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In the 1970s when the women's rights struggle gained national attention, college students were an important part of that movement. Universities traditionally have been viewed as arenas for free thought and exchange of ideas, a perfect forum for a liberal movement. But the conservative '80s, with its race to yuppie-dom, drew the focus away from issues of women's rights. And today's college women, wary of being labeled a 'liberal' or a 'feminist,' have been hesitant to jump back on the bandwagon.

Not that all women are hesitant to protest for women's rights. After *Playboy* named the U. of Vermont one of the top 10 party schools in the nation, a photographer visited campus for interviews with women to be featured in an upcoming issue. Women on the campus reacted furiously, expressing their displeasure at the magazine "using women as objects." More than 150 students gathered for a "speak out" where women, naked to the waist and covered in body paint, wore bags with "silence" on them over their heads and performed a theatrical protest.

They call themselves feminists. And because they do, many college women are hesitant to join them in wearing that label, not wanting to be associated with a radical part of the women's rights movement.

Nicole Shupe is one of those women.

Shupe, a U. of Michigan senior, calls herself a feminist by definition but does not support radical tactics. "Very militant women continually put men on the defensive. Nothing moves that way," she says.

But Jen Ochumias, a UVM senior who helped organize the rally there, doesn't believe these tactics are offensive. "We took off our clothes, but I don't call that radical."

What she would call it is women taking control of their lives. And this concept of feminism — a label which carries the connotations of bra-burning, angry women — is being pushed to its limits by women who see a need for change.

Mary Beijan, a senior at the U. of Michigan, went after this change by protesting *Playboy* when the magazine interviewed for its "Girls of the Big 10" issue. After Beijan facetiously interviewed and posed for a *Playboy* photographer, she handed him a folder of anti-pornography literature and a raw chicken leg. "I gave him a chicken leg because I thought he wanted meat," she says.

The extension of the limits of the word feminism has created an obstacle for advocates of women's rights who shun stereotypical labels.

Stephanie Bloomingdale, field director of the U.S. Student Association (a Washington, D.C., lobbying group), says young women need to internalize the term and shape their own meaning. "It's very strange. This word 'feminism' has been equated to something bad. Each individual has to define feminism for themselves," she says. "Basically it's got a bad rap."

And sometimes those who try to understand feminist issues are ostracized for being insincere or opportunistic.

Mike Jackson, a senior at the U. of Missouri, says as one of a handful of men in a women's studies class of more than 100 students, men are not welcomed fully. Once when a male student said he was a feminist, women sitting near Jackson laughed and passed around a note that read, "He's trying to be a male feminist to get a date."

Though feminism isn't meant to exclude men, the idea that it does comes from traditional images of feminism. And these images, including the ones that cause women to shy away from the term, is derived from what students are taught early on.

Many students grew up with feminist mothers or dual-career families, so these images are not foreign, says Sharon Welch, professor of women's studies at the U. of Missouri. But these same students don't call themselves feminists because they don't want to be labeled as such, she says.

Which is exactly what Shupe believes some women are avoiding. "Some women today would not join NOW [National Organization for Women] because they don't want the stigma of being called a feminist."

Angie Waszkiewicz, a senior at the U. of Missouri, says all women's rights advocates have the same goal of improving the lifestyles of women. "Whether women call themselves feminists or not, they are concerned about women's issues."

These issues include discrimination, reproductive rights and pay equity. And perhaps the most volatile concern is sexual assault. At the U. of California, San Diego, more than 200 women took part in a Take Back the Night march. Nearly one-third of the women removed their shirts as part of the protest. Senior Andrena White, a member of the Women's Resource Center, says the administration told her group it had violated the student conduct code. "The next day we got a memo saying how lewd we were," she says.

But the battle being waged may be about little more than semantics. Donna Jones, director of Affirmative Action and Compliance at the U. of Wisconsin, says there is a 'word war' raging in America. While some people still proclaim themselves feminists, others find the word too confining, she says.

"There has been a tendency to move away from the term 'feminist' and use the broader term 'women's issues,'" Jones says.

Waszkiewicz says many fear the word itself for what feminism represents. "For the most part people see [feminism] as something to be feared because of the potential for change."

And perhaps this Year of the Woman, with 178 women running for prominent public offices, will be an impetus for the change. Some hope the furor will spur new gains in the women's movement. Perhaps one of these gains will refute the bra-burning image of the movement to include a definition of feminism embraced by all.

UVM's Ochumias says she believes strongly that this meaning will come, not from a dictionary but a lifestyle change.

"[Feminism] is something you live, something you believe in, something that carries over into everyday life."

I'M NOT A FEMINIST, BUT...

College advocates fight the bra-burning image of feminism that still hovers over their battle for women's rights

By PURVI SHAH, *Michigan Daily*, U. OF MICHIGAN