

Representations of *Lean In* and *The Feminine Mystique* in Social Media: A Look at Pinterest Pins

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Abstract

This analysis of representations of the *Feminine Mystique* and *Lean In* on Pinterest investigates how Pinterest serves as a means to disseminate social commentary on feminism. Specifically, it investigates hyperlinks to books, blog entries, and websites to assess how representations of both books on social media platforms provide historical context and characterizations of feminism. As visual bookmarking sites continue to grow in significance, scholars need a solid understanding of the various definitions and techniques affiliated with the platform.

Keywords

Lean In, *The Feminine Mystique*, Betty Friedan, Sheryl Sandberg, gender inequality, Pinterest, social media, feminism, marriage, homemakers, housewife

Introduction

In *The Feminine Mystique*, Betty Friedan described the widespread unhappiness of homemakers in the late 1950s and early 1960s. She asserted that educated women had been duped into believing they could best fulfill themselves by “living up to what she called the ‘mystique’ of the happy housewife” (Loughlin, 1983, p. 138). Decades later, Sheryl Sandberg examined gender inequality in the workforce in *Lean In: Women, Work, and the Will to Lead*. The popularity of *Lean In* and the 50th anniversary of *The Feminine Mystique* in 2014 offered the opportunity to examine how Pinterest serves as a means to disseminate social commentary on feminism. Specifically, it investigates hyperlinks to books, blog entries, and websites to assess how representations of both books on social media platforms provide historical context and characterizations of feminism.

As visual bookmarking sites continue to grow in significance, scholars need a solid understanding of the various definitions and techniques affiliated with the platform.

This analysis examines the historical context of these two pivotal books and their representations on the social media platform—Pinterest. Written 50 years apart, both books intrigued readers, topped *The New York Times* bestselling nonfiction list, and helped shape how society perceives women. As visual book-marking sites continue to grow in importance, communication scholars must develop a solid understanding of the various definitions and techniques affiliated with each platform. Pinterest is of interest for this study because of its target audience—women. According to Pew (2013), Pinterest follows Facebook in popularity, and 80% of its users are women (Moore, 2014). This large base of women as an audience indicates the platform offers a method of targeting certain

audiences. Friz and Gehl (2016) assert:

Pinterest becomes a surrogate for generational knowledge that used to be passed on via inculcation into a specific, narrow gender role. No longer do mothers train daughters in the ways of sewing, cooking, cleaning, and childrearing, but this knowledge is now available, custom-made, through Pinterest. The kind of femininity cultivated on Pinterest is then, conveniently, made available for purchase from handy sponsors. (p. 701)

Phillips, Miller and McQuarrie's (2014) analysis of 20 pinboards with 2,291 images indicates continued gender-related studies of this platform are important as women often use Pinterest to contemplate future purchases and identities. This study is particularly relevant as awareness of individuals use the new medium to share messages on feminism may offer scholars a deeper understanding of trends.

Review of the Literature

The Feminine Mystique

Friedan is often credited with inspiring the second-wave feminist movement of the 1960s and 1970s in the United States that advocated the idea that women need meaningful work, education and careers. Friedan's research on women began in 1957, when she conducted a survey of her former Smith College classmates for their 15th class reunion. Survey results indicated many of her classmates were unhappy with their lives as homemakers, which prompted her to begin interviewing other suburban housewives and researching psychology, media and advertising. According to Friedan's analysis of then *Ladies' Home Journal*, *McCall's*, *Good Housekeeping*, and *Women's Home Companion*, the majority of heroines in the four major women's magazines in 1939 were career women. Within 20 years, however, the transforma-

tion from career-woman to housewife was such that by 1958, Friedan was unable to find a single career-woman heroine (Loughlin, 1983).

The author published the survey results in the 1963 bestseller, *The Feminine Mystique*, which examined the role of women's magazines, Freudian psychology, and educational institutions in keeping women in a subservient position (Loughlin, 1983). The book questioned the idea that middle-class women were happy and fulfilled as housewives. Several events that occurred during the period of civil turbulence contributed to the book's context and impact (Taylor, 2013):

- In 1954, Edith Green and Martha Wright Griffiths won seats in the U.S. House of Representatives.
- In 1955, Green proposed the Equal Pay Act; it became law in 1963. Green soon added Bernice Sandler to her Congressional staff and they began work on Title IX legislation. Griffiths worked to eliminate other forms of sex discrimination; she is now credited as the person most responsible for sex being included in the 1964 Civil Rights Act.
- In 1962, Gloria Steinem published an article describing how women are forced to choose between career and marriage in *Esquire*. (p. 71)

By 2000, *The Feminine Mystique* had sold more than three million copies and was translated into several languages. Today, it is widely regarded as one of the most influential nonfiction books of the 20th century. As asserted by Dow (2005), feminist texts of 1960s and 1970s have not received adequate attention in communication studies. The few studies on the text conclude that while strides have been made, there is room for growth in the feminist movement. In her essay on *The Feminine Mystique*, Turner (2013), discusses the 50th anniversary of the book and its contribution to the growth of

feminism. However, Turner adds that feminists still have much work to do in order to achieve their goals.

Cady (2009) explored a series of broad connections between women's employment and feminism in her investigation of *The Feminine Mystique*. The author adds that *The Feminine Mystique* envisions women finding fulfillment not in corporate careers, but instead in civic-minded pursuits, and more importantly, through developing "thoughtful liberal subjectivity." She concluded that recent mainstream news outlets have framed the book as *feminism's origin, a call to work*, and used these connections to condemn all feminism as conformist careerism, hence narrowing the range of issues addressed by the book and by women's liberation (Cady, 2009). Cady adds:

Although sections of *The Feminine Mystique* encouraged middle-class women's career aspirations, the book did not simply argue that women should enter the professions. Friedan critically assessed working within corporate capitalism, and she concluded by advocating not that women merely pursue professional work, but instead that they seek self-actualization through "the kind of lifelong personal purpose that was once called a 'career'" (Friedan, 1963, 2001, p. 342). (p. 366)

One of the biggest criticisms of the book is the idea that it contains elements of racism and classism. In 1984, black feminist theorist bell hooks introduced, *Feminist theory: from margin to center*, which includes a critique of *The Feminine Mystique* and mainstream feminism, in general. hooks maintains that mainstream feminism's reliance on white, middle-class, and professional spokeswomen obscures the involvement, leadership, and centrality of women of color and poor women in the movement for women's liberation.

Lean In

Fifty years after *The Feminine Mystique* debuted, Sheryl Sandberg, the Chief Operating Officer of Facebook, details her own struggle to achieve advancement and equality in a historically male-dominated workplace environment in *Lean In*. In *Lean In*, Sandberg advocates for women to be agents of their own success; rather than sitting on the fringes of a meeting, women should take their place at the table and "lean in" to their career. Addressing one of the leading dilemmas women face, Sandberg offers strategies for women to pursue career advancement without sacrificing a family life. She argues that it is no longer necessary for women to choose between having children or a career. *Lean In* has sold more than 2.25 million copies worldwide (Sandberg, 2013). Another measure of *Lean In's* influence is its network of *Lean In* Circles, or small in-person and online peer group meetings that are worldwide.

Sandberg details her struggle to achieve equality in a historically male-dominated workplace environment, advocates for women to be agents of their own success, rather than sitting on the fringes of meetings, and offers strategies for women to pursue career advancement without sacrificing a family life.

Fine and Fermaglich (2013) note that both Friedan and Sandberg share similar backgrounds. They grew up in comfortable Jewish families where education was valued and both women went to elite schools and excelled in their chosen disciplines. Both women were married with children and worked outside the home when they wrote their books. Fine and Fermaglich (2013) add that while Friedan and Sandberg are similar in their backgrounds, their books are different. Friedan primarily focuses on

the unhappiness felt by housewives who believed something was missing from their lives, while Sandberg focuses on how women are overlooked in leadership positions in corporate America. While Friedan's book is based on interviews, Sandberg is the subject of her book. She discusses her family, education, jobs, mentors, husbands and moments of struggle in corporate America (Fine & Kirsten, 2013). In sum, Sandberg's realization echoes a similar silence that Friedan portrayed over 50 years earlier - extending that internal question to the modern woman, "How can she have it all?" (Murphy, 2016).

Much like *The Feminine Mystique*, *Lean In*'s reviews are mixed with critics praising it for its insightful advice on how to balance both career and family, and panning it for a seemingly elitist perspective. Today, the movement's concerns shift constantly as activists personally encounter pay gaps, rising childcare costs, and pregnancy discrimination (Cochrane, 2013). With the magnitude of pressing issues, feminists fight on several fronts. The campaigns of the past few years were started by individuals, or small groups, that have responded to issues about which they feel strongly (Cochrane, 2013).

Many commentators argue that the internet has enabled a shift from 'third-wave' to 'fourth-wave' feminism. Phillips & Cree (2014) state: "We are currently witnessing a resurgence of interest in feminism across the world, with a claim that we are experiencing a 'fourth wave' in the global North that has its birthplace primarily on the internet" (p. 2). The two add that the internet has created culture, in which sexism or misogyny can be called out and challenged. Fourth wave feminism often combines finances, politics, mental well-being and stability in an overarching vision of change (Diamond, 2009).

Lean In is relatively new and scholars

have yet to fully explore the many dimensions of how audiences view and enjoy the book. Shonk (2013) recounts the major arguments within *Lean In*, and examines their overall effect on the workplace and society. Shonk (2013) finds that *Lean In*'s influence has yielded positive results for women by creating what she calls the "Sandberg Effect." Women have become confident enough to ask for the compensation they feel their work truly deserves by following Sandberg's advice for successfully negotiating a job interview or appealing for pay increases, rather than what is allocated to them. Shonk (2013) highlights a specific case in which the "Sandberg Effect" is evident by citing the editor of BuzzFeed, a popular social media company:

[Editor] Ben Smith writes that numerous women had mentioned Sandberg's name in salary negotiations with him and other editors just weeks after the book's publication. After negotiating a new role with Smith, one senior editor stood up to leave, then stopped herself and said, 'Sheryl Sandberg would be disappointed in me if I didn't ask you for a raise'. (p. 9)

Moreover, Shonk (2013) argues that *Lean In* also carries weight in creating a more communal workplace environment in which women can comfortably "position themselves as showing concern for all women, not just themselves" during negotiation (p. 106). The author explains that by simply having an authority figure, such as Sandberg that makes a public call for equality, women are able to reference a known authority as well as bolster their arguments.

User Generated Content (UGC)

Scholars have long asserted that traditional media outlets function as the primary gatekeeper in disseminating news to the public (Snider, 1967; White, 1950). However, with the rise of social media sites such as Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter, a varied

group of gatekeepers have emerged as numerous as those that use the medium (Curnutt, 2012). Pinterest is one of the newer social networking sites that launched in beta mode in March 2010. In 2015, Pinterest had more than 100 million monthly active users (MAUs), according to *The New York Times* (Isaac, 2015). The site started out as an invite-only visual bookmarking platform, but changed in 2012. It is now open for anyone to join. Though it is still considered only the third most popular social media, behind Facebook and Twitter, Pinterest is rapidly becoming a powerful tool for advertisers, purchasers and communicators (Vega, 2012). Building on this review of the literature, this study seeks to answer the following research questions:

RQ1: How are *Lean In* and *The Feminine Mystique* characterized in scholarly research and popular culture?

RQ2: What content is usually linked to Pinterest pins containing the two books in the title?

Methods

There is no single feminist method of study, but feminist communication researchers have incorporated and transformed different methodologies (Krolokke & Sorensen, 2006). However, feminist-informed methods commonly put gender and gender-related concerns at the center of analysis, and highlight notions of power in different ways. This content analysis of 200 Pinterest pins was identified by choosing applicable pins for analysis. The researchers used the keywords: *Betty Friedan*, *The Feminine Mystique*, *Sheryl Sandberg* and *Lean In* during October of 2013. This time frame was selected in commemoration of the 50th anniversary of Friedan's monumental text. It was also the year that Sandberg's book, *Lean In*, debuted. Each pin was selected by scrolling down the page with search results, and

the pin was copied and pasted into a Word document, as well as any links to connected websites noted; each book reached 100 pins, with a total of 200 pins in the sample.

The analysis included the reading and identification of the key themes emphasized in the selected sample. The researchers read the pins multiple times and highlighted themes. Cycling through data, the researchers were able to see similarities and differences in pins and keep track of thematic elements. We developed a coding protocol to place the pins into categories related to the most prominent themes: dispelling myths, consumerism, art and fashion. We also noted if the pins linked to other platforms such as: blogs, websites, and other types of social media. After compiling the themes, an emergent pattern was created, which provided the evidence for an argument about the nature of Pinterest's representation of *The Feminine Mystique* and *Lean In*.

Findings and Discussion

The Feminine Mystique Pins

Pinterest pins in our sample primarily linked pins to blog entries and online articles about the 50th anniversary of the book (see Diagram 1). One of the most popular pins linked to an article about *The New York Times* columnist, Gail Collins, who helped kick off the 50th anniversary of *The Feminine Mystique* with a spot titled, "Room for Debate." The half-hour debate included panelists who discussed the strengths and weaknesses of the book.

Similarly, a NPR blog entry discusses the 50th anniversary of *The Feminine Mystique*. The piece titled, "At 50, Does 'Feminine Mystique' Still Roar?" includes an interview with Hanna Rosin, author of *The End of Men*, who was in her 20s when she first read the book (Neary, 2013). Rosin argues

Table 1
Operational Definitions

Pins	A visual bookmark stored on a user's Pinterest account that links to outside content
Boards	A method of categorizing pins into similar groups
Followers	People who subscribe to other users or particular boards to view the content on their own homepage
Online media platforms	An alternative to traditional media, not confined by one channel of communication
Social networking sites	An online media platform that allows users to interact and generate new content by using the website
Visual bookmarking sites	Sites that primarily collect and share images and others that share links to all kinds of material found online in a visual way

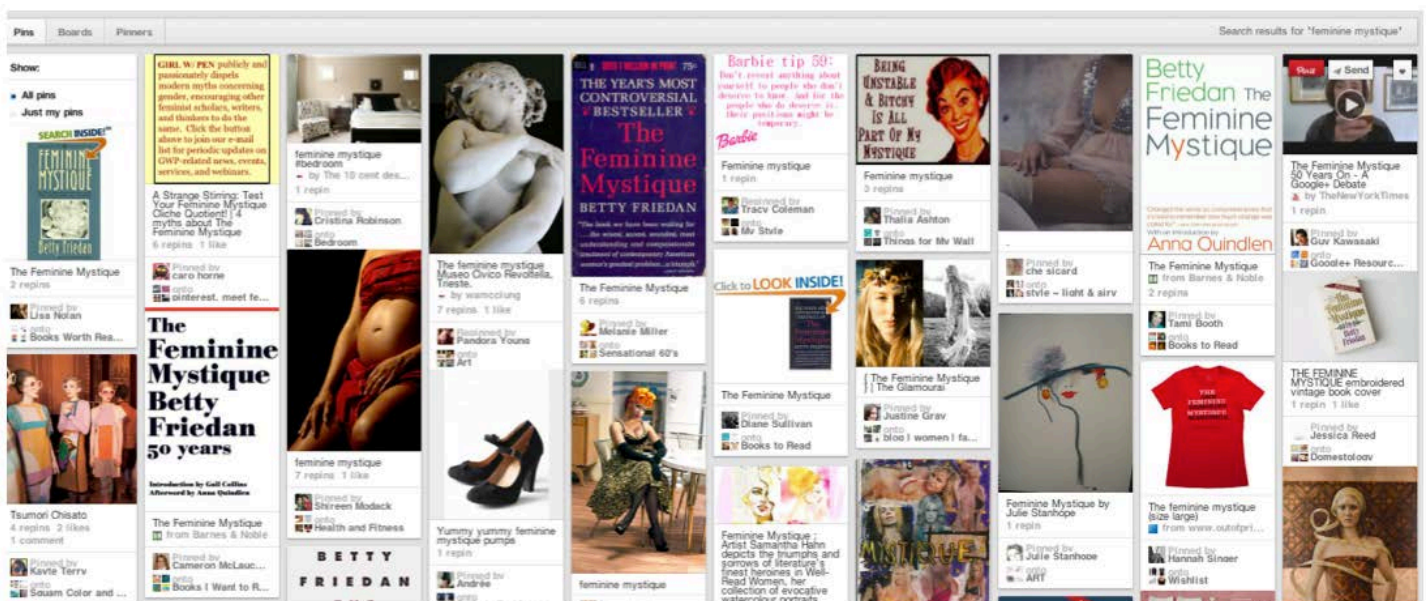


Table 2
The Feminine Mystique categories

Pins linked to other social media	Pins that linked to websites including blogs, news articles, or interviews. Each linked website discussed a distinctive view of <i>The Feminine Mystique</i> .
Dispelling myths	Pins that linked to websites which focused on correcting the misconceptions most commonly held about <i>The Feminine Mystique</i> , most notably the idea that Friedan hated men and domestic life.
Consumerism	Pins that linked to websites selling clothing, accessories, or books related to <i>The Feminine Mystique</i> .
Art and fashion	Pins that linked to artwork inspired by <i>The Feminine Mystique</i> .

that she was surprised by Friedan's anger as she systematically laid out the case against a male-dominated society that was determined to keep women in their place. Rosin adds that *The Feminine Mystique* is still relevant, especially when it comes to our "understanding of women and domesticity." The pin includes a photo of well-known feminists of the 1960s.

In the blog posting, Jessica Valenti, 34, states that women her age and younger are actively engaged with feminism, but not necessarily in traditional forums such as magazines and organizations. Instead, they are on the web and social media striving to "move the discussion forward." Neary (2013) states:

I see a lot of people who are discouraged that we are still having the same conversation. We've seen all these policy changes, we've seen incredible laws, we've seen Roe [v. Wade], we've seen the Violence Against Women Act, but we're still kind of fighting for implementation and we're still really battling the cultural battle and looking for cultural shifts. (para. 13)

Another pin links to a historical analysis of *The Feminine Mystique* 50 Years Later. Published on February 17, 2013, the author, Peter Dreier (2013), stated that *The Feminine Mystique* "catalyzed the modern feminist movement, helped forever change Americans' attitudes about women's role in society and catapulted its author into becoming an influential and controversial public figure" (para. 1). The author adds that *The Feminine Mystique* was not only a best-selling book, but also a manifesto for change. "Most Americans now accept as normal the once-radical ideas that Friedan and others espoused" (para. 3). He compares 1963 when there were few college courses, women's studies programs or books on women's history to today when "most Americans, including men, believe that women should

earn the same pay as men if they do the same job" (para. 3). Dreier (2013) states:

Corporations, law firms, the media, universities, advertising, the military, sports and other core institutions can no longer exercise blatant sex discrimination without facing scrutiny and the risk of protest and lawsuits. The Obama administration just lifted the ban on women in combat. Women are now running corporations, newspapers and TV stations, universities and major labor unions. In 1960, only about six percent of medical students were women. Today women comprise about half of all medical students and have a stronger foothold in other formerly all-male professions and occupations. (para. 3)

Dreier (2013) lists the right to have an abortion as the one grey spot in feminism; legalized in the US Supreme Court's Roe v. Wade ruling in 1973, the case is still under attack, but remains the law. Conversely, Siegel (2011), uses Pinterest as a platform to help dispel myths about Friedan. The post highlights Stephanie Coontz's 2011 book: *A Strange Stirring: The Feminine Mystique and American Women at the Dawn of the 1960s*, which is a monograph of *The Feminine Mystique*. Among the myths and clichés about *The Feminine Mystique* and the movement of feminism is the idea that Betty Friedan was a man-hater, and *The Feminine Mystique* was anti-marriage, according to Coontz (2011). In reality, Friedan hated housework, but she loved men. She even suggested that her tombstone should read: "She helped make women feel better about being women and therefore better able to freely and fully love men" (para. 3).

Another myth busted by Coontz is the idea that Friedan encouraged women to put their personal gratification and career ambitions ahead of family or community concerns, leading directly to "sex-in-the-city" individualism. In reality, Coontz stated that Friedan told women it was a mistake to

think that better sex or a new man would meet their need to grow. Coontz (2011):

She argued that only an un-liberated woman would believe that more money or a bigger house would fill the hole inside her. She also said it was better to do volunteer work, if possible, than to take a job just for the money, insisting that women, like men, could find themselves only by developing their individual capacities in the framework of socially useful work, whether paid or unpaid. She would have hated "Sex in the City." (para. 2)

Demonstrating the diversity of the posts, another blog entry posted by *The Atlantic* magazine, focuses its attention on "4 Big Problems with *The Feminine Mystique*." Author Ashley Fetters explores what she calls several "grains of salt" that deserve consideration in any discussion of the 50-year-old book's legacy (2013). The article analyzes *The Feminine Mystique* through the lens of critical race theory. It highlights the views of black feminist theorists such as bell hooks, who assert that *The Feminist Mystique* ignored the black and lower-class women of the 20th century (see *Diagram 2*). The blog entry also discusses the positive achievements that women have made in the years since the book appeared.

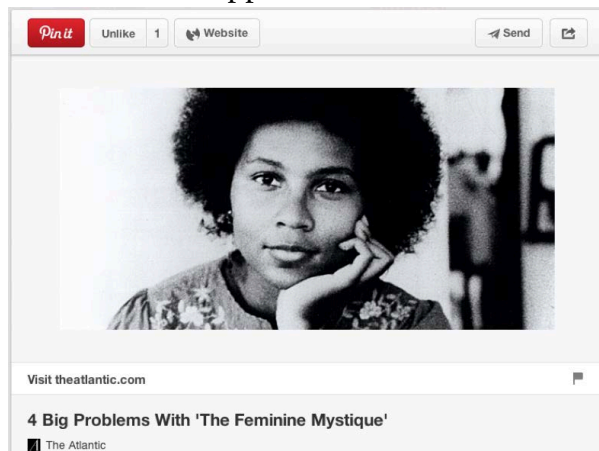


Diagram 2

Link to blog posting on *The Atlantic*.

<http://www.pinterest.com/pin/154389093448061578/>

Many of the Pinterest pins in our sample link to products and services such as art, fashion, the actual book and T-shirts commemorating *The Feminist Mystique* (see *Diagram 3*). The book is displayed with many different colors including one with embroidered letters. Posters of these pins include individuals who like the book and online booksellers such as Barnes and Noble and Amazon. One artist uses Pinterest to post pins featuring her paintings that depict the triumphs and sorrows of literature's finest heroines in an exhibit titled, "Well-Read Women." In her collection of evocative watercolor portraits, the artist shares paintings of Daisy Buchanan, Ophelia, and five more fictional characters.

Lean In Pins

The phrase *Lean In* also retrieved a wide array of user-generated pins, with content belonging to a broad variety of categories (*Diagram 4*). The majority of the images present an inspirational quote from *Lean In*, or from a lecture or interview given by Sandberg. As with *The Feminine Mystique*, the overwhelming majority of pins link to blog posts, including topics such as career advice, motherhood, and self-improvement (see *Table 3*).



Diagram 3

T-shirt emblazoned with a *Feminine Mystique* emblem.

<http://www.pinterest.com/pin/115123334197793007/>

Though a number of blogs offer supportive statements about *Lean In*, many critical posts also exist. A number of pins unrelated to Sandberg also surface, due to phrases such as “become lean in six weeks,” and advertise

exercise routines, diet plans, and health advice.

Support for *Lean In*

The popularity of *Lean In* has raised a

Table 3
Lean In categories

Career advice	Pins that link to websites offering quotes and direct career advice from Sheryl Sandberg, or a form of advice derived from the content of <i>Lean In</i> .
Support for <i>Lean In</i>	Pins that link to blogs and websites detailing personal stories from women who have applied Sandberg’s advice to their own workplace, and experienced a positive outcome.
Criticism and negative feedback	Pins that link to blogs and websites in women recount negative instances of using strategies from <i>Lean In</i> in their workplace or personal life.

great deal of controversy. While many women are grateful for and profit from the book’s impact, various others believe that Sandberg is not truly representing the working woman and mother, and as a result, unfavorably distorts the majority of women. This criticism, however, makes pins in support of *Lean In* stand out all the more. A pin linking to an online *Forbes* article titled, “It’s Sheryl Sandberg’s Courage to Raise Her Voice That’s Hot News, Not Leaning In,” presents a staunch defense of the book. Writer, Anne Doyle, is an author of a feminist book titled *Powering Up!*, and is subsequently in a better position to understand Sandberg’s motivations when creating *Lean In*.

Doyle (2013) acknowledges that *Lean In* does not offer new or groundbreaking advice, but argues that it is the reiteration of these ideas by a powerful female figure that matters most. She posits that the goal of *Lean In* is to encourage female participation in the workplace, regardless of how dissimilar Sandberg may be compared to other women. Doyle applauds Sandberg for her

willingness “to raise her voice, put her personal reputation in the game, and talk openly about the gigantic elephant in the room.”

Another positive article from *Time* magazine, “Confidence Woman,” by Belinda Luscombe (2013), defends *Lean In* from critics, and goes as far as to state that the book launches “the most ambitious mission to reboot feminism and reframe discussions of gender since the launch of Ms. magazine in 1971” (para. 4). Luscombe (2013) reinforces her support of *Lean In* by referencing influential feminists, such as Gloria Steinem, that have also supported the book. She catalogs Sandberg’s personal successes as well as gains in workplace equality, and concludes by expressing hope for Sandberg’s future as a feminist icon: “After the women get the power, well, then she can really let loose” (Luscombe, 2013, para. 9).

Another notable blog linked from Pinterest titled, “Moms Rising,” contains an article written by Stephanie Coontz (2013), previously mentioned for her commentary on *The Feminine Mystique*. Coontz rebuts

criticism, separating Sandberg from middle-class women, stating: “Sandberg does not discount the external barriers facing women. Nor is she unconcerned with the well-being of less affluent women” (para. 4). Coontz claims that Sandberg’s main argument attacks the intellectual barriers women continue to hold. *Lean In*’s appeal is that it breaks down these mental obstructions, and gives women the confidence to push farther than they previously believed possible. Even when expressing doubt over Sandberg’s hopefulness, Coontz (2013) nevertheless supports *Lean In*. She advises women that it is “better to focus one’s fire on the politicians and employers...than to attack a corporate leader who concedes that the playing field is still not equal and has some interesting ideas about how to help other women succeed” (para. 16).

burnout – both at work and home. Brooks (2014) argues that women are still seen and expected to behave as the primary caregiver at home; they still work a “second shift” regardless of career status. Upon her initial reading of *Lean In*, Brooks was inspired to emulate Sandberg’s drive, and transformed what was once leisure time into time spent reaching out and leaning in. Brooks (2014) describes her efforts and conclusion:

I leaned in some more. I ate protein bars and made important telephone calls during my morning commute. I stopped reading novels so I could write more articles and memos and make more handicrafts to contribute to the school auction. I put in extra hours at work. When I came home, I did radio interviews over Skype from my living room while supervising the children’s math homework. And I realized that I hated Sheryl Sandberg. Because, of course, I was miserable. (para. 20)

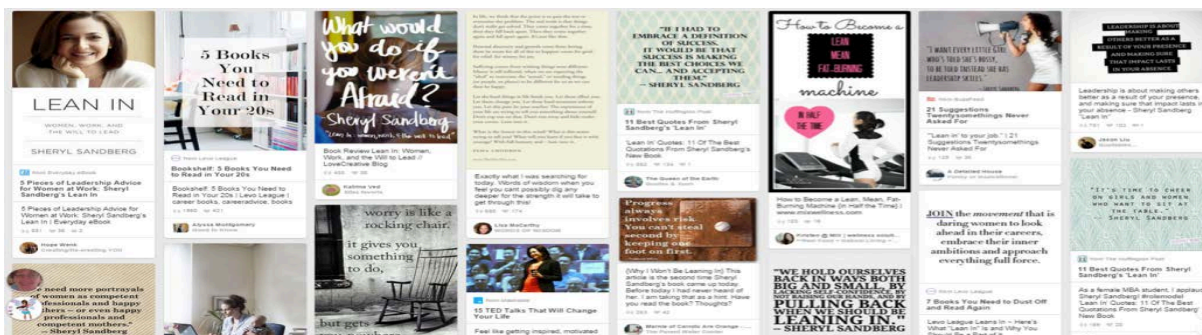


Diagram 4

Pinterest pins containing the words “Lean In” in their title.

Criticism and Negative Feedback

The array of criticism on Pinterest pushes back against positive views of *Lean In*. Some of the pins link to blog entries or newspaper opinion pieces citing the faults within Sandberg’s work. One of the strongest pieces of criticism stems from a pin linked to a 2014 *Washington Post* article titled: “Recline, Don’t Lean In: Why I Hate Sheryl Sandberg.” The author, Rosa Brooks, faults Sandberg for pushing women to the point of

Though she achieved success through her attempts to lean in, Brooks argues that Sandberg’s definition of “leaning in” is simply not sustainable. She believes Sandberg has contributed to a culture in which women are viewed as failing in career devotion unless they are at the office “every night until nine,” or “checking email 24/7” (Brooks, 2014). To the author, Sandberg is perpetuating gender inequality by convincing women to overwork themselves to the same degree

that men do. Brooks concludes by cautioning women against the *Lean In* mentality, and instead advocates hard-working women to use free time to recline, stating: “If we truly want gender equality, we need to challenge the assumption that more is always better” (2014).

Additional criticism is found in a pin linking to the *New Yorker* article: “Lean Out: The Dangers for Women Who Negotiate.” Author Maria Konnikova (2014), argues against Sandberg advising women to ask for what they want when negotiating, and instead recommends women to proceed slowly and with great caution in their career pursuits. Konnikova (2014) tells a story of a woman who, after being hired on as a university professor, sent her employer a polite email asking if it would be possible to discuss some of her requests, including a slight pay raise, eventual paid maternity leave, and a pre-tenure sabbatical. The employer promptly responded, only to inform her that she no longer seemed like a good fit for the position, and she would no longer be receiving the job.

Konnikova employs this cautionary tale to remind women that, though there should not be any harm in simply asking, the workplace remains kinder to assertive men than women. She quotes studies finding that requests are looked upon more favorably when coming from a male employee, while women are more likely to be seen as overreaching. Konnikova (2014) agrees with Sandberg in that women should be paid as much as men, but she maintains her view that today’s society is still a dangerous place for women to seek advancement quickly. Her ending advice for women is to disregard Sandberg’s strident attitude towards career advancement, while wisely remaining aware that “any negotiation in which gender is involved remains a careful, precarious balancing act”

(Konnikova, 2014, para. 19).

Comparison of the Two Books

Pinterest features a wide array of user-generated pins that link to the books with other content representing a broad variety of categories. Pinterest pins containing the term “Feminine Mystique” and “Lean In” link to YouTube videos, blogs, and websites with products ranging from art to high fashion to websites that offer the books for purchase. Though a number of pins offer supportive statements about the two books, these are offset by an equal number of critical posts or those that link to unrelated items such as websites that sell diet products, fashion and other random items.

Lean In garnered online discussion almost immediately after release. Though both support for and criticism of Sandberg’s work maintain wide bases, the fact that *Lean In* has raised a significant discussion is valuable in and of itself. By publicly declaring herself a feminist, Sandberg has consequently created new dialogue regarding feminism and company structure.

One key difference in the representations of the two books on Pinterest is *Lean In* pins are more likely to link to career-related topics. Keeping in line with the overall theme of *Lean In*, numerous pins link to websites offering career advice in the form of reading lists, negotiating tips, inspirational quotes for female entrepreneurs, and advice for working mothers. For instance, one popular pin links to a reading list directed toward young women, titled, “5 Books You Need to Read in Your 20s.” The collection, headed by *Lean In*, contains books centered on the theme of self-improvement and early-career guidance (see *Diagram 5*).

One blog rehashes Sandberg’s career advice in its post “5 Pieces of Leadership for

Women at Work.” Author, Rachel Jacobs, praises Sandberg for starting “a long overdue conversation about gender biases and lack of female leadership in the workplace,” and provides what she believes to be the five most important takeaways from *Lean In* (2013). She encourages women to put Sandberg’s advice to use in their career, and further the Lean In movement.

There are also quite a few pins linking to the website created specifically for Sandberg’s book, *leanin.org* (Diagram 5). On this website, users can create or join “lean in circles” in order to share support with individuals in or near their community. The site offers advice for entrepreneurs, recent graduates, and career-oriented individuals.

Study findings illustrate the influence *The Feminine Mystique* has had on society in general. Pins discuss and analyze feminism, and commemorate the five decades following the publishing of *The Feminine Mystique*. Such activities keep alive valuable discussion on important women’s issues. The text’s migration to new forms of media such as Pin-

terest is a testimony to its importance as it continues to shape the lives of women in the 21st century.

Conclusions

One of the greatest challenges for women today is finding the right balance between personal and professional life. Predictively, Betty Friedan compared the feminist revolution to evolution, when she said: “The feminist revolution had to be fought because women quite simply were stopped at a state of evolution far short of their human capacity” (p. 88). Friedan, who died in 2006, was a trailblazer and groundbreaker for the feminist movement in the United States, serving as a founding member of the National Organization for Women (NOW), the National Abortion Rights Action and the National Women’s Political Caucus (Betty Friedan Biography, 2012).

Pinterest offers a method of targeting certain audiences—specifically women, which means scholarly inquiry in this area might offer insight into feminist viewpoints and trends. The findings illustrate the reality that there are groups outspokenly against feminism, and have a skewed view of what feminism entails. On the social media platform Tumblr, a popular account titled “Women Against Feminism” consistently posts about the evils of feminism. *The Daily Beast*, studying the effects of misrepresentation, writes: “one woman posted ‘I don’t need ‘feminism’ because I believe that men and women are EQUAL, not that women should belittle men’ (Shire, 2014, n.p.). Studies such as this one that highlight not only feminist texts, but also the citizen reaction to these works, are needed to illuminate the common perceptions and misconstructions of feminism overall.

Although both of these texts are clear-

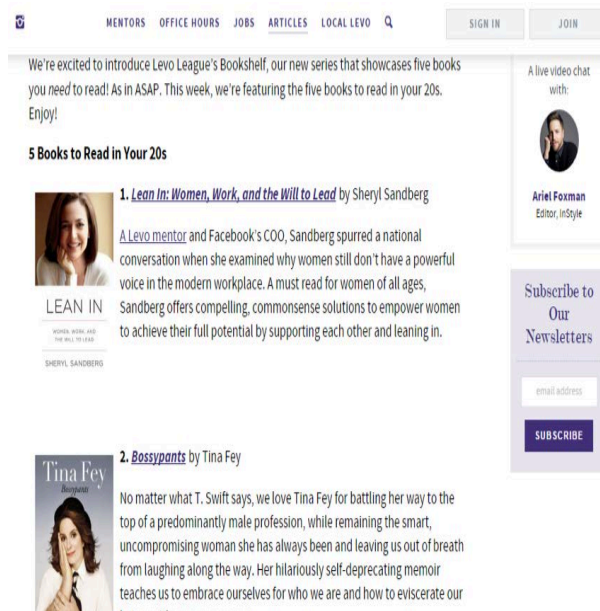


Diagram 5

Pin of motivational reading list. <http://www.levo.com/articles/lifestyle/5-books-to-read-in-your-20s>

ly being discussed on popular social media platforms, there is an observable lack of knowledge about their contents in society at large. Just one in four Americans – and one in three women – call themselves feminists today. However, that is often before they read a dictionary definition of feminism. Even then, 40% of Americans in the latest Economist/YouGov Poll – including half of all men – say they do not think of themselves as a feminist, defined as “someone who believes in the social, political and economic equality of women” (Frankovic, 2014, n.p.). These results were equally inconsistent in the United States: a 2013 poll “found just 16 percent of men and 23 percent of women in America identify as feminists [...] however, that same poll found 82 percent of all Americans agree with the statement ‘men and women should be social, political, and economic equals’” (Swanson, 2013, n.p.). This inconsistency indicates although many people are aware that texts such as *The Feminine Mystique* and *Lean In* are widely circulating, they may not understand the overall concept of feminism.

As with any study, there were limitations associated with this analysis. One primary weakness is it solely examines Pinterest to determine reactions to and discussion of *Lean In* and *The Feminine Mystique*. By focusing on one social media platform, the findings cannot be generalized to other social media platforms. Worth noting is we chose Pinterest for its appeal to women. This study will serve as a springboard to future studies that examine reactions to and discussion of *Lean In* and *The Feminine Mystique* on other social media platforms. Also of interest would be a survey or focus group study that examines the uses and gratifications of users on this platform might also enhance the findings. In addition, this study is mainly concerned with the 50th anniversary of *The Feminine*

Mystique; therefore, it looks at a relatively small timeframe of social media posts. Future studies might utilize a longitudinal approach, and determine if this online public opinion changes greatly over time.

Fifty years after *The Feminine Mystique*, Coontz writes, “I don’t think *Lean In* is the new *Feminine Mystique*. But I do see it as following up with the next stage of consciousness-raising for the modern counterparts of Friedan’s suburban housewives” (2013, n.p.). Only time will tell. However, Pinterest indicates Americans have spotted both value and faults in the two books, and they are using social media to impart their thoughts to the world. This trend is sure to continue as social media and user-generated content continue to consistently grow in popularity■

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