

Dimensions of Empowerment in Women Participating in Grassroots Feminist Movements

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ABSTRACT

Objective: This study aimed to explore the multidimensional nature of empowerment as experienced by women engaged in grassroots feminist movements in the United States.

Methods and Materials: A qualitative research design was employed, utilizing semi-structured interviews with 29 women actively involved in feminist grassroots organizing across various regions of the United States. Participants were selected through purposive sampling to ensure diversity in age, ethnicity, and activist experience. Data collection continued until theoretical saturation was achieved. Interviews were conducted virtually, transcribed verbatim, and analyzed using thematic analysis, supported by NVivo software. The analysis followed Braun and Clarke's six-phase approach to identify key themes and subthemes reflecting participants' lived experiences of empowerment within activist contexts.

Findings: The analysis revealed five major dimensions of empowerment: personal empowerment, collective empowerment, sociopolitical agency, transformational learning, and identity reclamation. Each category comprised multiple subthemes, such as self-awareness, solidarity, political voice, critical consciousness, and cultural pride. Participants described how grassroots activism facilitated internal growth, strengthened interpersonal connections, and expanded their engagement in civic and political life. The data highlighted how empowerment was not a fixed state but an evolving, contextual process shaped by resistance, relational dynamics, and ongoing learning. Quotations from participants illustrated how even small acts, such as asserting boundaries or sharing personal stories, contributed to broader transformations in identity and agency.

Conclusion: Women's participation in grassroots feminist movements fosters a dynamic and multifaceted empowerment process that transcends traditional institutional metrics. These findings underscore the importance of recognizing emotional, relational, and symbolic dimensions of empowerment, as well as the sociopolitical mechanisms through which women reclaim agency and challenge systemic inequalities. Supporting grassroots feminist efforts requires attention to sustainability, intersectionality, and collective care to maintain their transformative potential.

Keywords: Empowerment; grassroots feminism; feminist activism; women's agency

1. Introduction

In recent decades, grassroots feminist movements have emerged as transformative spaces for challenging structural inequalities, promoting social justice, and cultivating empowerment among women at the margins of formal politics. These movements, often rooted in community-based mobilization, have created platforms where women not only resist patriarchal norms but also actively construct new ways of being, leading, and advocating for systemic change. Within these spaces, empowerment transcends mere participation in decision-making; it becomes a multidimensional process involving personal transformation, collective action, sociopolitical engagement, and identity reclamation. Scholars have increasingly emphasized that empowerment within grassroots contexts cannot be reduced to institutional outcomes or policy shifts alone; rather, it must be understood in terms of the lived experiences and evolving agency of women engaged in these movements (Alam & Shiuly, 2023; Baena et al., 2024; Dulhunty, 2023).

Historically, grassroots feminist activism has filled the voids left by formal political structures, particularly in regions where women's interests have been excluded or minimized by dominant institutions. Whether responding to environmental injustice, gender-based violence, or economic disenfranchisement, these movements have often grown organically from the needs of women themselves and their communities (Gottardi, 2020; Waldron, 2018). In this sense, grassroots spaces represent not only modes of resistance but also laboratories for cultivating leadership, voice, and self-determination. As Bocking-Welch et al. note, the historical significance of women's campaigning and petitioning lies in their ability to reconfigure the meaning of political action itself, often challenging the boundaries of what constitutes legitimate activism (Bocking-Welch et al., 2024). These initiatives have also been deeply intersectional, addressing overlapping forms of oppression shaped by race, class, sexuality, and geography. As seen in transnational movements such as the "Idle No More" and "Standing Rock" protests led by Indigenous women, activism at the grassroots level often reflects both local struggles and global solidarities (Gottardi, 2020).

Feminist scholars have argued that empowerment must be conceptualized as a process rather than a fixed outcome—a dynamic interplay of psychological, social, cultural, and political shifts that enable women to redefine their roles and assert control over their lives (Kabira & Maloiy, 2019;

Khuankaew, 2020). In community organizing contexts, this empowerment process is often nonlinear, involving moments of rupture, reflection, and resilience. For example, grassroots organizing provides spaces for women to confront and unlearn internalized patriarchy, articulate their lived experiences, and engage in collective meaning-making. These acts, though often small in scale, accumulate into what Baena et al. term "micro-empowerments"—incremental but powerful shifts in how women see themselves and their potential for change (Baena et al., 2024). This suggests that empowerment within feminist movements is not simply about acquiring external resources or leadership positions but also about internal transformations and relational dynamics.

One of the defining characteristics of grassroots feminist organizing is its emphasis on collective identity and relational empowerment. Rather than promoting individualistic notions of success, these movements foster a sense of solidarity, interdependence, and mutual care. Mari Tripp, in her study of women's peacebuilding in Africa, underscores how grassroots feminist efforts often revolve around the principle of "being each other's keeper," where the empowerment of one woman is intrinsically linked to the wellbeing of others in the community (Mari Tripp, 2024). This collectivist ethic challenges dominant liberal frameworks of empowerment that center autonomy as self-sufficiency, instead offering a more nuanced vision grounded in empathy, shared struggle, and trust. Similarly, Clatterbuck's ethnographic work with Catholic sisters involved in agrarian activism highlights how community rituals and moral commitments can serve as sources of feminist resistance and spiritual empowerment (Clatterbuck, 2022).

At the same time, grassroots spaces offer a fertile ground for the development of political agency and leadership among women who may be excluded from formal institutions. As Gordon's research on the Rojiroti women leaders in India demonstrates, community-based activism enables women to acquire skills in negotiation, conflict resolution, and strategic planning, ultimately reshaping their relationship to political structures and decision-making processes (Gordon, 2020). This is echoed in Natil's analysis of nonviolent women-led activism, where he shows how bottom-up organizing can catalyze civic consciousness and transformative leadership even in contexts of severe repression (Natil, 2021). Furthermore, González-Malabet's work in Colombia illustrates how grassroots feminist engagement often paves the way for broader political

participation, as women begin to assert their presence in public spheres traditionally dominated by men (González-Malabet, 2022).

However, the transformative potential of grassroots feminism does not arise in a vacuum; it is shaped by historical and cultural legacies, institutional constraints, and uneven power dynamics. For example, Waldrop's study of grassroots activists in New Delhi highlights how women often navigate conflicting pressures between political involvement and gendered expectations of domesticity, which can lead to burnout and eventual withdrawal from public life (Waldrop, 2024). Similarly, Prasongko and Arti show how grassroots women leaders in Indonesia, while praised for their compassion and responsiveness during crises, often carry a disproportionate emotional burden in sustaining community welfare (Prasongko & Arti, 2021). These findings raise important questions about the cost of empowerment and the need for sustainable, reciprocal models of activism.

Empowerment also unfolds in the discursive realm, where language, storytelling, and digital media become tools for resisting dominant narratives and creating alternative subjectivities. Han's analysis of the #MeToo movement in China demonstrates how even subtle, coded forms of digital resistance can function as acts of empowerment within authoritarian contexts (Han, 2021). Likewise, Dudley's exploration of Black feminist praxis in the U.S. honors the epistemological contributions of African American foremothers whose embodied knowledge and health activism have challenged biomedical and racial hierarchies (Dudley, 2023). These discursive practices are not merely expressive but strategic—they allow marginalized women to reframe their realities, articulate collective grievances, and demand structural change.

From a global perspective, the strategies and forms of empowerment enacted in grassroots feminist movements vary widely but are connected by a shared commitment to justice, autonomy, and transformation. In Nigeria, for instance, women-led groups have been central to both political participation and economic development, demonstrating that empowerment is inseparable from broader questions of access, opportunity, and systemic inclusion (Abasilim, 2020; Orisadare, 2019). Similarly, Alam and Shiuly document how Bangladeshi women's participation in local governance has led to increased gender sensitivity in decision-making processes and tangible community improvements (Alam & Shiuly, 2023). In post-colonial contexts such as South Africa, popular women's

politics have historically served as counterweights to state-sanctioned exclusions, emphasizing the enduring relevance of grassroots mobilization in the struggle for rights and recognition (Healy-Clancy, 2020).

The environmental dimensions of grassroots feminist activism also warrant attention. As Santpoort et al. demonstrate in their multi-country study, rural women have developed bottom-up strategies to secure land rights and ecological stewardship in the face of climate injustice and land dispossession (Santpoort et al., 2021). These movements reframe environmental protection as a gendered, relational, and justice-oriented endeavor. Similarly, Moohin's work with Muslim community leaders illustrates how local organizing can build social cohesion while advancing inclusive narratives around belonging and leadership (Moohin, 2022).

Despite these advances, structural challenges remain. Scarrow et al. observe that while women's empowerment has increased partisan participation in some settings, it has not always translated into equitable representation or influence within mainstream institutions (Scarrow et al., 2024). Moreover, as Karakchiev's historical study of women in Soviet-era governance suggests, formal inclusion does not guarantee genuine empowerment when broader patriarchal norms persist (Karakchiev, 2024). Thus, the work of grassroots feminist movements must be seen not only as an alternative to formal politics but also as a critique and reimagining of it.

Finally, the emotional and psychological dimensions of empowerment deserve further exploration. As Waldron argues, grassroots women who confront environmental violence often face intersecting traumas tied to colonialism, racism, and gendered erasure (Waldron, 2018). In these contexts, empowerment is not only about visibility or voice but also about healing, remembrance, and reclaiming dignity. The feminist ethic of care that underpins much grassroots activism thus becomes a form of resistance in itself—one that defies capitalist and patriarchal metrics of productivity and success.

In sum, this study investigates the lived dimensions of empowerment among women involved in grassroots feminist movements in the United States.

2. Methods and Materials

2.1. Study design and Participant

This study employed a qualitative research design to explore the dimensions of empowerment among women

engaged in grassroots feminist movements in the United States. The research adopted a constructivist paradigm to capture the subjective meanings and lived experiences of participants within their sociocultural contexts. The sample consisted of 29 women who self-identified as active participants in grassroots feminist initiatives addressing issues such as reproductive rights, gender-based violence, and economic equity. Participants were selected through purposive sampling to ensure variation in age, ethnicity, geographical location, and type of activism. Recruitment was conducted via online feminist forums, activist networks, and community-based organizations. Inclusion criteria required participants to have been engaged in grassroots feminist activism for at least one year. Data collection continued until theoretical saturation was reached, at which point no new themes or insights emerged from subsequent interviews.

2.2. Measures

2.2.1. Semi-Structured Interview

Data were collected through in-depth, semi-structured interviews, each lasting between 45 and 90 minutes. An interview guide was developed based on existing literature on empowerment and feminist activism, covering topics such as personal transformation, collective identity, perceived agency, and challenges encountered in activism. Interviews were conducted via video calls to accommodate participants' geographical diversity and ensure accessibility. All interviews were audio-recorded with participants' consent and transcribed verbatim. Participants were assured of confidentiality, and pseudonyms were used in all transcripts and reporting to protect their identities.

2.3. Data Analysis

Data analysis was conducted using thematic analysis, following Braun and Clarke's six-phase framework. NVivo software (version 12) was used to manage, code, and

organize the qualitative data systematically. The process began with open coding to identify initial codes within the transcripts, followed by axial coding to explore relationships among codes and cluster them into broader categories. Finally, selective coding was applied to identify overarching themes representing distinct dimensions of empowerment. Credibility was enhanced through member checking, where a subset of participants reviewed preliminary findings to ensure accuracy and resonance with their lived experiences. Reflexive journaling and peer debriefing were also employed throughout the analysis to minimize researcher bias and enhance the trustworthiness of the findings.

3. Findings and Results

The participants in this study consisted of 29 women actively involved in grassroots feminist movements across various regions of the United States. The age range of participants was between 21 and 52 years, with the majority ($n = 17$) falling within the 25–35 age bracket. In terms of racial and ethnic identity, 11 participants identified as White, 7 as African American, 5 as Latina, 3 as Asian American, and 3 as multiracial. Regarding educational background, 9 participants held a bachelor's degree, 13 had completed graduate-level education, and 7 had some college or associate degrees. Participants also represented a diverse range of socioeconomic backgrounds, with 12 reporting middle-income status, 10 identifying as working-class, and 7 indicating low-income status. Sexual orientation was self-identified as heterosexual by 16 participants, queer by 8, bisexual by 3, and lesbian by 2. Geographically, participants were distributed across both urban and rural areas, with 19 residing in urban centers and 10 in rural or semi-rural regions. Activist involvement varied in duration: 14 participants had been engaged in feminist activism for 1–3 years, 10 for 4–7 years, and 5 for over 8 years. This diverse demographic composition allowed for a rich exploration of intersecting identities and experiences within feminist grassroots organizing.

Table 1

Themes, Subthemes, and Concepts Related to Dimensions of Empowerment in Women Participating in Grassroots Feminist Movements

Category (Main Theme)	Subcategory (Subtheme)	Concepts (Open Codes)
1. Personal Empowerment	Self-Awareness	Recognizing internalized sexism, reflecting on identity, emotional growth
	Self-Confidence	Speaking out in public, asserting boundaries, rejecting self-doubt
	Emotional Resilience	Recovering from backlash, coping with burnout, reframing negative feedback
	Goal Orientation	Defining personal goals, aligning values with actions, staying motivated
	Autonomy	Making independent decisions, rejecting external control, embracing freedom
	Body Sovereignty	Reclaiming bodily autonomy, resisting objectification, practicing self-care

2. Collective Empowerment	Assertive Communication	Expressing needs, refusing compliance, confronting authority
	Solidarity	Mutual support, shared struggles, sisterhood bonds
	Collaborative Leadership	Rotating roles, consensus-based decisions, inclusive facilitation
	Shared Vision	Collective purpose, common feminist goals, political clarity
	Community Building	Creating safe spaces, organizing events, nurturing trust
3. Sociopolitical Agency	Conflict Navigation	Managing disagreements, dialoguing differences, preserving unity
	Political Voice	Testifying at hearings, writing to representatives, public speaking
	Civic Engagement	Voting campaigns, policy advocacy, public education efforts
	Legal Literacy	Understanding rights, navigating legal systems, educating others
	Protest Participation	Attending rallies, organizing marches, civil disobedience
4. Transformational Learning	Media Advocacy	Social media campaigns, writing op-eds, podcast activism
	Resource Mobilization	Fundraising skills, grant writing, managing community assets
	Critical Consciousness	Questioning norms, analyzing power structures, deconstructing patriarchy
	Intersectional Awareness	Recognizing multiple oppressions, valuing diverse identities, rejecting tokenism
	Historical Grounding	Learning feminist history, honoring past struggles, understanding lineage
5. Identity Reclamation	Skill Development	Facilitation skills, conflict mediation, digital organizing
	Reframing Failure	Seeing setbacks as growth, embracing imperfection, redefining success
	Cultural Pride	Embracing heritage, celebrating traditions, challenging stereotypes
	Sexual Identity Acceptance	Affirming queer identities, resisting heteronormativity, expressing fluidity
	Healing from Shame	Naming trauma, rejecting stigma, embracing vulnerability
	Naming Experiences	Defining personal narratives, articulating oppression, validating feelings
	Role Reimagining	Rejecting imposed roles, redefining womanhood, choosing one's own path

Participants described self-awareness as a foundational shift in their empowerment process, marked by their ability to identify internalized sexism and reflect on how societal norms shaped their beliefs. One participant shared, “I never realized how much I doubted myself because I had learned to stay quiet and small. It was like waking up to who I really am.” This awakening often led to a growing sense of self-confidence, particularly in public and activist spaces. Participants described standing up in meetings, asserting boundaries, and “finally believing my voice matters just as much as anyone else’s.” As they faced challenges in activism, emotional resilience emerged as another key dimension. One woman stated, “There were times I was exhausted, especially when our efforts were ignored. But I reminded myself that this is part of resistance.” They also demonstrated goal orientation, where staying aligned with long-term personal and political objectives helped them sustain motivation. “I always remind myself why I started: for my daughter, for justice, for change,” explained one interviewee. Many women emphasized autonomy in their choices, from refusing social expectations to making life decisions independent of traditional gender roles. “I stopped asking permission for how I live my life,” one participant emphasized. The theme of body sovereignty was equally powerful, encompassing experiences of resisting objectification and reclaiming ownership over one’s body. A participant reflected, “For the first time, I felt like my body belonged to me—not to men, not to the media.” Finally, assertive communication was identified as a key tool that allowed women to challenge dominant voices and express

their truth. As one woman put it, “Learning to say no clearly and unapologetically has been life-changing.”

The power of solidarity was repeatedly emphasized in participants’ narratives. They spoke of deep bonds formed through shared struggle, stating that “feminist sisterhood gave me the strength I didn’t know I had.” Collaborative leadership was another defining feature of their collective practices, where decision-making was intentionally non-hierarchical. “We take turns facilitating. No one is ‘the boss,’ and that makes me feel seen,” one activist explained. The existence of a shared vision grounded participants’ activism in a common ideological framework. “Even when we disagree, we know we’re working toward the same kind of world,” one woman noted. The process of community building was described as both practical and emotional, involving the creation of safe, affirming spaces. A participant recounted, “We hold each other up—sometimes literally, during marches or after hard meetings.” In the face of internal disagreements, conflict navigation became essential. Participants shared that they learned to manage tensions without undermining group cohesion. One woman reflected, “We’ve had tough conversations about race, class, and privilege. But staying in those conversations made us stronger.”

Women in the study described developing a strong political voice through their activism. Many had testified at public hearings or spoken at rallies, experiences that transformed their sense of civic power. “I used to think politics wasn’t for me, but now I stand at that podium and tell the truth,” said one participant. Civic engagement extended beyond voting to include organizing advocacy

campaigns and engaging in policy work. One woman shared, “We’re not just marching; we’re meeting with lawmakers and rewriting what’s possible.” Another critical area was legal literacy, which empowered participants to defend their rights and educate others. “I read up on my rights and taught them to other women in the shelter,” explained one interviewee. Protest participation remained a central mechanism for expressing resistance. One participant described, “Being in that crowd, chanting together—it was electrifying. It reminded me I wasn’t alone.” They also utilized media advocacy as a contemporary tool, sharing stories through podcasts, Instagram posts, and blogs. As one woman described, “Posting about my experience with harassment went viral—and that post changed policies at my job.” The skill of resource mobilization was frequently cited, with participants taking on tasks like organizing fundraisers or applying for grants to support grassroots efforts. “We started with nothing, but now we have a budget, a plan, and real impact,” said a participant proudly.

A recurring theme was the development of critical consciousness, as women engaged with feminism and deconstructed oppressive ideologies. “Feminism gave me the words to describe what I always felt,” one participant explained. This learning journey was deepened through intersectional awareness, where participants recognized and responded to overlapping systems of oppression. “I’m a Latina and a survivor—so feminism has to see all of me, or it’s not real,” said one activist. Many also described gaining a historical grounding in feminist movements, which fostered a sense of lineage and responsibility. “Reading about Black women activists from the past made me feel I was part of something bigger,” one woman noted. Through their activism, they engaged in skill development, from public speaking to digital organizing. One participant shared, “I never thought I’d learn how to run a Zoom town hall, but here I am, organizing hundreds.” Finally, the ability to reframe failure helped participants maintain momentum. “When our petition was rejected, I didn’t see it as defeat—I saw it as a lesson in strategy,” said one interviewee.

Participants described cultural pride as a form of empowerment, particularly in reclaiming marginalized identities. “I used to be ashamed of my accent—now I speak it louder,” shared one woman. Sexual identity acceptance was another powerful subtheme, with queer participants finding safety and affirmation in feminist circles. “This space let me come out without fear—it was my first time feeling whole,” said one interviewee. Others focused on healing from shame, naming experiences of trauma and

stigma. One woman reflected, “I finally said out loud what happened to me—and nobody turned away.” Naming experiences was central to making meaning out of their struggles and affirming their perspectives. “Once I named what I’d gone through as abuse, I stopped blaming myself,” explained a participant. Lastly, the idea of role reimagining emerged, as participants actively rejected imposed gender roles. “I’m not trying to be the perfect daughter or mother anymore—I’m just trying to be me,” said one activist.

4. Discussion and Conclusion

This study explored the dimensions of empowerment as experienced by women participating in grassroots feminist movements across the United States. The findings revealed five major thematic categories: personal empowerment, collective empowerment, sociopolitical agency, transformational learning, and identity reclamation. Each category encompassed distinct but interconnected subthemes that together mapped a multidimensional view of empowerment. Through these women’s narratives, empowerment emerged not as a singular achievement, but as an ongoing, lived process shaped by internal shifts, interpersonal relationships, political action, and socio-cultural resistance. These findings align with and extend prior literature emphasizing empowerment as fluid, situated, and often emerging through localized experiences of resistance and transformation (Baena et al., 2024; Dulhunty, 2023; Kabira & Maloiy, 2019).

In the realm of personal empowerment, participants described significant changes in self-awareness, confidence, emotional resilience, and autonomy. These internal transformations were often prompted by their involvement in feminist organizing, which enabled them to unlearn internalized gender norms and cultivate new, empowering self-concepts. These findings are consistent with Dulhunty’s assertion that grassroots feminist spaces act as catalysts for individual reflection and personal growth, especially among women who have historically been marginalized by dominant institutions (Dulhunty, 2023). Baena et al. similarly observed that empowerment often begins with what they term “micro-empowerments,” where incremental internal changes—such as naming a boundary or speaking publicly—lay the foundation for broader political engagement (Baena et al., 2024). Our participants frequently cited assertive communication and body sovereignty as markers of this personal empowerment, reflecting the deeply

embodied and psychological nature of feminist transformation.

Collective empowerment emerged as a particularly powerful dimension, highlighting how solidarity, shared leadership, and community building contribute to a sense of collective strength and resilience. The women in this study described how organizing with others allowed them to feel seen, supported, and connected—often for the first time. These findings affirm Mari Tripp’s argument that grassroots feminist practices often embody an ethic of interdependence, where empowerment is co-created through relational dynamics and mutual care (Mari Tripp, 2024). Bocking-Welch et al. similarly emphasize the political importance of women’s collective campaigning and petitioning, noting that these efforts not only amplify marginalized voices but also reconstitute what counts as political action (Bocking-Welch et al., 2024). The emphasis on rotating leadership and non-hierarchical decision-making in this study further supports Gordon’s findings that feminist grassroots groups often develop alternative models of leadership grounded in inclusion and community accountability (Gordon, 2020).

The theme of sociopolitical agency captured participants’ growing involvement in political advocacy, civic engagement, protest organizing, and legal education. Many described how feminist activism enabled them to recognize their political power and to act upon it, whether through organizing rallies, testifying at local hearings, or using social media for advocacy. These findings align with González-Malabet’s research on women’s engagement in Colombian social movements, which demonstrated how grassroots participation fosters civic consciousness and encourages broader public involvement (González-Malabet, 2022). Similarly, Natil’s work on nonviolent activism shows how women in grassroots settings develop strategies of resistance and political participation that challenge authoritarian or patriarchal structures without relying on formal institutional support (Natil, 2021). The political empowerment found in this study also mirrors the experiences of the “Women of Standing Rock” and other Indigenous movements, where grassroots organizing becomes a vehicle for challenging state power and asserting rights (Gottardi, 2020).

The category of transformational learning emphasized the ways in which participation in grassroots feminist movements reshaped how women understood the world and their place within it. Participants reported becoming more critically aware of systemic injustices and more equipped with new skills—ranging from conflict mediation to digital organizing. These findings resonate with Han’s analysis of

digital feminist resistance in China, where seemingly mundane practices such as hashtag use and story-sharing facilitate political awakening and discursive empowerment (Han, 2021). Likewise, Prasongko and Arti observed that grassroots leaders often learn through crises, developing emotional intelligence and practical leadership capabilities in the face of uncertainty (Prasongko & Arti, 2021). Participants in this study also reframed failure as a source of insight, a finding that mirrors Dudley’s notion of Black feminist praxis as both reflective and strategic, embracing imperfection as a form of resistance and growth (Dudley, 2023).

The final theme, identity reclamation, revealed how feminist activism allowed participants to reconstruct their identities in ways that affirmed their values, experiences, and histories. Participants discussed reclaiming cultural pride, embracing diverse sexual identities, naming past traumas, and rejecting imposed gender roles. This process of identity redefinition aligns with Kabira’s argument that feminist activism disrupts victim narratives and instead positions women as agents of cultural and social transformation (Kabira & Maloiy, 2019). Similarly, Healy-Clancy’s work in South Africa emphasizes the importance of popular politics in reimagining identity through collective struggle and historical continuity (Healy-Clancy, 2020). Clatterbuck also highlights how spirituality and community ritual can be sites of identity reclamation, especially for women who have experienced marginalization within both religious and political domains (Clatterbuck, 2022). The narratives shared by participants in this study underscore the deeply personal and symbolic dimensions of empowerment, where reclaiming one’s story becomes a political act.

Taken together, these five dimensions of empowerment reveal a complex, multi-level process through which women come to reconfigure their relationships to power, self, and society. The findings affirm prior research emphasizing the holistic and context-dependent nature of grassroots empowerment (Thorat et al., 2024; Waldrop, 2024). As Waldrop notes, however, this empowerment is not always linear or sustainable; women in grassroots settings may experience burnout, financial insecurity, or familial conflict as a result of their activism (Waldrop, 2024). This tension was present in several interviews, where participants described emotional fatigue and the need for ongoing support. Scarrow et al. also caution that increased participation does not always yield proportional influence, particularly in institutional contexts where women’s contributions remain undervalued or resisted (Scarrow et al.,

2024). Nonetheless, the women in this study articulated a strong sense of agency, belonging, and transformation through their grassroots engagement, pointing to the enduring relevance of local feminist organizing in broader struggles for justice and equity.

5. Limitations and Suggestions

While this study offers rich insights into the dimensions of empowerment among women in grassroots feminist movements, several limitations must be acknowledged. First, the sample was limited to 29 participants from the United States, which may restrict the generalizability of findings to other national or cultural contexts. Second, participants were recruited through activist networks and social media platforms, potentially favoring individuals already articulate and comfortable discussing their experiences. This may have resulted in the underrepresentation of more marginalized or isolated activists. Third, the reliance on self-reported data through interviews may have introduced recall bias or social desirability effects, particularly in discussions of personal transformation or leadership. Lastly, while NVivo software was used to support systematic coding, thematic interpretation inevitably reflects researcher subjectivity and positionality.

Future research should consider expanding the geographical and cultural scope of grassroots feminist studies to include transnational comparisons and voices from underrepresented regions. Comparative studies across different sociopolitical systems could reveal how local conditions shape the contours of empowerment. Additionally, longitudinal research could explore how empowerment evolves over time, particularly in response to political backlash, personal transitions, or activist burnout. There is also a need to examine the role of intersectionality more deeply, especially in how race, class, disability, religion, and sexuality interact to produce varying experiences of empowerment. Further inquiry might also explore the emotional labor of feminist organizing and its impact on mental health, sustainability, and group cohesion.

To strengthen the empowering potential of grassroots feminist movements, practitioners and organizers should prioritize inclusive and accessible spaces that validate diverse identities and experiences. Leadership models should remain flexible, rotating, and non-hierarchical to prevent gatekeeping and promote shared responsibility. Emotional resilience strategies, such as peer support circles

and collective care practices, should be embedded in movement culture to mitigate burnout. Training in political literacy, digital tools, and conflict navigation can further enhance individual and collective agency. Finally, recognizing and affirming small-scale acts of empowerment—such as speaking up or challenging internalized beliefs—can foster long-term engagement and build sustainable, transformative movements from the ground up.

Authors' Contributions

Authors contributed equally to this article.

Declaration

In order to correct and improve the academic writing of our paper, we have used the language model ChatGPT.

Transparency Statement

Data are available for research purposes upon reasonable request to the corresponding author.

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Declaration of Interest

The authors report no conflict of interest.

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Ethical Considerations

The study protocol adhered to the principles outlined in the Helsinki Declaration, which provides guidelines for ethical research involving human participants.

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