

**"We are all feminist, but do we think the same about trans rights? A qualitative analysis of the collaboration between feminist and the LGBTIQA+ movement in Spain"**

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**Data availability statement**

The data, instructions, and informed consent that support the findings of this study are openly available in OSF.io at <https://osf.io/hk6y2/>

**Public Significance Statement**

This study demonstrates the potential of alliances between movements to address gender-related social inequalities globally.

**Abstract**

This study examines the perceptions of LBQ+ and heterosexual feminist cis women, regarding how they define feminism and perceive the relationship between the feminist and LGBTIQA+ movement in the context of progressive trans rights legislation in Spain (Trans Law, approved in 2023). Two two-hour focus groups were conducted with 12 feminist cis women, 6 of whom were LBQ+ and 6 heterosexuals. Data was analyzed through reflexive thematic analysis, identifying 3 themes: Feminism, conflicts in the feminist movement concerning the Trans Law and intergroup collaboration. While both groups held similar definitions of feminism, LBQ+ women emphasized the importance of an intersectional perspective. Both groups expressed interest in addressing gender inequalities and forming alliances but differed in their analysis of these alliances. Heterosexual women focused on alliance challenges and threats, while LBQ+ women emphasized the need of empathy and collaboration. Heterosexual women expressed mixed feelings toward the proposed Trans Law, whereas LBQ+ cis women expressed clear support for the law and the protection of trans rights. Participants suggested actions to promote the allyship (e.g. creating common spaces and confronting LGBTIQA+phobic aggressions). While both groups express willingness to collaborate, differences and challenges are inherent in diverse feminism. Such differences should be embraced as opportunities for debate and effective collaboration, to reduce conflict and promote social transformation. It demonstrates the potential of alliances between movements to address gender-related social inequalities as a global challenge.

*Keywords:* feminism, focus group, qualitative analysis, LGBTIQA+, intraminority solidarity

**"We are all feminist", but do we think the same? A focus group analysis of cisgender heterosexual and LBQ+ women on the collaboration between feminist and LGBTIQA+ movement in Spain**

Reducing gender inequality is a global challenge and a sustainable development goal (SDG5; UN, 2015). The feminist movement strives to achieve gender equality (Hoffman, 2001), a goal shared with the LGBTIQA+ movement. Both movements face common challenges, such as confronting negative stereotypes related to traditional gender roles and expectations. This shared struggle has historically fostered an alliance between feminism and the LGBTIQA+ movement (Mayor et al., 2021). However, the advancement of legislation to guarantee trans rights can activate an intergroup conflict between the different perspectives within feminism and the LGBTIQA+ community. This has been the case in Spain, because of the public debate around the legalisation of LGBTIQA+ rights in 2023 (Ley para la igualdad real y efectiva de las personas trans y para la garantía de los derechos de las personas LGTBI, 2023) 4/2023; henceforth Trans Law). Even though the re-emergence of historical discussions (Raymond, 1979; Thurlow, 2022), regarding the inclusion of trans aims in feminism is a global phenomenon (e.g. UK; Rowling, 2020; or Germany; Geschlecht zählt, 2022), the situation of Spain has its own particularities due to the process of approval of the Trans Law. The goal of this study was to deepen our understanding of Spanish cis women's perspectives (distinguishing between LBQ+ and heterosexual cis women) of feminism, their views on the intergroup conflict and potential strategies to promote the cooperation between the feminist and LGBTIQA+ movements. Studies were carried out one year after the first draft of the Trans Law was published.

**Feminism(s) and Solidarity with Other Disadvantaged Groups**

Feminism is a social, political, and cultural movement that advocates for the equal rights, opportunities, and treatment of all genders, with a particular focus on addressing historical and ongoing inequalities faced by women (Hoffman, 2001; Mayor et al., 2021).

Feminism has gained a lot of advocates in Spanish society (where most of the youth identifies as feminist and half of it think that feminism is key to achieve gender equality (Sanmartín et al., 2024), resulting in massive protests during 8M in recent years and resistances (e.g. #SeAcabo movement, driven by a Spanish football player denouncing the sexual violence that women suffer in sports; Brascia, 2023). This has occurred in parallel with other global gender movements (e.g. "Me Too"; advocating for the visibility of survivors of sexual violence; Burke, 2017).

Within feminism, there are diverse branches, each offering distinct approaches to combating gender inequalities (Hoffman, 2001). However, there is limited exploration of the dynamic content of feminist identity constructed in conversation with others who also self-identify as feminists. A qualitative approach to feminist identity can provide deep insights into the individual's perspective (Carrino et al., 2022). Given that self-identification with feminism and holding feminist values has different connotations (Carrino et al., 2022; Hoskin et al., 2017; Rhodebeck, 1996) and self-labelling is key to promoting activism (Liss et al., 2000; Yoder et al., 2020), we propose a qualitative approach to investigate the content of feminism among individuals who identify with the label "feminist", addressing a significant gap in the existing literature.

Beyond analysing the content of feminist identity (e.g., Liss et al., 2000; Rhodebeck, 1996), scholars have shown a growing interest in feminist identification and its effects on collective action not only for gender inequality (Greenwood, 2012; Thomas & Newell, 2022), but also for other groups (e.g., for LGBTIQ+ community, Uysal et al., 2021). People who identify as feminists are often more aware of the need to address other inequalities (e.g., racial discrimination, Fisher et al., 2017; economic inequality, Arruzza et al., 2019) since feminism promotes the perception that discrimination is structural and affects different groups simultaneously (fostering an intersectional perspective; Crenshaw, 1989). Perceiving that discrimination is co-occurring at different levels increases stigma-based solidarity (i.e.,

mutual support and bond formation among individuals who face similar societal discrimination and prejudice due to their identity; Chaney & Forbes, 2022), which takes root in the awareness that disadvantaged groups share a common fate (Schmitt et al., 2003).

Identifying as feminist might create allyships between groups not only because feminist identification can promote stigma-based solidarity, which may translate to actions that aim to fight against outgroup discrimination (LGBT; Uysal et al., 2021; and trans; Galván-hernández et al., 2025; Conlin et al., 2021; Platt & Szoka, 2021; Worthen, 2012), but also because it can increase the perception of the LGBTIQ+ people as ingroup members, serving feminist identification as an intersectional common identity. The Common Ingroup Identity Model proposes (Gaertner & Dovidio, 2000) that having a common identity fosters a positive attitude towards the outgroup. This could be the case for self-identified feminists, where a perceived overarching group is perceived among different demographic groups: cisgender and transgender, or heterosexuals and LGB+. Therefore, the perception of having common goals and shared grievances increases willingness to engage in collective actions to improve the outgroup's situation (Chaney & Forbes, 2022; Craig & Richeson, 2016). So, given that feminism aims to challenge patriarchal norms and traditional gender stereotypes, it is not surprising that feminist identity has been positively related to openness to diverse representations of gender, and gender fluidity (Molin et al., 2020; Platt & Szoka, 2021), making feminist identity an important tool to counteract the development of transphobic attitudes.

### **Intergroup Conflict between Feminism and LGBTIQA+ movement**

Nevertheless, while some feminists recognize and affirm transgender people's identities and acknowledge their historical contributions to feminism (Mayor et al., 2021), the relationship between feminists and the transgender community has faced challenges (e.g. radical feminists' rejection of trans identities in the 70s; Brownmiller, 1975). These challenges have re-emerged with force worldwide (being one of the main divisive topics nowadays; Morgenroth et al., 2024). Some feminists, often referred to as gender critical feminists or trans

exclusionary radical feminists (cf. TERFs; Smythe, 2008), have expressed concerns about the inclusion of transgender individuals in women-only spaces and feminist politics. Their arguments range from supporting compulsory professional evaluations (such as psychiatric or hormonal or surgical assessments) to alter sex/gender registration on official documents, to opposition to the inclusion of transgender women in gender-segregated facilities (e.g. sex-segregated bathrooms or sports) on the grounds that it could threaten the safety of cis women (e.g., *Contra el Borrado de la Mujer*, 2021). However, research suggests that opposition to trans-inclusive policies may be more closely related to attitudes toward trans individuals than safety concerns (Morgenroth et al., 2022).

Some feminists also exclude transgender women in their definition of womanhood (Brownmiller, 1975; Hines, 2019), which reflect gender distinctiveness threat (Morgenroth & Ryan, 2021). Recent studies suggest that gender distinctiveness threat contributes to opposition among certain cis women to gender-inclusive facilities (Hayes & Reiman, 2021). According to the Optimal Distinctiveness Theory (Brewer, 1991), individuals strive to balance their need for inclusion within a group as well as their need for distinctiveness. Thus, as group membership becomes more inclusive (e.g., broadening the category of women or feminist) the need for differentiation is activated (Brewer, 1991). When minority groups perceive threats to their distinctiveness or competition for limited resources from other disadvantaged groups, they can react with hostility or stress (White et al., 2006), and this perception of identity threat can increase the willingness to act against an outgroup (Galván Hernández et al., 2025; under review; Shepherd et al., 2018).

Moreover, demographic factors play a role in shaping individuals' predispositions toward developing transphobic attitudes. For instance, research indicates that men and heterosexual individuals are more likely to harbour negative attitudes toward trans people compared to women and LGB+ individuals (Conlin et al., 2021; Hatch et al., 2022). Exploring

the attitudes of feminist cis women toward the Trans Law differentiating between heterosexuals and those belonging to the LGBTIQA+ community could provide further insight into the dynamics underlying the emergence of transphobic discourses.

### **The Present Research**

The Ministry of Equality of the current government of Spain recently approved a new progressive law that addresses LGBT+ rights (e.g. prohibiting the mutilation of intersex individuals or allowing gender self-determination in national identity documents). Since its initial proposal in 2021, a debate has risen in the Spanish feminist movement that has polarised opinions around the inclusion of the trans realities in the feminist agenda. Opinions about the trans law varied widely. On the one hand, some feminist critics (e.g., TERFs) expressed concerns about the potential implications of the Trans Law for cis women, arguing that it would jeopardize women's sex-based rights and spaces (e.g. gender-violence protection and sex-segregated facilities. One of the consequences of this has been the creation of platforms in opposition to the law (e.g., *Contra el Borrado de la Mujer*, 2021). On the other hand, Trans Law supporters view it as a necessary step towards achieving gender equality, since they perceived trans rights as an inherent part of the broader feminist struggle (Mayor et al., 2021). Both positions of this debate filled Spanish social media (Ferré & Zaldívar, 2022) leading to a distance between these positions in the feminist movement (e.g., different 8M women's marches) (Zuil, 2021). For example, opponents of the law organized counter-protests on significant feminist days like March 8th or November 25th.

While this conflict has gained attention on social media and in academia, there is a lack of understanding of the mechanisms underlying feminists' polarized views on this topic. This study aims to delve into the complexities of cis women that are feminists among heterosexual and LBQ+ women in Spain. By employing qualitative methods, specifically reflexive thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2019), we aim to uncover the nuances within these perspectives on

gender, identity, and intersectionality. We use the strategy of thinking about cognitive alternatives (Tajfel & Turner, 1979), to encourage dialogue between different positions by enhancing common ground.

## **Method**

### **Study Design**

We ran focus groups since they offer an efficient means for participants to share their perspectives on shared subjects (Onwuegbuzie et al., 2009), making them a valuable tool for gaining insights and a better understanding of the relationship between feminism and the LGBTIQA+ movement. We use a semi-structure guide to facilitate the conversation during the focus groups, so participants lead the conversation while the researchers act as facilitators.

### **Participants**

We recruited a snowball convenience sample whose requirement to participate was to identify as a woman and as feminist. Two focus groups were attended by a total of 12 cis women divided into two different groups: heterosexuals (Group 1:  $n = 6$ ) and LBQ+s women (Group 2:  $n = 6$ ). The average participant's age was 25 years ( $SD = 2.92$ , range = 22-32; full disclosure of the demographics in Supplementary Materials). Each session lasted an average of 90 mins (range = 75 – 105). Participation was rewarded with a payment of 30€ per participant. All participants lived in Granada, and while some were acquaintances due to residing in the same city, all of them declared not having close relationships with any of the other participants in their focus group.

### **Procedure**

The preparation for the focus groups was carefully structured. Initially, we developed a protocol based on Mishra's recommendations (2016), which encompassed considerations such as the number of participants and the framing of questions. A semi-structured guide (Table 1)



was created to steer the focus group discussions. This guide prompted participants to share their perspectives on feminism, its contemporary goals, the potential for collaboration between the feminist and LGBTIQA+ movements, their concerns regarding the Trans Law and their vision for a world with gender equality.

Additionally, a contingency plan (see in Supplementary Materials) was established to address any potential disruptions during the discussions. To ensure the effectiveness of the data collection process, all researchers responsible for conducting the focus groups underwent comprehensive training. This training involved either facilitating groups or observing their interactions in four distinct focus groups with psychology students. Although these practice sessions were shorter in duration (60 minutes each), they followed the same schedule and contingency plan to evaluate the flow and natural progression of discussion topics. This meticulous approach was vital in ensuring the quality and reliability of the collected data.

We held the two focus groups in the lab between December 2021 (Focus Group 1: heterosexual participants) and January 2022 (Focus Group 2: LBQ+ participants) and recorded the audio of each session. The sessions were scheduled to last a maximum of 120 min. They were semi-structured to facilitate the discussion of and the connection between topics. Two researchers assumed the role of assistant moderators for each group. Their role was to create a welcoming environment that facilitated the group discussion and to make annotations in the observer's notebooks of interactions and nonverbal information<sup>1</sup> (i.e., head nods, smiling, developed from Onwuegbuzie et al. ,2009; Supplementary Materials). A female researcher acted as the session facilitator guiding the discussion in each focus group. She was instructed to act in an impartial way, to minimize biases and ensure a productive and respectful

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<sup>1</sup> Interactions between participants (quantity of interactions between participants and who was leading or not participating in each question), kinetic communication (i.e., shaking their heads "no") or paralinguistic (i.e., variations in volume and quality of voice) and other related information.

environment for all participants. We audio-recorded the focus groups and transcribed them manually, to then input data into the data analysis software Atlas.ti (<https://atlasti.com/es>).

The sessions began with participants filling out the informed consent form and reporting sociodemographic data. After that, the conversation was incentivized with an ice-breaker task. Following this, the moderator explained the instructions (i.e., not talking over others, not interrupting others, respecting everybody's opinion) and encouraged participants to structure the discussion around the questions. The data was transcribed by an assistant moderator. The transcription was orthographic, containing all verbal utterances, and was enriched with nonverbal information from the observer's notebooks.

### **Ethics**

Informed consent was acquired from all participants. To ensure participants' confidentiality and anonymity, we eliminated any identifiable details from the transcripts, using identification codes to refer to each participant. These codes consisted of a distinctive participant code combined with the respective focus group number (participants P1-P6 were part of Group 1; FG1, while participants P7-P12 were part of Group 2; FG2). These codes are used in the results section in quotations. The ethical clearance for this research was granted by the ethics committee of the institution hosting the study.

### **Data Analysis**

We analysed our data using Reflexive Thematic Analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). We combined concept-driven (or deductive) and data-driven (or inductive) methods. While we primarily employed a deductive approach to data analysis based on main objectives of the research (i.e., creating a shared definition of feminism and its aims, analysing the different perspectives of cisheterosexual and LBQ+ participants regarding the relationship between feminism and the LGBTIQA+ movement and the Trans Law). The guide to run the focus groups was constructed based on pre-existing theories and initial approaches to theme creation, but

we also incorporated an inductive approach, enabling a more holistic analysis of the data and fostering theory development. We followed the six steps recommended by Braun & Clarke (2006) to analyse qualitative data, although these recommendations are not necessarily linear or sequential: data familiarization, initial code generation, generating (initial) themes, theme review, theme defining and naming and report production.

First, three researchers familiarized themselves with the entire data set by thoroughly reviewing transcripts; involving several researchers to enrich the reading of the data. Second, we generated initial semantic (explicit content) and latent codes (underlying meanings), seeking common patterns. Third, we collaboratively categorized these codes into broader themes and sub-themes, with a focus on how feminism and its relation to the LGBTIQA+ movement were constructed by participants. The criterion for creating a theme is not only based on recurrence but also related to the research question itself (Braun & Clarke, 2019)<sup>2</sup>. Fourth, we debated and organized these themes into bigger topics. Fifth, we refined the themes. Finally, we created a relational diagram, and wrote up the conclusions, acknowledging that coding was an ongoing, flexible process, where iteration was an inseparable part of the process in line with reflexive thematic analyses. This systematic approach ensured that the findings were firmly rooted in the data.

## Results

The focus groups produced lively discussions about the conceptualization of feminism, the relationship between the feminist and LGBTIQA+ movement, and how to solve their conflicts. Based on participants' responses we defined three main themes and eight sub-themes: 1) Feminism; subthemes: a) What is feminism, b) Being feminist is not easy; 2) Conflicts in the feminist movement concerning the Trans Law; sub-themes: c) Violent spaces

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<sup>2</sup> In focus groups there might be just one mention about a topic but a complete agreement by all participants, which does not mean that it is less relevant than another one that is mentioned repeatedly.

among us, d) Intergroup conflict, e) Controversy surrounding the term “TERFs”, f) Need for gender distinctiveness; and 3) Intergroup collaboration; sub-theme: g) Joint actions and h) Role of Allies. The overview of the topics, themes, sub-themes, and codes can be seen in Supplementary Materials.

## **Theme 1: Feminism**

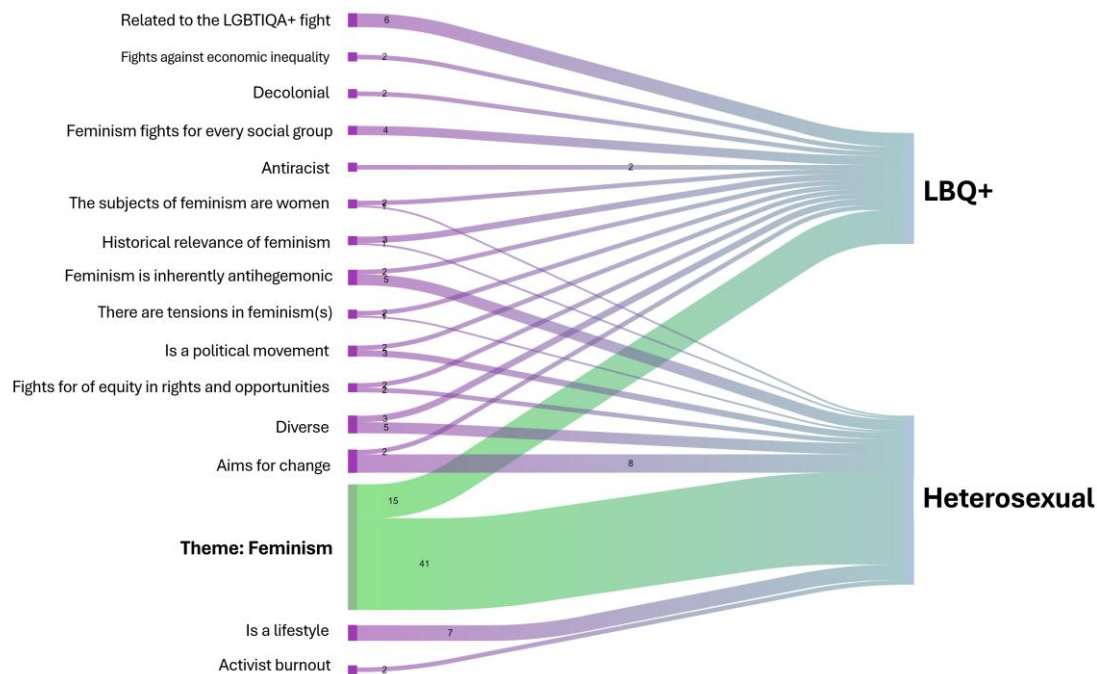
### ***What is Feminism***

Feminism was defined by participants from both focus groups as a political, social, and even cultural movement focused on reducing gender inequality, being its general aim to achieve real gender equality regarding rights and opportunities for women by participants. Participants of both focus groups had commonalities on their definitions of feminism (e.g. historical relevance, that it aims for gender equality), check differences in the rooting of the codes, i.e. number of times that coders generated a sub-theme in FG1 and FG2 in Figure 1:

P4: Feminism is effective equality between all existing people. (FG1)

P7: So, it [feminism] is a social movement with great historical relevance, which basically seeks for women to have equal rights and opportunities in the world in which we find ourselves. (FG2)

**Figure 1.** Overlap and rooting of themes and subthemes between hetero and LBQ+ participants regarding the difficulties in the collaboration between feminists and trans movement



*Note:* Next to each sub-theme appears the number of words rooted for each of them.

Heterosexual participants (FG1) defined the goals of feminism in terms of challenging traditional gender roles. They also pointed out that feminism should be focused on the personal level (P3-FG1: "The personal inequalities [are the aim of feminism], because what is at the macro level has already been worked out"), since women are educated to play the role of caretakers in their families, and they still do it even though they are increasingly incorporated into higher power positions in society. There was a shared agreement on most topics discussed during this part of the conversation, where all participants exchanged their ideas in line of the same arguments (and expressed non-verbal gestures such as nodding or smiling while talking about feminism). Most participants intervened in this conversation, check Figure 2. They built a shared definition of feminism through the conversation, since at first it



out that feminism was characterized by being plural and anti-hegemonic, i.e., going against normalized power structures. When defining feminism in FG2, the conversation all participants intervened and showed verbal and non-verbal (i.e. head nods and smiles) when another disadvantaged group need was added to the scope of feminism. Some participants expressed anger towards oppressive societal structures (such as capitalism), but also empowerment when talking about their feminist identification.

P8: [Feminism] It is not only a political [...], but a social movement that affects all social strata because [...] it seeks full equality of opportunities between genders, but it also implies changing something very deep-rooted such as the patriarchal view in all spheres, [...] such as the economic or colonizing spheres. This is where [...] feminism comes from, to give a voice to all those invisible parts that are not seen by the hegemonic viewpoints. (FG2)

### ***Being Feminist is not Easy***

Heterosexual women (FG1) highlighted that even though feminism was part of their identity, they often felt forced to hide it because self-labelling as feminists had resulted in them experiencing different forms of aggressions. Participants expressed anger about being labelled 'feminazis'<sup>3</sup> highlighting how patriarchal norms still ridicule gender equality advocates. This difficulty that comes with feminist self-identification is a reflex of how patriarchy still oppressed women, ridiculing them for caring about gender equality, even in fairly egalitarian societies as the Spanish one (i.e. Spain is the eight most egalitarian country in Europe; EIGE, 2020). Participants in FG1 said that people using such derogatory terms to refer to them misunderstood what feminism promotes. Heterosexual participants showed strong agreement

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<sup>3</sup> "Feminazi" is a derogatory term that combines "feminist" and "Nazi" to insult feminists, especially. It is offensive and should be avoided in discussions about gender equality.

(i.e., head nods) with "choosing their battles", i.e., not confronting sexist attitudes and/or comments when they knew they would not get support from others.

P1: In some circles, or in a meeting that is more relaxed, and you are in a good mood, you say "Am I going to cut into the conversation confronting you because what you said is out of place?" [sexist comment] Sometimes I don't feel brave enough to do it, and maybe I should. (FG1)

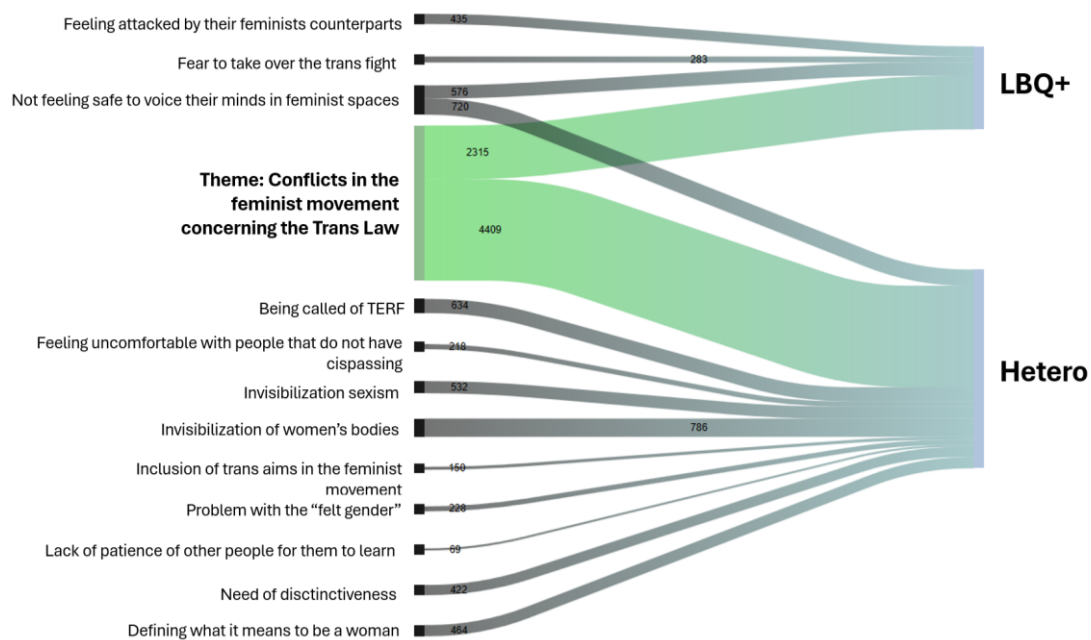
## **Theme 2: Conflicts in the Feminist Movement Concerning the Trans Law**

Most participants in both focus groups recognized the diversity within the feminist movement and the tensions that arose from these different coexisting perspectives, especially after the proposal of the Trans Law. In both focus groups it was mentioned that there is no communication about it between different feminist positions, but the issues brought up in the two groups were different (they shared the feeling of not being comfortable in feminist spaces, but the reasons behind it for heterosexuals were related to not being able to express their reservations regarding the Trans Law, while for LBQ+ they felt misunderstood by some feminists; i.e. precisely the ones that had reservations; see the rooting of the sub-themes in Figure 3).

Some heterosexual participants (P1 and P3; FG1) pointed out that they felt that one of the problems in the relationship between the feminist and LGBTIQ+ movements was that they did not feel safe sharing doubts about the legal changes that were taking place (they shared smiles and complicit looks while talking), and P3 even mentioned that not being able to express her hesitations towards the Trans Law had made her back off feminist activism, since she felt attacked by other colleagues. However, when LBQ+ women talked about feeling attacked in feminist spaces it was regarding how tired they were about having to "educate" other feminists to not be LGBTIQphobic was (they shared head nods and approval sounds, e.g. "aham").



**Figure 3.** Overlap and rooting of themes and subthemes between hetero and LBQ+ participants regarding the difficulties in the collaboration between feminists and trans movement



*Note:* Next to each sub-theme appears the number of words rooted for each of them.

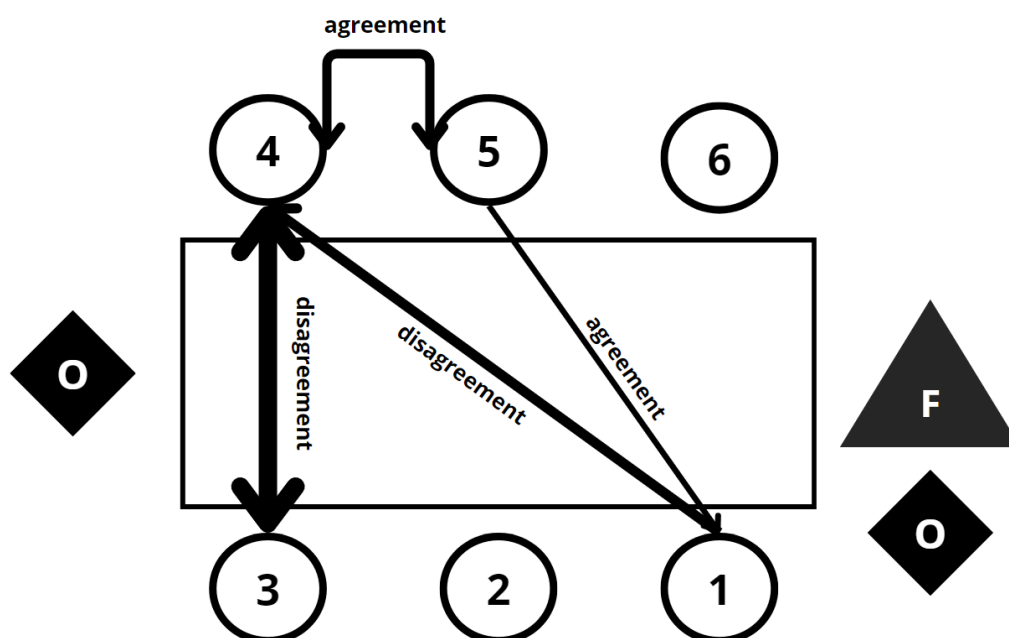
Interestingly, there was a debate among some of the heterosexual participants (FG1) about the sense of misunderstanding and persecution of feminists who expressed doubts about the inclusion of trans aims in feminism. While some participants expressed anger and discomfort at not being able to voice their minds and feeling insulted by the adjective TERF (P1 and P3), other participants (P4) strongly stated that it was legitimate for trans people to call cis people TERFs. This interaction created tension around the group, which could be seen in participants' lack of movement and rigidity. P4 talked about the need for recognition of trans people's needs and wants, to sympathize with them, and voiced the parallelism with feminists that expect men to recognise, accept and be self-critic when called sexist. The conversation dynamic spun mostly towards P3 and P4 (see Figure 4 to check the annotations on the observer's notebook of this conversation), interchanging nonverbal gestures of anger and aggression (i.e., moving hands, leaning forward on the table). There was a general agreement

in the end of this section of the conversation with P4's need for recognition argument amongst the rest of the participants following this discussion. Despite this debate in FG1, there was a general assent (i.e. head nods in several participants) regarding that feminism is for all who identify as women (P1-FG1: "No matter how you are born, if you consider yourself a woman, you belong to the feminist movement").

P3: There are situations where I, being a cis woman, feel confused in some debates, and I don't feel comfortable talking about it because I've been called a transphobe or TERF on certain occasions and I've ended up crying. [...] being called this [TERF] makes me very confused, and I don't really have comfortable spaces to talk about this. (FG1)

P4: Just as we ask men to understand us, we also must work on understanding trans women. I think that many times they have the right to call us transphobic or TERF or whatever they want, basically because we are not prepared to understand them. (FG1)

**Figure 4.** *Interactions of FG1 during their conversation about feminism*



*Note:* P4 is the one in the top left, P3 in the bottom left and P1 in the bottom right of the table.

Another problematic aspect in the relationship between feminism and the trans movement from the perspective of heterosexual participants (FG1), was the invisibilization of women. Some participants expressed the feeling that women's issues and bodies were being invisibilized with the pretext of being inclusive, and therefore, undermined gender distinctiveness. For instance, using terms like "menstruating bodies" instead of "women", or refraining from using symbols like the triangular representation of a vulva at demonstrations, as not all women possess one, were concerns raised by some participants. They expressed that the women's and trans community's issues are not the same. Nonetheless, some participants pointed out that the trans community suffered more violence than the average woman (P4), and the rest of the participants agreed with this comment.

P1: It is true that there are women who do not menstruate, and it is true that there are women who do not have a vulva because they are women born into the male sex but who feel like women, but of course, I am not going to become a 'menstruating body' just to be inclusive. (FG1)

Some heterosexual participants in FG1 expressed concerns about the inclusion of trans women in women-only spaces, such as toilets. They feared that the presence of individuals who do not conform to traditional feminine appearances might cause discomfort or perceived safety threats. This expression of safety threat goes in line with the trans-exclusive platform arguments (e.g., *Contra el Borrado de la Mujer*, 2021). These fears are rooted in the broader context of patriarchal norms that have historically instilled a sense of vulnerability in women, particularly in relation to male violence. These concerns are often based on misconceptions and a lack of familiarity with the experiences of trans individuals.

P1: Those people who do not want to undergo treatment, a masculine appearance would still make me uncomfortable [in women-only spaces] because visually it is masculine. It may be that once I talk to them, all those fears disappear when I know

that they are a woman. [...] But if I'm afraid of a certain male appearance, a bigger male appearance, and I meet him in person, then it's going to be inevitable. (FG1)

On the other hand, when LBQ+ participants (FG2) talked about the Trans Law, they expressed their incomprehension with the arguments held against it by some women such as those expressed in FG1 above. LBQ+ participants in FG2 pointed out that many concerns about the Trans Law stem from misinformation and a lack of understanding about gender transitions, prison sentences and fake statistics of detransitioning<sup>4</sup>. For example, the media covered discussions about how dangerous it could be for an abuser to be in a women's prison (BBC Mundo, 2018). They emphasized that the law does not retroactively affect the sentences of those convicted of gender violence, so those already convicted of gender violence will not be affected by the change of gender in national identity documents. So it counteracts concerns that abusers may take advantage of gender identity changes to gain access to women's spaces. LBQ+ participants also said that trans-excluyent arguments saying that trans people promote traditional gender roles were transphobic and that they were not threatened by these scenarios at all. FG2 participants stressed the importance of empathy in understanding the struggles of trans individuals and the necessity of inclusive spaces for their safety and dignity. The interaction within this conversation was mostly between P7 and P11, with general agreement expressed by the rest (i.e. head nods)

P11: I think that all those "women" who feel threatened by the Trans Law lack the empathy, the self-critical thinking to realize that there is deep-rooted sexism and patriarchal thoughts. And it seems utopian, but really what these people [trans people] want is simply equality. (FG2)

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<sup>4</sup> "Detransitioning" refers to the process of someone who had previously transitioned to a different gender identity returning to their previous one. It is a unique and individual decision influenced by various factors, and not all transgender individuals detransition.

**Theme 3: Intergroup Collaboration**

In terms of the relationship with the LGBTIQA+ movement, both groups agreed that the two movements should work together to achieve their goals. They thought that feminism and the LGBTIQA+ movement had essentially the same goals they shared many commonalities. In addition, this vision of the two movements having the same objective co-existed with the understanding of different claims between them both in heterosexuals and LBQ+ focus group.

P4: I think the interesting thing about this is to bring both together [feminist and LGBTIQA+ movements] because really where they are going is towards the same thing, which is to destroy this system [patriarchy] (FG1).

P9: They [feminist and LGBTIQA+] are collectives that go hand in hand, that people who are not women, including those who are not cisgender, are affected by this structural sexism that goes against feminism. So, I think they are movements that could not exist without each other. (FG2)

Interestingly, while heterosexual women (FG1) agreed that the LGBTIQA+ movement was part of the feminist struggle, LBQ+ women (FG2) said that people could belong to both movements at the same time, reflecting a difference in the perceived intergroup boundaries. For LBQ+ might be more important to underline that there are two distinct movements, because the LGBTIQA+ could be hindered under the feminist one, while for heterosexual participants this need to differentiate between them might not be as important.

P1: I have never seen it [relationship between feminist and LGBTIQA+ movement] as a way of having to make agreements as if we were two different groups, but that I do consider them [LGBTIQA+ movement] to be part of our group [feminist]. (FG1)

P10: We [people in general] are not just one thing, that is, each of us can identify as part of the LGTBQ+ community and with the feminist one, because in the end there

are many structural acts of violence that both movements share because I can suffer violence both for being a woman and for being bisexual. (FG2)

### ***Joint Actions***

Several actions were described in both groups in order to collaborate with the LGBTIQA+ community, from more classical conceptualizations of collective actions (e.g., signing petitions to fight for LGBTIQA+ rights, attending talks and assemblies regarding LGBTIQA+ discrimination), to more innovative ways to show support (e.g., promoting common spaces between heterosexual people and the LGBTIQA+ community to horizontally communicate LGBTIQA+ experiences or creating artwork that represented LGBTIQA+ realities from a respectful point of view). Here are some examples:

P5: Make covenants, I mean to sit down both sides, each one with their proposals, see which are common and fight for them. To achieve power, which in the end is what all this is about, and from there, perhaps each collective will have its own strength to fight for its own rights. (FG1)

P9: Not only to listen to them [trans people] but to support them as much as possible in terms of signing petitions, any kind of congregation they do, associations, simply reading about the subject, all to try to understand others a little more. (FG2)

Across both focus groups, participants widely spoke about the need to change how gender relationships are created and how gender itself is built. Participants said that we need to create societies where children are educated to be who they truly are, free from gender stereotypes, and where the labels "masculine" or "feminine" would not hold a positive or negative connotation (P1-FG1: "I want this gender-based education to disappear"; P12-FG2: "If we were to get away from stereotypes, prejudices, judgements, anyone could have any gender expression or identity they wanted to have"). Nevertheless, while heterosexual participants (FG1) pointed out that we should stop labelling ourselves in social categories, LBQ+

participants (FG2) said that labels might be important, specifically for disadvantaged group members, as is shown in the following paragraphs:

P5: A world where it doesn't matter so much or generate so much debate about who we are, what we are and how we feel. [...] Having to define labels like "gay", "trans", etc., we are people, and we should relativize [the rest of the labels]. I think it should not be so important. (FG1)

P11: Maybe not to eliminate the label [gender], but to respect that there are people who want them and people who don't. Because maybe there are people who feel comfortable [with the labels], [...] but there will be people who feel the need to feel identified with a group or a label. (FG2)

### ***Role of Allies***

In both groups they broadly defined what an ally should (or should not do). Interestingly, while heterosexual participants (FG1) debated the role of allies by extrapolating what they thought men should do in feminist fights, LBQ+ participants (FG2) directly related allies to the trans struggle. Participants in both focus groups talked about how allies should not take ownership of the outgroup's causes. Instead, they should listen to the claims of the outgroup and sympathize with their struggles. They also pointed out that allies should use their privilege to give voice to the targets of discrimination to visibilize their realities, while being self-critical with their own prejudices and check for paternalism in their motivations to collaborate. LBQ+ participants (FG2) also pointed out other aspects important for considering someone an ally, such as being respectful of other realities that are not familiar and to celebrate diversity as natural and part of society (P4-FG2: "The interesting thing about all this being brought into education [LGBTIQA+ realities] [...], is that all children will see this as something natural, avoiding problems like bullying and other harmful things").

P2: I mean, I'm not going to speak for you, but I'm going to accompany you [the trans community], we're all together in this [fight against patriarchy]. (FG1)

P10: First, giving a voice to the people who must talk about the issue, so that trans people speak out, and that we are open to listening to them and giving them that space. We should not take ownership of speeches. (FG2)

### **Discussion**

Both heterosexual and LBQ+ women expressed similar definitions of feminism, acknowledging the importance of gender equality and the need for respectful dialogue within the different positions in the feminist movement. There is a shared recognition that feminism must continue evolving to address all forms of oppression. However, they had different perspectives on how to fight against them. Heterosexual women were more concerned about challenges and perceived threats in these alliances, while LBQ+ women emphasized the role of allies in advancing women's and LGBTIQA+ rights. Some heterosexual women had mixed feelings about the Trans Law, feeling attacked for expressing doubts, while others supported it and showed empathy toward trans activists. LBQ+ women were more aligned in advocating for a comprehensive LGBTIQA+ law and greater protection of trans people's rights. Participants suggested actions to enhance collaboration between the two movements, such as creating shared spaces, addressing LGBTIQA+phobia, and normalizing diversity. They all agreed on the importance of dismantling gender roles and patriarchy for a fairer society.

### **Similarities and Differences in the Definition of Feminism**

First, participants conceived feminism as a social, political, and cultural movement that aimed to reduce gender inequalities, in line with previous theoretical proposals (Hoffman, 2001; Mayor et al., 2021). These results align with the three main ideas that "feminist identity" holds (Swirsky & Angelone, 2015): recognizing the historical oppression of women, trying to improve their social status, and actively criticizing traditional gender roles. This contributes to



previous quantitative literature about the content of feminist identity (e.g., Thomas & Newell, 2022), providing insights into what feminism is from the perspective of heterosexual and LBQ+ women.

Even though both groups developed similar definitions of feminism, some meaningful differences emerged. While heterosexual participants highlighted that feminism was part of their identity and lifestyle, and clearly mentioned some threats that feminism faces (e.g., liberal feminism, instrumentalization of the movement, misinformation), LBQ+ participants highlighted that they conceived feminism as inherently intersectional (i.e., anti-racist and anti-capitalist). Notably, heterosexual participants did not really bring up the idea of intersectionality until we asked them directly about how feminism and LGBTIQA+ movements were connected. This difference in their focus on intersectionality might be related to the kinds of challenges they face (Crenshaw, 1989). Some women primarily deal with problems related to their gender roles, making them more inclined to focus on gender-related issues in feminism. Others (e.g., LBQ+) deal with various kinds of oppression. This makes them more sensitive to how gender identity intersects with other aspects of discrimination (e.g., Greenwood, 2012). The focalization in aspects of gender discrimination that are only related to cisgender, White, middle-class women, is one of the main criticisms by feminists that are not part of that voiced majority (i.e., Black feminists; Collins, 2009; Davis, 1981). Recent evidence points out that an intersectional perspective in feminism can be especially beneficial in the construction of allyships across social movements (Adam, 2017; Cole, 2008), such as with the LGBTIQA+ movement.

### **Navigating Conflicts Between Feminist Movement and Trans Rights**

Second, participants discussed tensions within the Spanish feminist movement concerning the Trans Law. Both focus groups expressed disappointment and sadness due to inadequate communication between feminists with differing viewpoints. Research highlights

the benefits of intergroup contact for building alliances and reducing prejudice (Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006). However, building alliances can be challenging when chance encounters are limited, making it difficult to identify common ground with potential allies in contexts where open and respectful discussions are scarce. This discussion reflects on the many arguments being held in the last years in social media regarding the inclusion of trans people in feminist aims and the consequences of the Trans Law for cis women. For example, an online podcast of a Spanish influencer (holding an opponent's perspective towards the Trans Law) and the former minister of Equity of Spain (main driver of the Trans Law in the Spanish government) had a very similar confrontation regarding trans-inclusion (Takanashi, s. f.).

Moreover, heterosexual women voiced concerns about potential encounters with trans individuals, particularly in women-only spaces, citing safety as a major worry. Prior research has linked greater threat perception toward trans women with decreased support for their inclusion in women-only spaces (Outten et al., 2019). Beyond safety concerns, these participants expressed apprehension about gender-neutral language, fearing it might make “women's” unique experiences (e.g., menstruation) less visible by de-emphasizing biological features as criteria for categorizing someone as a woman (Outten et al., 2019). This goes in line with the Optimal Distinctiveness Theory (Brewer, 1991): when the membership to the category “women” or “feminist” becomes more inclusive, the need for differentiation is activated (Brewer, 1991). Consequently, some might actively reinforce traditional gender and sex binaries, which create clear divisions between men and women. This qualitative evidence suggests that gender distinctiveness threat, or gender essentialism, could be factors that contribute to women's resistance to advancements in trans people's rights, corroborating recent quantitative findings (Hayes & Reiman, 2021; Morgenroth et al., 2022).

Concerning women's opposition to legal advancements for trans individuals, the growing use of the TERF acronym has sparked significant conflict. Some heterosexual

participants expressed feeling personally attacked when labelled as TERFs, while another participant suggested that feminists should respond with empathy and self-reflection instead of defensiveness. This labelling practice serves to clearly demarcate feminists with transphobic views as TERFs, creating a distinct division between those aligning with the predominant group norm, which supports trans rights, and those who do not. However, this distinction also leads to pronounced divisions within the feminist movement. Moreover, research suggests that prolonged social ostracism, exemplified by the seemingly inescapable TERF label, can lead to antisocial behaviour and heightened hostility towards the group (Williams, 2007). Following transgender activist Julia Serano's classification (2016), it is essential to differentiate between individuals who are trans-antagonistic (opposed to the trans agenda) and those who are trans-unaware (uninformed) or trans-suspicious (acknowledging the existence of trans people but questioning or challenging trans perspectives and politics). Grouping everyone within these three categories under a single label may foster the erroneous perception that there is more opposition to the trans agenda than is genuinely the case (Thurlow, 2022). Future studies should explore the effects of naming someone "TERF" in radicalization and promotion of intergroup conflict.

Interestingly, while heterosexual participants expressed concerns about how the "Trans Law" might affect their daily lives, there was a broad consensus regarding the validation of trans people's identities. Participants emphasized that anyone who identifies as a woman is indeed a woman and an integral part of the feminist movement, regardless of whether they are cisgender or transgender. This finding aligns with prior research demonstrating a positive correlation between feminist identification, receptiveness to gender fluidity, and favourable attitudes towards transgender individuals (Conlin et al., 2021; Platt & Szoka, 2021; Worthen, 2012).

**Strategies to solve intergroup conflicts and promotion of intergroup cooperation**

Participants in both groups shared a perception of facing similar oppressions and pursuing common goals, highlighting a sense of collective victimhood. This portrayal of victimhood is instrumental in promoting collaborative collective actions, especially when disadvantaged groups contend for limited resources. Collective victimhood is closely linked to stigma-based solidarity, wherein the belief that suffering parallels among group members fosters collaboration with outgroups (Kural et al., 2022). This sentiment aligns with previous research findings (Uysal et al., 2021) emphasizing the collaborative nature advocated within the feminist and LGBTIQA+ movements.

However, an intriguing observation emerged during discussions about intergroup collaboration for shared objectives: heterosexual and LBQ+ participants held differing perspectives on intergroup boundaries. While heterosexual participants explicitly said that the LGBTIQA+ movement was a subsection of the feminist one, LBQ+ participants did not mention that hierarchical relationship. This difference in the conceptualization of group limits could be due to power differences. While LBQ+ participants need to maintain the distinctiveness of the LGBTIQA+ movement to the feminist one, heterosexual women prefer to recategorize as one group; in line with the Common Ingroup Theory (Gaertner & Dovidio, 2007), where different groups are seen as more similar once they are categorized as being part of the same superordinate group. While representing several groups under the label of feminist fosters intergroup solidarity, (Gaertner & Dovidio, 2007), maintaining intergroup distinctiveness is key in intraminority solidarity relationships, so a threat to identity is not triggered (White et al., 2006).

When participants were asked about their portrayal of a more egalitarian society, they mentioned cognitive alternatives (Tajfel & Turner, 1979) such as promoting an education free from gender stereotypes and prejudice. Suggesting cognitive alternatives, which involve envisioning a more positive future for a group, has been found to enhance the sense of self-

efficacy among members of low-status minority groups (Iyer et al., 2017). Consequently, these more optimistic prospects can inspire greater participation in collective efforts for societal change.

Notably, a marked disparity emerged in how heterosexual and LBQ+ participants regarded the use of labels. Heterosexual participants favoured a label-free society, emphasizing our shared humanity. In contrast, LBQ+ participants underscored the importance of labels as a means of visibility and identity. This divergence in perspective resembles the colour-blindness strategy often applied in discussions of race. Colour-blindness seeks to downplay intergroup distinctions, like skin colour, to mitigate discrimination (Apfelbaum et al., 2008). However, it is crucial to recognize that colourblind strategies have proven detrimental to Black individuals, diverting attention from issues of unfair treatment and discrimination, which could potentially dissuade disadvantaged group members from engaging in collective efforts against racism (Plaut et al., 2009). The power dynamics of the relationship between heterosexual and LBQ+ women under the umbrella of feminism should be analyzed in future studies.

The specific case study of tensions within the feminist movement over trans rights can be situated within the larger societal context of prejudice against both LGBTQ+ individuals and feminists. This broader societal prejudice exacerbates internal conflicts within the feminist movement. The political landscape in Spain has undergone significant shifts in recent years, with the rise of right-wing and extreme right-wing parties gaining prominence (Stacey, 2024). These political movements promote conservative ideologies that may be at odds with progressive values, including gender equality and LGBTQ+ rights. The increasing stigmatization of LGBTQ+ people creates an environment where intra-group solidarity becomes essential yet challenging to maintain. Furthermore, within the LGBTQ+ movement, there are tensions and differing viewpoints regarding trans rights, reflecting the diversity of experiences and

perspectives within this community (e.g. men have worse attitudes towards trans people than women, the gay men might be more transphobic than other members of the LGBTIQA+ community; Conlin et al., 2021).

Addressing these conflicts requires practical strategies to prevent potential intergroup conflict between cisgender heterosexual and LGBTQ+ feminist activists. That means, ensuring what the Trans Law proposes without triggering zero-sum beliefs in cis women. Moreover, recognizing how zero-sum beliefs intensify reactive threat sheds light on the cognitive processes that fuel resistance to social change (Galván-Hernández et al., 2025). Additionally, promoting intergroup contact through structured dialogues and collaborative projects can reduce prejudice and build alliances. Encouraging empathy and self-reflection instead of defensiveness when faced with criticisms can also foster a more inclusive movement.

### **Limitations**

Despite the richness of the insights derived from our data, this research has some limitations. To begin, our findings rely on self-report data, which solely reflects women's stated beliefs and might be influenced by a tendency to present themselves in a socially desirable manner. Moreover, we used a convenience sample that does not represent all feminist perspectives, even though there was some variability in the trust and fear regarding how the legal changes for trans rights would affect women. Further, our samples were highly educated, left-leaning, Caucasian feminists from Spain, which is not representative of the feminist movement in general. Incorporating feminists from diverse cultural backgrounds could have significantly altered the dynamics of our focus groups, providing a broader range of experiences and perspectives. For instance, the definitions of feminism and its aims might vary considerably. In countries where Islam is the dominant religion, discussions around the use of the veil could become prominent. Additionally, the state of trans rights protection in different regions could influence perspectives on their necessity. In contexts where no legal protections for trans rights exist, participants might perceive such rights as less critical unless they strongly

identify as feminists. Conversely, in regions where trans rights have long been protected by law, there might be lower levels of threat perception toward trans rights due to the absence of negative consequences for cis women over time. Additionally, it's important to recognize as a limitation of this study that assuming all LGBTQIA+ individuals uniformly support LGBTQIA+ rights are not always the case, as individual perspectives within this community can vary significantly

## **Conclusions**

This study illuminates the diverse perspectives within the feminist movement regarding its relationship with the LGBTIQ+ community and transgender rights in the city of Granada, Spain. Participants, including both heterosexual and LBQ+ individuals, demonstrated a shared commitment to addressing gender and social inequalities. The need for communication and contact among feminists with different viewpoints was evident, suggesting that positive intergroup contact can play a crucial role in fostering understanding and collaboration. Nonetheless, they differed in their approaches, with heterosexual participants expressing concerns and LBQ+ participants emphasizing the importance of intergroup allyship. Rather than causing conflict, these differences should encourage debate and facilitate effective collaboration. Understanding the psychosocial processes underlying the positions of different feminists' perspectives is crucial for developing strategies by activists, ranging from marketing and advertising to policy development, to foster a strong and united feminist movement capable of addressing the challenges posed by gender inequality.

In conclusion, the discussions reflect the feminist movement's dynamic nature and the need for continued dialogue and inclusivity. By acknowledging and addressing the fears and misconceptions, while promoting empathy and understanding, the movement can work towards a more united front against all forms of gender-based oppression. Achieving gender equality and recognizing the rights of marginalised groups, including the transgender

community, are fundamental steps toward building a more peaceful world. By acknowledging the existence of diverse perspectives within feminism and promoting dialogue, we can foster a more inclusive and effective movement that navigates the complexities of gender inequality and works towards a more equitable society.



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**Table 1.** *Focus Group Schedule*

Topic covered in focus group	Specific question
Ice-breaker discussion	Tell us your name and your favorite hobby
Conceptualization of feminism and its values	What comes to your mind when I say the word feminism? What does it mean to you to be a feminist?
Objectives of the feminist movement	What would you say are the goals of the feminist movement today?
Relationship with the LGBTIQ+ community	There has been a lot of controversy lately regarding the relationship between feminism and the LGBTIQ+ movement. Do you think the feminist movement and the LGBTIQ+ movement should collaborate? If so, how do you think such collaboration should be organized? Do you think the LGBTIQ+ movement should be reflected in feminist spaces with its own voice? And how should the feminist movement be represented in LGBTIQ+ spaces? Do you think they should unite in some cases under a common "voice"?
Threat perception	In the last year there has been quite a lot of public debate arising from the proposed law regulating the rights of transgender people. What do you think about this debate? Some people feel that the proposal puts women's rights at risk. What things make you feel potentially threatened by the proposed Trans Law?
Cognitive alternatives for a more egalitarian world	How do you imagine a world where gender equality exists?