certain behavior patterns that often lead to gender based violence and in particular rape. This phenomenon takes on a worrying dimension in Brazil, considering not only the consequences for the victims but on society in general. In losses of productivity, violence within households is born which reinforces a chauvinistic pattern that is shared on the streets.

Empoderamento da Mulher and their strategies

The organization, founded in 2013 is a relatively new civil society grassroots organization constantly developing in pace with more members engaging. It is limited to Porto Alegre but has a large member's base on social media where a significant part of the advocacy work is carried out. The Facebook group; *Espaço de Empoderamento da Mulher* grew from 500 to 1700 members during the last four months.

The organization describes itself as a democratic space to liberate and empower women and to break chauvinistic paradigms. According to the founder (interview 1) the strategies are connections with people, education and sharing of experiences. They have been working with, for instance, women's self-esteem and breaking the beauty patterns. Much of their work is about sharing stories of resilience and women's empowerment among members and outside the network.

The organization has two directions on which they focus; the lectures and workshops, and the social-media discussions which they call *virtual empowerment*. The internal strategies are conversations and debates about for instance *the body, career and power*, while the external strategies are to share stories of powerful women to show cases of empowerment. Meetings and workshops are carried out fortnightly where the public is invited to come and participate in group debates and discussions about empowerment, feminism, today's society, gender equality, etc. Currently debate and conversation is the main strategy, however, in a long term perspective they hope to expand and reach out to more people. This can be achieved through social-media campaigns or word-of-mouth. One member (interview 3) explains that the aim is to teach women how to be more empowered and to teach men who are involved how to handle increased empowerment. Another member (interview 4) says it is to make more women feel good about themselves, as well as to change the way in which men see women. A third member (interview 5) mentions inclusiveness as a central value of the organization. "We

want to make everybody feel welcome, that is our niche and what makes us popular, and people are starting to realize that this is the new way that feminism can be taught.”

The founder of *Empoderamento da Mulher* describes the organization:

I believe the project conveys examples of resilience and empowerment of women in several situations. The project was born from the moment the group noted that, despite all the difficulties imposed by society, every woman has the resilience and capacity to overcome them and become empowered, by for instance sharing experiences or listening to stories of other women to get inspired in their search of their own empowerment

(Interview 1)

This statement reveals two different approaches to equality: The fact that the organization focuses on empowering individuals rather than the whole society indicates on a liberal approach towards feminism (Gemzöe 2014: 11-12). However, the strategy to share experiences of being a woman is an example of a radical feminist strategy (Gemzöe 2014: 49), which makes the organization difficult to place in the feminist framework. Nevertheless, as the paper will show more aspects point at it being a liberal feminist organization. The feminist development has always had theoretical disagreements since the feminist thought has an interconnected, fragmented and fluid nature and roots in competing ideological traditions. Bryson argues that different feminist thoughts can be identified; reality cannot be represented by these identifications only, since organizations can at the same time have contradictory beliefs (Bryson 2003: 2).

While a lack of money and volunteers constitute the largest limitations of the organization, the active members really believe in the project and the objective. The long term goal is to form the public opinion and change the way in which people think and see the world. The world view they wish to convey is one of equal rights for all people.

In this chapter a background on feminist movements in Latin America was given, together with some background on the situation in Brazil where the study was conducted. Thereafter the targeted organization was presented to give a deeper understanding of their strategies.

6. Empirical analysis – Local issues, strategies and criticism

The empirical analysis is presented in three sections. The first one explains how the informants define the problem, what perception they have regarding what is wrong in their society and how they intend to tackle these problems. The second section brings up the different strategies that this liberal feminist organization uses, the two main strategies discussed will be the individually oriented empowerment of women and the inclusion of men. The third section concerns the potential limitations of such liberal strategies by comparing and analyzing them together with other feminist thoughts.

Section 1: perceptions of the problems

To understand why *Empoderamento da Mulher* use the strategies they do it is important to see how they define and perceive the problem and how they intend to tackle it. Why the organization was created in the first place is essential to understand for the following empirical analysis. What factors in society make so many women dissatisfied and what motivates them to create or join feminist organizations? It is also interesting to see if different feminist groups perceive the problem differently and how they articulate their strategies based on their perception of the problem.

Porto Alegre - a dangerous city

A recurrent theme throughout the interviews with feminist women is the insecurity on the streets and the fear of getting robbed or raped when going outside (interview 4). “If I go walking I have to change my route and be careful not to go through some dangerous area” (interview 5). This reflects the article in *Exame.com* (Vaz 2015) where Porto Alegre is ranked the 37th most violent city in the world, with 1442 killings during 2014, and the violence is increasing. Brazil also makes 2nd on a list of the world's most dangerous holiday destinations for women in an article in the *daily mail, UK* (Wain & Pemberton 2015). Following this *Empoderamento da Mulher* dedicated an event for women who travel alone, to illuminate the problem.

One of the main themes shared in the social media groups is discussions about violence against women and rape. Intimate partners are far more likely the perpetrators in cases where

women are victims than the other way around, the numbers are around 40% contra 6%. In Brazil, from 2001 to 2011, it is estimated that there were over 50 000 femicides with the number increasing even faster recently. Most of these deaths were due to domestic and family violence against women, about a third of them had the home as place of occurrence (Garcia et al: 1). It is estimated that there were on average 15.52 deaths of women from violent causes each day (Garcia et al: 3).

A recurring statement during the interviews (interviews; 3, 8, 9) was that violence against women. The chauvinistic way to treat women is often normalized and accepted by women, society and laws. Many women don't understand the problems because of the culture they were raised in. They point out that men who abuse or even kill their significant other can often refer to it as an "act of love" in court which significantly lowers the sentencing. Many women see the lack of consequence as a reason for these crimes being committed. Furthermore women often withdraw their report out of shame, fear or economic dependency. Sometimes for security reasons. Unfortunately this significantly lowers the credibility of the women who get assaulted. This corresponds with Momsen's (2010: 96) statement that violence against women often occurs within the home, where it often goes unreported and is tolerated, and the fact that women are often economically dependent and emotionally involved with those who victimize them.

Glick et al. (2002: 292) declares that male chauvinist behavior positively correlates with attitudes in society that legitimize abuse. Men with favorable attitudes about the use of oppression and force in relationships are more likely to use it. To understand the spreading of domestic abuse these attitudes including chauvinistic beliefs about women are important to understand, as well as the reasons for such attitudes. The cultural pattern from which the violence against women derives is something that *Empoderamento da Mulher* is seeking to change. According to Cerqueira and Santa Cruz Coelho (2014: 28) social development and the guarantee to basic rights, dignity and sexual freedom are hindered by the chauvinist society which poses enormous challenges to the state.

According to the Criminal statistics of SINESP the state Rio Grande do Sul had a rate of 28.33 rape victims per 100 000 inhabitants in 2014. In a Brazilian context they land somewhere in the middle. One respondent (interview 5) means that it depends a lot on who you get as your investigator if cases of rape and sexual assault will be investigated or not. Sadly they always start with asking "what were you wearing", and try to find ways to justify the rape. She means that this makes women feel like they did something wrong and society

tries to make women learn how to dress and how to behave instead of teaching men not to rape.

To be a woman in Porto Alegre

If it is not danger and violence it is the constant whistling and yelling. The respondent in interview 4 means that male chauvinism is very current in Brazil, and if she would wear a skirt on the street people would mess with her. “Women in Brazil cannot go wherever they want whenever they want; we do not own our own bodies or lives”. Another respondent (interview 3) thought it was important to observe the chauvinist society closely; men who *cat call* sometimes refer to it as compliments, this reveals that the phenomenon can be looked upon in different ways. However, when they get no response they resort to insults to solicit some sort of response. According to the respondent in interview 3 men do this because they want to feel like they have power, and express it.

One respondent (interview 5) states that there are two perceptions of women in Brazil. One is the fun, crazy, dancing, samba girl. And then there is the “good girl” who always has to carefully consider how she dresses not to look too promiscuous, she has to think about what she does and what she says to be a lady. These two different stereotypes make it confusing for women in Brazil, because they don’t know how to behave and will get judged either way. One member (interview 4) brings up that women are not supposed to have an attitude nor sexual desires, “We are just objects”. She continues by mentioning that society always finds a way to blame women: “if a woman is raped, it was because she was wearing a short skirt, if the husband cheats on his wife it was because she didn’t treat him well”. At the same time women are expected to look perfect and compete with each other for the attention of men. Another member (interview 5) says, they are told they need a man. This dependence on men could be contributing to the male chauvinism since the women “need” them. This echoes Bryson’s (2003: 140) argument that the clearest appearance of liberal feminism is found in Betty Friedan’s *The Feminine Mystique* (first published 1963; references to the 1986 edition). Friedan meant that women were tricked into believing that “their only fulfillment lay in domesticity” and the commitment lay in the “fulfillment of their own femininity”. These values are reinforced by advertisements and women’s magazines. Friedan meant that women’s lives were focused on “attracting and keeping a husband”. The *Feminine Mystique* changed the lives of many women since it provided a forum for debate and created a network

of active, politically informed women (Bryson 2003: 142). In the same way *Empoderamento da Mulher* think that they can be something new that might change the lives of many women.

A recurrent theme in the interviews is the threats to feminism (interview 5, 9). The two main groups actively opposing the feminist movement are the church and groups of chauvinistic men. The church's teachings are against abortion and demanding that girls get married virgins. "These two groups make it difficult for us since they also aim to have influence in society" (interview 5). This reflects Coe's (2010: 60) argument that the Catholic Church has a strong influence on the population. Another problem is the perception of feminism; "they will always think that I am strange or different because I am a feminist; some friends think that it is embarrassing; "You are a feminist but I like you anyway" (interview 5).

Except for violence, insecurity and insults the informants repeatedly mentioned the unequal opportunities for women as a big problem, for instance the work conditions and the lower salary. Mill in Bryson (2003: 53) empathized with educated women's intellectual frustrations. The founder of the organization (interview 1) mentions lack of prioritization and respect, lower salary, having their body objectified, fear of violence and to have their sexuality judged by the church. Lack of gender equality cherishes conservative norms and male control over women. Gender division of labor and women's lack of autonomy brings stigma to an organization's members because they advocate against these standards (Coe 2010: 59), as in the case of *Empoderamento da Mulher*.

Mostly women work with lower paid professions such as cleaning ladies or receptionists, with minimum salary, and if a man entered any of these he would climb to a higher position faster, two informant's state (interview 5, 9)

A male perspective

A male respondent (interview 2) argues that the general perception of women is bad and that some men "see women as a piece of meat". "If I asked men on the street most of them would answer that they like it the way it is because they are superior". He claims that even if the Brazilians would want to change something it would not be possible since the congress has a big part of religious parties who always vote against feminism, abortion and gay rights.

One respondent (interview 12) claims that the most difficult aspect to overcome for Brazilian feminism is the chauvinism already implemented in the culture. He believes that this type of organization is needed since they seek the awareness of people in society. Another informant

(interview 11) states that in the south of Brazil most people are concerned about the equality of genders, but that no one actually cares about the organizations and many people, especially religious groups, still believe women are worth less. Several female respondents said they fight against the chauvinism every day and that the only way to change the society where you live is to always oppose when you experience chauvinism.

Illegal abortion and its consequences

Radical feminists argue that the culture sustains a relationship where women's sexuality is controlled, which could be applied on the example of illegal abortions, which is a way to control women's sexuality (Bryson 2003: 3).

A recurrent theme throughout the interviews with women is the anger over the laws of illegal abortions. It is criminalized and people who undergo abortions in Brazil are subjects to one to three years in prison (The criminal law enforcement), a doctor can be punished with up to 20 years (Wylter 2013). The Brazilian *Ministry of Health* estimates that about 1 million abortions are made in Brazil every year, out of these about 200, 000 women are hospitalized from vaginal bleedings, infections and other complications. In Brazil abortion is legal only if the mother's life is in danger, in the rare instances of anencephaly or in cases of rape. However, among the male informants (and some cases with women) it was as common to be against legal abortion in cases where the girl was not raped. A female member (interview 4) argues that men do not care, since they will not have to go through it. According to her some people argue that women will use it as contraception and don't understand that it is a traumatic experience for women. *Empoderamento da Mulher* can have a positive impact since they discuss these matters and raise awareness about women's right to their own body.

The problem of chauvinistic women

It can be questioned whether the members of the organization are representatives for how the problem is perceived by women generally, the members might perceive inequality as a greater problem compared to others since they have organized themselves. After observations and interviews it is obvious that not all women are that concerned, and that according to the active members some women are even chauvinistic themselves. In interview 17 an anti-feminist woman explains how she is annoyed with the increasing feminist movement and refers to the feminists as boring and disgusting. She argues that abortion should be illegal since it is a woman's own responsibility not to get pregnant. This reflects Rocha-Coutinho's (1999: 379)

argument that Brazilian women without knowing it contribute to the chauvinist system being maintained.

This first section summarizes the obstacles feminists and women meet in Porto Alegre by exploring the empirical data collected and comparing it to the body of research done on the subject to understand why the need for the organization arose.

Section 2: feminist strategies of *Empoderamento da Mulher*

This section deals with the strategies implemented by *Empoderamento da Mulher*. As many liberal feminist organizations their strategies are individually oriented and characterized by the inclusion of men. The organization has two main strategies; the empowerment of individual women, and the inclusion of men. In this section these strategies will be presented as well as the way in which the organization works through these liberal strategies. To conclude critique against the strategies will be presented.

1. Empowerment of individual women as a strategy

The empowerment of individual women as a strategy deals with the way in which the organization can influence the women involved.

The organizations main work is carried out online through social media, there women get enlightened and aware about how women are treated across the world and what could be criticized about the Brazilian society. Articles and sexist advertisements are shared, everything which can generate a discussion.

Central for the liberal thought is *inclusiveness* since everybody is seen as equals. The founder of *Empoderamento da Mulher* argues that the feminist group is *intersectional* and that they seek greater representation. She means that society is made up by individuals and you cannot exclude anyone when you create a space or project with the aim to empower. One of the members (interview 2) argues that a black man has less power than a white girl, and that feminism is an important struggle but racism and the discrimination against homosexuality are even bigger problems. According to Gemzöe (2014: 189-190) *intersectionality* is a way to conduct feminism. The previously stated thoughts on intersectionality and the separated feminisms, by Zack (2005: 161), agree with this line of reasoning.

One strategy is to expand by including new people who could possibly get a new perception of feminism. Unfortunately the organization does not reach out to all genders, classes and

geographical places, almost everybody in the group is white middle-class. The informants think the group will get more diverse the bigger they become and the further out they reach.

Through interviews and observations it can be captured how people involved in the organization are affected or changed, or how they developed a political consciousness and a collective feminist identity and awareness. This reflects Coe's argument that the women's movement goes beyond nations and those involved in women's movements get involved based on the construction of collective identities, and a process of mobilization rather than a form of predetermined structural position (Coe 2010: 26).

In difference from Marxist and radical feminism liberal feminism uses a rather apolitical strategy, by focusing on influencing individuals. Since the organization does not focus on changing structures they need to influence many individuals to make an actual change in society. In interview 4 the respondent explains her beliefs in the multiplying effect. If she brings someone to a meeting or a lecture that person might get a new insight and tell friends about it, maybe react if he/she sees something sexist, and in that way influence further change in society.

A recurrent theme throughout the interviews was the women's concern with working class women, women in the periphery and homeless women. However, no big efforts to bring these groups to the events have been made, and the women seemingly hope that these groups will benefit from their work in the long run. Mill (in Bryson 2003: 53) too was concerned with working-class victims of violence, while he never saw them as potential fellow campaigners.

Increased self esteem as a strategy is vital for the organization, since they believe that a woman with high self-esteem and sense of control is empowered. The founder defines empowerment as:

When one has the notion of his/her value as a person, know his/her capabilities, rights and respect and is proud of his/her story. An empowered woman in Porto Alegre knows her rights and fights for them, and knows how important she is for the city and that she matters. Not afraid to fight for her rights, space, voice and respect.

(interview 1)

This reflects Petesch, Smulovitz and Walton's (2005: 53) argument regarding empowerment having an influence on; freedom, security, education and self-esteem. Diener and Biswas-

Diener (2005: 133) also reflect the organizations arguments by stating that empowerment includes mastery and self-confidence. Diener and Biswas-Diener (2005: 125) discuss subjective well-being, people's positive evaluations of their lives such as life satisfaction and fulfillment. These are connected with the understanding of personal value and rights, as well as the psychological empowerment which refers to self-efficacy. Empowerment according to them derives from self-confidence and sociability, since positive moods produce a state similar to psychological empowerment.

Education is one of the main strategies of the organization for empowering individual women, since through education and information you understand the world better, see what is wrong with it and start working for a change. Sleeter (1991: 125) confirms the importance by arguing that empowering students gives them the tools to influence the world and motivates them to strive for social change. Many of the members admit they were influenced and learned more about feminism thanks to their commitment. A repeating statement from the members is that those who oppose feminism in Brazil do it due to ignorance, and the reason why men are allowed in the group is for them to learn more about feminism, not to participate in the feminist struggle. If you ask the men they often respond that they are there for that very reason.

In the long run the organizations goal is to change the public opinion and create cultural change. In March the organization got invited to speak for the local government in Rio Grande do Sul on women's day. This echoes Alvarez argument about local governments looking for feminist NGOs to administer the targeted self-help and evaluate their gender-focused policies (Alvarez 1999: 182).

2. Including men as a strategy

Men's inclusion is central within *Empoderamento da Mulher* and considered one of the main strategies, as well as it is part of the inclusive feminism that the organization is carrying out. A recurring standpoint by the members has been that men *have* to be included for the feminist struggle to go in the right direction. The founder (interview 1) wonders how men are supposed to learn more about, and start to respect feminism if we keep excluding them. In interview 2 the member says he supports these kinds of organizations to learn more about feminism. He does not want to take charge and does not think men should be leading the struggle for empowerment of women. However, he thinks that it is important that men are

welcome and have a role. His view on women has changed remarkably since he joined the organization and he sees not only Porto Alegre, but the whole world in a different way, and he believes that it will have an impact on society as well given enough time. Similarly Antrobus (2004: 147-9) argues that a movement for social transformation cannot be built without strategic alliances with men.

Within feminism men's inclusion is complex and widely debated. Some women want to include men, others do not. Some men want to be included, others do not. *Empoderamento da Mulher* is currently debating whether or not to include men; and since this would be a position in their values the decision is sensitive and complicated. They compare men participating in a feminist organization with white people participating in an anti-racist organization for black people. All active members argue that men should be included in the feminist struggle and that it is important that men participate in the discussions, what is problematic is not to lose the women who do not want to participate in a discussion forum with men. This reflects Boutros Boutros-Ghali's argument (in Momsen 2010: 230), he meant that for true social transformation to occur every society needs to learn to adopt new values where relationships between men and women based on equality, mutual respect and equal responsibility have to be created. Momsen (2010: 107) also argues that part of the solution involves changing men's attitudes. One man involved in the organization (interview 14) already shows signs of this attitude change when he states that it is everybody's struggle, not just women's, and if women take over and make it only their struggle it is dangerous since that would create a "we" against "them" scenario. Maybe the price they have to pay to be inclusive is to lose the potential members who do not agree with these including values.

In the book; *Men engaging feminisms: pro-feminism, backlashes and schooling* Stephen Heath (cited in Lingard & Douglas 1999: 1, *italics in original*) tries to clarify the complex inclusion of men in feminism:

Men's relation to feminism is an impossible one [...]. Men have a necessary relation to feminism – the point after all is that it should change them too, that it involves new ways of being women *and men* against and as an end to the reality of women's oppression – and that relation is also necessarily one of a certain exclusion [...] this is a matter for *women*, that it is their voices and actions, not ours: no matter how "sincere", "sympathetic", or whatever, we are always also in a male position which brings with it all the implications of domination and appropriation, everything precisely that is being challenged, that has to be altered

Some men don't want to be included and oppose these kinds of organizations. One respondent (interview 11) thinks only people with nothing better to do enter these organizations, and that real feminists are hard working women who achieve their goals by their own efforts, not by trying to make people feel guilty and say that men exploit them. A recurring theme in interviews with men outside of the organization was that they often said they were for equal rights, but wouldn't call themselves feminists or join the organization, because the word feminist has bad connotations, often because of radical or extreme feminists having expressed hate towards them. Leijonborg (2001: 11-12) confirms this by arguing that the negative connotation occurred because of feminists who saw all men as enemies, and did not focus on individuals.

The most active women in the organization state that feminism is a struggle for women only which has made some of the men interviewed not feel welcome. The women want the men there to learn, and as support, and if they want to be more than that they are not welcome.

"Feminism is the opposite of male chauvinism" some of the male informants said, indicating that male chauvinism is bad for society. They also mentioned that the gauchos are not very receptive to this new feminist wave since they see themselves as too masculine. They think it is about lowering the man's position in order to empower women, which is not the case. The empowerment of women project is all about lifting women up. Some men however refer sarcastically to feminists as "feminazis" and claim that feminism is a strategy for ugly women who cannot get laid and who hate men to take their power. This reflects Gemzöe's (2014: 16) argument that there are people who have the image of a feminist as a woman who is frustrated, choleric, and masculine and cannot get a man because she is too ugly. It also reflects Kimmel's arguments regarding the participation of men within feminism. Kimmel (in Gemzöe 2014: 149-150) claims that some men are afraid of feminists, because many individual men do not recognize themselves in the feminist view of men as people with power when they often feel powerless themselves. He argues that women, as a group, are subordinate to men although many men are subordinate to other men through class belonging, ethnicity, sexuality, age or disabilities. The feeling of powerlessness that many men feel is because of the thought that men should have power and privileges just because they are men, in reality many men do not have this. Kimmel (in Gemzöe 2014: 149-150) further claims that feminists attack men for having power, and this is when they become defensive. He means that the task of pro-feminist men is to clarify the roots to why some men feel powerless. One of the informants (interview 10) brings this up and explains that many men also need to be

empowered, and that the organization fails to see this. Leijonborg (2001: 13) also supports this line of thought when talking about men who do not recognize themselves as particularly powerful.

Some feminist informants (interview 1, 8) argue that men don't like feminism because they don't feel they are the centre of it. Kimmel (in Gemzöe 2014: 149-150) reflects on this by bringing up the fear of feminism. If men are seen as irrelevant and meaningless in the feminist world view they don't see themselves in it. This is probably the reason why separatism as a feminist strategy has made men angry and opposed to feminism. The task of pro-feminist men is to make feminism understandable for other men, who might be opposing it and for the public. They have to explain that feminism isn't about robbing individual men their power, but about challenging the idea that men automatically are born with a power position (Kimmel in Gemzöe 2014: 149-150).

One informant (interview 2) states that what makes men participate in these types of organizations is empathy, since they cannot gain anything when they are already superior. This reflects Kimmel's argument (in Gemzöe 2014: 149-150) regarding that the reason why men join feminism is ethical, it is *right* to support feminism.

Another reason why men hesitate to join the feminist struggle is the resistance they meet. One of the respondents (interview 10) brought up the fact that men who write on the Facebook page of the organization have to be 100% feminist, if the statement is somewhat chauvinistic it will be criticized, he claims this is why men do not join, and that it goes against their vision of an open debate. He also says that since he is a guy people see him as a "feminazi" when he refers to himself as a feminist. This reflects Gemzöe's (2014: 16) argument that prejudice still exists against those who call themselves feminists and men who call themselves feminists often have to motivate why.

In this second section of the analysis the strategies used by *Empoderamento da Mulher* have been discussed and presented as well as the implementation of these strategies. The main strategies are empowerment of individual women and the inclusion of men, which are also two of the main liberal strategies according to Leijonborg (2001).

Section 3: discussing liberal strategies

To analyze the opportunities and limitations of liberal strategies they need to be compared to other feminist strategies. In this empirical analysis it will be investigated how the different feminisms work with their strategies together with potential limitations and opportunities.

Differences between radical and liberal feminism

One of the informants (interview 9) argues from a radical perspective that being a woman is a social construction. This construes one of the main differences between the two thoughts: radical feminists do not want to include Trans-people in the struggle since they have been socialized as men and therefore have certain privileges. She means that being a woman has nothing to do having long hair, boobs and make up but that it is a social construction. Another reason for the exclusion of Trans-people is the view that they try to silence the feminists about maternity, abortion and menstruation which they have no experience of. Another difference is the view on pornography and prostitution: the liberal feminists see it as a free choice of the woman while the radical feminists see it as a way to exploit women because they have no other options, not as something they do because they “love sex and want to make men happy” (interview 9). These views clash with the liberal goal of inclusiveness.

A radical feminist (interview 9) argues that liberal feminism can be good for the purpose of informing women who are not feminists, but the liberal strategies do not have a real impact on women’s lives, changing laws, or helping women in the periphery leave the domestic housework. She criticizes liberal feminists for not working for *all* women’s empowerment.

Radical feminists (interview 9) argue that in Brazil feminism needs help from the state to liberate women from domestic work. They criticize liberal feminism for only changing individuals; she claims that there is no point changing individuals if the problem is structural; that they only change themselves, not the society. This echoes Bryson’s (2003: 92-93) argument that liberal feminism ignores oppression inside the home and only advocates equal rights between the sexes in the public sphere within a hierarchical, unequal society. She also argues that the radical feminism assumes the state can improve the situation of women.

A feminist is an empowered woman. Empowerment is having the tools to grow and to live free with no oppression. It is not empowerment to walk with high heels and feel pretty if you can still get raped. Make-up gives you no power, it makes you feel pretty but who told you that you need to look pretty?

(Interview 9)

An ongoing theme in the interviews is that there is a continuous fight between the radical and liberal feminist approaches. Radical feminists do not agree with the liberal thought that empowerment is about feeling good about oneself. They explain it as something that makes a woman free, like changes in structure and politics. The radical feminist's often direct criticism against the liberals for not being political or deep enough, for not aiming to change any structures but rather focus on individuals, which they argue will not change anything.

Feminists are hated because they want to change the structure of society. The liberal feminists are trying to make feminism more beautiful, but I don't want to be beautiful, I want to fight.

(Interview 9)

These same ideas are presented by Eisenstein (in Bryson 2003: 87). She claims that the view of women as a sex-class united in a struggle against men is opposed to the liberal principles that when women have equal rights it is up to the individual women to change their situation. The liberal ideas deal with equality and natural rights while the radical ideas deal with the collective interests of women and the need to defend these against men (Bryson 2003: 75).

Separatism versus inclusiveness within feminism

The most distinctive disagreement between the radical and liberal strategies is the inclusiveness of the liberal strategies and the separatism of the radical. The radical feminists argue that feminism is only for women, and one of the radical informants stated that; "if men like feminism you are not doing it right, feminism doesn't exist to make men happy". The liberal feminists on the other hand promote inclusiveness and everybody's equal value. This disagreement is confirmed by Bryson (2003: 4) who argues that the underlying theoretical perspectives are influencing whether feminists work in "separatist women-only organizations" or include men. Gemzöe (2014: 51-52) argues that radical feminism stresses the importance of women as a group without the interference of men and to strengthen the women's movement some separatism is necessary. Their idea that men are taking advantage of the patriarchy results in a separation between men and women. Gemzöe (2014: 146-147) also brings up that within the second wave feminism, with the radical feminists in the front, separatism was a strategy; to liberate women from the oppressing patterns, without men. They meant that if men participated in the political forum the debates would change direction and

men would be dominating. The point was not to reject men, but to be independent from them, and according to Gemzöe (2014: 146-147) this early women's movement strategy of separatism has been the most misunderstood strategy of the movement. People have been interpreting the strategy as naïve, and thought that the women want to ignore men and build a utopia that only works in the absence of men. This has made separatism the most provoking part of feminism for many men.

Many radical feminists think all men are potential rapists or might have raped someone in the past and therefore do not want anything to do with them (interview 9). As one of their strategies (Gemzöe 2014: 49) they share experiences of men with each other. They talked about rape as something that is happening all the time even in relationships between a man and a woman. This reflects Bryson's (2003: 178) argument that for many radical feminists sexual exploitation within the family is more significant than domestic exploitation and that the patriarchy is primarily based on violence and control over women's sexuality.

The relation between radical and liberal feminists

One relevant reason why liberal feminists and radical feminist cannot collaborate might be the ontological differences where the liberal feminists value the actors while the radical feminists value the structures.

Liberal feminists often refer to their radical counterparts as needed in the feminist struggle even though they don't sympathize with their strategies. Several informants (interviews 3, 5) confirm this: they argue that people who are seen and heard create a chock that society and people opposing feminism need to see to understand that women are not happy with society as it is today.

It is indeed difficult to isolate the two thoughts from each other. One informant (interview 9) argues that many people start of as liberal feminists, only to realize that it is not enough and will not change anything in society and then become more radical. This is confirmed by Bryson (2003: 3) who argues that despite legal rights women remained disadvantaged; and therefore many arguments of the liberal feminists are becoming more radical. Bryson (2003: 244) also argues that because women's experiences and needs cannot be fully expressed by a liberal approach many liberal feminists move to more radical positions.

Despite the many discrepancies, radical feminism agrees with the liberal feminist thought that women are a subject of inequalities because they are excluded from basic freedoms and rights.

However, the radical feminism argues that this type of inequality is nothing but a symptom of deeper lying power structures that will not be changed just because some women acquire higher positions in society (Gemzöe 2014: 58-59). Bryson (2003: 162) finds it difficult to identify feminisms and argues that liberal feminists often challenge the liberal assumptions when they recognize that women share the nature of individual experiences. Some radical ideas have been accepted by “mainstream” feminists.

A radical thought is that feminism has to be political with a political representation. One of the radical informants (interview 9) mentions that the reason why a political party cannot be created is because there is no unity within feminism in Brazil. The anarchist feminists do not believe in the state and the liberal and radical feminists refuse to collaborate. This correlates with Bryson’s (2003: 4) argument that implications for the political practice of feminism are created because of theoretical disagreements within feminism.

Zack (2005: 162) argues that the second wave feminism gave up “inclusive feminism” and abandoned the universal definition of feminism too quickly and easily, and that feminism should not ignore what women have in common. Zack (in Gemzöe 2014: 191-194) claimed that black American feminists for instance have shown that they feel excluded from the white middle-class feminism, even though it had a pretense of inclusion. She continues by claiming that the problem of exclusion of some groups was solved through abolishing the idea of inclusion and the realization that different feminisms are needed for different women’s interests. Zack (2005: 1) argues that to unite the feminisms again the greatest criticism of second wave feminism has to be taken into account, “that white middle-class feminists did not speak for all women”. Zack claims that this was what made intersectionality a leading paradigm within feminism. Further, Zack (2005: 2) calls for a development of a new inclusive feminist theory.

Opportunities of liberal feminism

A common perception throughout the interviews was that women realized that men are affected by the chauvinist society too, and that the inclusion of men would ultimately lead to a less chauvinistic society. One member (interview 5) states that if men participated more in the household and with raising the children they would be more able to express themselves without so many expectations of what a man should be like, they too would gain from the dissolving of the stereotypes. Bryson (2003: 157) makes an argument that she finds it hard to see why a majority of men would suddenly start doing house work; she means that they rather

do not because it is culturally seen as something women do. Bryson (2003: 176) argues that the refusal to help with the domestic work is not individual disagreements but part of a wider power struggle. Gemzöe (2014: 146-147) also reflects this by mentioning an early discussion about men suffering from living in a chauvinistic society and that their possible support should be encouraged and not rejected. The stereotypical role of men is hindering them from developing their full personalities, it can limit them to be family breadwinners and limit them from contact with the children. Many men recognize that they would also gain on the abolishment of chauvinism. The patriarchy does not only mean that all men are oppressing all women, but that also men can recognize these structures and fight them, to hinder them from creating inequality between the sexes and lock men and women in stereotypical roles (Gemzöe 2014: 58-59). Faludi (in Bryson 2003: 144) argues, like many liberal feminists, that genuine equality could benefit men too.

Radical feminism has gotten criticized for its view on men, since they argue that the oppression of women is not maintained by unequal laws or economic structures but by men, who as a group have interests in women being subordinate.

Limitations of liberal feminist strategies - opportunities of radical feminism

Bryson (2003: 153-154) argues that the liberal thought might seem utopian since it fails to understand the reality of the power relations in society and the real forces opposing women's liberation. The demands for equal rights would mean that the state would have to be more non-liberal.

The liberal feminist thought could be criticized because the early liberal writers were essentially biased against women since it brought out a view of rationality excluding women by defining reason as "overcoming femininity" (Bryson 2003: 8-9). Socialist feminist Eisenstein (in Bryson 2003: 157-158) argues that the belief of liberal feminism that "it is up to each person to make the best of his or her life" contradicts the more radical view of women as a group being disadvantaged and needing to take collective action.

Some radical informants (interview 9) admit that liberal feminism is a fine idea, but that it is not for them, since it focuses on changing individuals when the problem is structural, the social and economical structures that created a hierarchy between the sexes. Gemzöe (2014) confirms this by describing the liberal feminism today as effective to a certain point in practice, but weak in theory. She means that liberal feminism lacks a theory of what the

deepest mechanisms of oppression of women are; while other feminist thoughts are trying to answer this question. The strategies of the liberal feminists to abolish the oppression of women are criticized for being built on a poor understanding of the matter. The competing thoughts complain that the liberal feminist strategy to gradually integrate women into society has not been able to abolish the subordinate position of women in society (Gemzöe 2014: 45-46).

Through interviews and participant observation it was found that an important question for the radical feminists is the sexuality and the unequal power relationship that it upholds. This echoes Gemzöe's (2014: 46-48) argument that liberal feminists are not focusing on the significance of the sexuality for the power relationship between the sexes. This also reflects the general critique of liberal feminism according to Stanton (in Bryson 2003: 33) who claims that by demanding rights for individual women on the same basis as men you are ignoring the domestic situations of many women which prevents them from fully exercising these rights. Despite this Stanton never questioned the female responsibility for children and home. However her appeal to liberal individualistic principles ignores the collective limitations of women, nonetheless Eisenstein (in Bryson 2003: 33) disagrees and argues that Stanton fails to understand the role of private oppression against the achievements of public equality.

A recurrent theme throughout the interviews, among all thoughts of feminism, is the fact that the members in the organization are mainly white middle-class women. It is mentioned how other women have it a lot worse, and that feminism is more needed for instance in the periphery. Radical feminists (interview 9) argue that for real change to happen all women have to be counted in, and that the liberal organizations and strategies are not helping the poor women in the periphery. This reflects Gemzöe's (2014: 46-48) argument that liberal feminism ignores the significance of the social class belonging and the material conditions of women. The importance given to the influencing of attitudes and to combat prejudice is obscuring the working-class women and their economic limitations to take advantage of what the liberal feminists have fought for. The class division between women is still present and an example mentioned by the respondents was that many women who would be interested cannot attend the meetings because they live too far away and cannot afford a taxi home at night. Gemzöe (2014: 29-30) also states that a definition of inequalities solely between the sexes might be racist and elitist. This is also reflected in Bryson (2003: 151-152) who reasons that liberal feminists only reflect on white middle-class women's concerns "who are privileged in every way other than their sex" while ignoring other inequalities. She brings up that some women

see it as fulfillment if they can have a profession and pay someone to take care of their household; however, the needs of the woman cleaning are often ignored. She calls this “elitist assumptions”. It also reflects Antrobus (2004: 1) argument about the divisions created within feminism, for instance the divisions of class, or geographical location, which prevents some groups from participating in *Empoderamento da Mulher*.

A recurrent theme when talking to radical informants was the disagreement between radical and liberal feminisms about the inclusion of men, they mean that men have a place in all other spaces in society and that feminism should be left for women. One of the respondents (interview 9) argues that she will not spend her time discussing with men and try to make them change when she knows they do not care. This reflects Stanton’s (in Bryson 2003: 33) suspiciousness of the male support of feminism, she argues that the women’s liberation must be won by women and that men have interests opposed to women, she analyses women as an oppressed class and she means that women can only be freed by their own collective struggle.

To summarize this chapter has dealt with the differences and relationship between radical and liberal feminism. Some of the central concepts constituting these differences such as inclusiveness and the involvement of men have been discussed and clarified. Furthermore some limitations and opportunities of the different approaches as also been presented.

7. Conclusion

Different feminist theories provide different strategies to reach equality and liberation of women, this section aims to answer the research question; *which strategies the feminist organization Empoderamento da Mulher employs? And what opportunities and limitations come with these strategies?*

The research has been conducted as an organizational study of the feminist organization *Empoderamento da Mulher* in Porto Alegre where the organizations importance and contribution for social development in Brazil has been discussed. The organization has been analyzed in a feminist theoretical context by reviewing its strategies and implications as well as comparing it with other types of feminism. In Porto Alegre the relationship between the feminisms is complex. The liberal feminists think that the radical feminists are needed for the struggle; however, the radical feminists generally do not agree with liberal feminist views, mainly because liberal feminists want men to participate, while radical feminists do not.

Considering the data it can be stated that *Empoderamento da Mulher* uses mostly liberal, individually oriented strategies for women's empowerment, as well as the inclusion of men as a strategy, with elements of more radical strategies customized for the organization; such as sharing of experiences.

With these strategies come several opportunities and limitations that all have been presented in the essay. Opportunities such as increased knowledge and self esteem among the members due to a discussion platform contributing to information spreading of feminist matters to a wide range of people. The inclusion of men is an opportunity in the sense that the strategy creates a niche which has grown popular in Porto Alegre and Brazil since it promotes an inclusive, intersectional feminism without discrimination. Limitations are often seen in the radical and Marxist critiques of these strategies such as the limited depth of solutions and inability to change societal structures which the radical and Marxist feminists argue are underlying factors for the patriarchy. Another limitation often mentioned is the fact that these liberal strategies often are used by feminist organizations consisting solely of white middle-class women which can be used as critique against their self-proclaimed inclusiveness.

A deeper understanding of the women's movement in Brazil has been presented, and analyzing the different feminisms and the concept of empowerment has contributed to the

understanding of the different strategies used by *Empoderamento da Mulher*. Given the empirical data the goals of increasing women's self-esteem, as well as educating the population, have been reached to a certain degree however whether or not this fully entails all aspects of empowerment can still be discussed. From a liberal perspective the individuals affected by the organization have been empowered, yet the societal structures remain unchanged.

The struggle for political and legal equality in the past was visibly progressive with actual improvements in all women's lives, regardless of class. In many countries we now take these legal, economic and political rights that earlier generations fought for, for granted. In Brazil however, where abortion is still not legal and women do not have basic legal rights and legal protection the struggle is still ongoing. This reflects Bryson's (2003: 162, 243) argument that these rights have to be defended and the western world should support women in countries where these rights do not exist.

Latin American feminism is increasingly heterogeneous (Alvarez 1999: 183) and Gemzöe (2014: 191) states that feminist political theory tries to identify the foundations for a feminism that recognizes differences between women without being unable to agree on a political agenda. Succeeding in this could result in a feminist political party which is coherent enough to make a significant difference. Because of this heterogeneity it is difficult to categorize the different strategies as radical and liberal only. Often a group uses strategies from several different feminist thoughts, even though they prefer to call themselves one or the other.

Different feminist approaches should recognize their limitations and seek to work more together, in order to achieve a tangible change in society. One solution would be a feminism aware of its limitations, which both explores the relationship between "race", sex oppressions and class, and at the same time does not reject liberal values in recognizing men as potential allies. Obviously this subject welcomes much further research especially since this study focused mainly on *Empoderamento da Mulher* in Porto Alegre. Nonetheless, a contribution, however small, to the debate and literature on liberal feminist strategies and middle-class feminist organizations has been made, and can spark more studies on this phenomena and how it develops, providing researchers with ongoing material about one of the most important social questions of our time.

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Appendix: interviews

1. **Founder and leader of *Empoderamento da Mulher* (woman)**
2nd of April, Online, Porto Alegre, Brazil
2. **Active male member of *Empoderamento da Mulher***
27th of January, Porto Alegre, Brazil
3. **Former active member of *Empoderamento da Mulher*, active when the organization was still about to make a documentary. Liberal feminist (woman)**
3rd of February, Porto Alegre, Brazil
4. **Active member of *Empoderamento da Mulher* (woman)**
24th of February, Porto Alegre, Brazil
5. **Active member of *Empoderamento da Mulher* (woman)**
25th of February, Porto Alegre, Brazil
6. **Active member of *Empoderamento da Mulher* (woman)**
26th of February, Porto Alegre, Brazil
7. **Man working at TransLAB (Company collaborating with the organization)**
26th of February, Porto Alegre, Brazil
8. **Feminist journalist and a member who attends the public events of *Empoderamento da Mulher* (Woman)**
22nd of March, Porto Alegre, Brazil
9. **Radical feminist opposing the liberal ideas (Woman)**
2nd of April, Porto Alegre, Brazil
10. **Male friend to one of the active members**
19th of February, Porto Alegre, Brazil
11. **Man, no connection with the organization**
20th of February, Online, Porto Alegre, Brazil
12. **Man, no connection with the organization**
23rd of February, Online, Porto Alegre, Brazil
13. **Man, no connection with the organization**
27th of March, 14th of May, Online, Porto Alegre, Brazil
14. **Man, member of *Empoderamento da Mulher***
27th of February, Porto Alegre, Brazil

15. Man, no connection with the organization

21st of March, Porto Alegre, Brazil

16. Man, no connection with the organization

18th of January, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil

17. Anti feminist woman

26th of March, Porto Alegre, Brazil

18. Feminist woman not from the organization

31st of March, Porto Alegre, Brazil

19. Man, connection with the organization

26th of February, Porto Alegre, Brazil